“WHAT GOOD WOULD A COLLEGE DEGREE DO FOR THESE WOMEN?:” THE POLITICS AND PARADOX OF TEACHING HIGHER EDUCATION IN WOMEN’S PRISONS

by

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Abstract

The instructors I interviewed for this study are among the pioneers in a revitalization of prison education during a period in which it has suffered one of its greatest setbacks – the government pulling out of the prison education business. They develop and teach their courses with little to no pedagogical support or training, and at a great personal cost for some. They deliver a bare-bones yet imaginative education whose benefits suggest that state governments should return to the business of college-in-prison programs. This study examines the ways these instructors navigate the politics of teaching in prisons and jails to create safe learning spaces for incarcerated women to challenge the disempowering environment of their confinement. I argue that while teaching in prison may not be an intentional political act, the very location of a prison makes it political. My findings in this qualitative analysis are based on in-depth interviews with professors, community volunteers and formerly incarcerated women who teach in women's prisons and jails. These instructors must negotiate power relations with prison administration and staff, including navigating their place in the typically male-dominated hierarchical power structure of prisons and jails. Critical pedagogy is used as the theoretical framework to analyze the tension between punishment and education that creates the paradox of college-in-prison: the classes promote critical thinking and questioning while prison protocols requires obedience and sanctions imprisoned women when they question authority.

INTRODUCTION: THE PARADOX AND POLITICS OF PRISON EDUCATION

New York State was poised to become a national model of prison education when Governor Andrew Cuomo recently announced his plans to use taxpayer money to fund college education programs in 10 of the state's prisons. Cuomo's plan would have helped incarcerated women and men earn an associate's or bachelor's degree over the course of two to three years, and would have cost taxpayers $5,000 per person per year, costing the state a total of $1 million in the first year. The state's corrections budget is $2.8 billion; it costs $60,000 a year to house an incarcerated person. Cuomo had stated his plan would help reduce the state's 40 percent recidivism rate and ultimately save money. The governor modeled his proposal after the Bard Prison Initiative, which provides college education to incarcerated women and men in six prisons across the state.

The governor's plan came 20 years after college-in-prison programs were obliterated when President Clinton signed the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act into law in 1994, which included a provision that denied incarcerated men and women access to Pell Grants. Soon after, New York State withdrew its financial support for college in prisons, ending all higher education for men and women incarcerated across the state. Cuomo's plan had confirmed what research has already proven: that people who receive a college education in prison are less likely to return. According to the RAND Corporation study "How Effective is Correctional Education?":

> More than 700,000 incarcerated women and men leave federal and state prisons each year; within three years of release, 40 percent will have committed new crimes or violated the terms of their release.[1]

The RAND study also concluded that people who receive an education while incarcerated have a better chance of finding employment post-release. Not surprising, some lawmakers vehemently opposed Cuomo's proposal, arguing that people in prison do not deserve a free college education. Petitions were started by senators to counter Cuomo's proposal. Putnam County Senator Greg Ball's petition, titled "Hell No to Attica University: No Free College for Education for Convicts[2]," states:

> The last thing New York State should be funding is college tuition for convicts when we have hardworking families in New York State that are struggling to send their children to college. While it is understandable for the need of counseling and rehabilitation, free college tuition for prisoners is a slap in the face to hard working New Yorkers that work multiple jobs and take out exorbitant student loans to pay for the cost of higher education.[3]

Senator Mark Grisanti of Buffalo started a petition titled "Say NO to Free College for Prisoners." In a statement on his website, Grisanti says he:

> supports rehabilitation and reduced recidivism, but not on the taxpayer's dime when so many individuals and families in New York are struggling to

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[1] The report can be accessed here: http://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR266.html.
[2] Ball's petition can be found on his website at http://www.nysenate.gov/webform/hell-no-attica-university-no-free-college-education-convicts.
[3] Ibid.

> meet the ever-rising costs of higher education. I believe that we should put the needs of hardworking, law-abiding citizens who are positively contributing to society first, and I will continue to fight for the reinstatement of TAP funds before I even begin to entertain the idea of supporting this program.[4]

Dissenters like senators Grisanti and Ball are failing to realize that providing an education to incarcerated people is an investment in their future, not a reward for good behavior. What is more disappointing than the short-sightedness of the opponents is Cuomo reneging on his plan just six weeks after his initial announcement. Claiming that his plan was "so politically controversial," the governor decided to drop his initial plan and proceed using private funders that have yet to be named. "I understand the sentiment (of the plan's opponents). I don't agree with it, but I understand it, and I understand the appearance of it," Cuomo said.[5] Brenda Chaney, one of the instructors I interviewed for this study, does not understand.

> It's just so short-sighted to say students on the outside are borrowing money, working two jobs to go to college and we're not going to pay for some prisoner. I think what are you thinking about? This makes me so frustrated.[6]

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[4] Grisanti's petition can be found on his website at http://www.nysenate.gov/press-release/senator-grisanti-launches-petition-against-free-college-prisoners

[5] Kaplan, T. (2014, April 3). Cuomo Drops Plan to Use State Money to Pay for College Classes for Inmates. *The New York Times*. A23. http://www.nytimes.com/2014/04/03/nyregion/cuomo-drops-plan-to-use-state-money-to-pay-for-college-classes-for-inmates.html?_r=0

[6] Chaney, Brenda. Telephone Interview. 25 July 2012.

Cuomo's nixed plan is yet another blow to the prison education field. Because of the lack of governmental support, programs rely heavily on donations from private sources. Not having the federal or state financial support leaves these programs and the instructors – including those I interviewed for this study – vulnerable. Without financial support from the government, their programs are subject to termination at a moment's notice. These instructors are pioneers in a revitalization of prison education during a period in which it has suffered one of its greatest setbacks – the government pulling out of the prison education business. They develop and teach their courses with little to no pedagogical support or training, and at a great personal cost for some. They deliver a bare-bones yet imaginative education whose benefits suggest that state governments should return to the business of college-in-prison programs.

The purpose of this study is to examine the ways in which instructors navigate the politics of teaching in women's prisons and jails to create safe learning spaces for incarcerated women to challenge the disempowering environment of their confinement. I argue that while teaching in prison may not be an intentional political act, the very location of a prison makes it political.

My findings in this qualitative analysis are based on in-depth interviews with professors, community volunteers and formerly incarcerated women who teach in women's prisons and jails. These instructors must negotiate power relations with prison administration and staff, including navigating their place in the prison's typically male-dominated hierarchical power structure. As such, their status as professor – and the educational freedom that comes with that – is sometimes challenged, placing them in a unique outsider/insider position. I use critical pedagogy as my theoretical framework to

analyze the tension between the correctional and educational that creates the paradox of college-in-prison: the classes promote critical thinking and questioning while the prison protocols requires obedience and sanctions imprisoned women when they question authority.

The primary research question I ask in this study is, "What are the lived experiences of instructors who teach in women's prisons and jails?" By asking this question, my goal is to capture the essence of what it means to teach in such an oppressive place as a women's prison[7], and how the instructors experience prison alongside the women they teach. My question is based on the hypothesis that women prison instructors in particular are subjected to some of the same maltreatment as some of their students. My secondary question, then, is, "What are the politics and challenges of teaching in women's prisons and jails? This project fills a void in the literature on women's prison education issues by detailing the experiences of instructors who teach in women's prisons. While I recognize that much of the public discourse on education centers on training, for the purposes of this study, I am conceptualizing education as a way of affording incarcerated women a set of critical thinking skills. Also, though I acknowledge that basic education and literacy are major issues in prison education discourse, I am focusing my study on higher education.

[7] The instructors I interviewed teach in both women's prisons and jails, but I often use the word prison as an inclusive term to mean both prison and jail. I use jail when I am specifically speaking of an instructor who teaches in a jail.

Why Women's Prisons?

I focus my study on women's prisons for several reasons. Primarily, an investigation of issues affecting women's incarceration reveals the gendered nature of prisons as matters of incarceration are typically told from the male perspective. Incarcerated women are largely out of society's sight and thus forgotten. When they are thought of, powerful stereotypes—many of them reinforced by the media or for political purposes—come into play. Women in prison are no longer parts of their communities, and a deeper examination reveals they are among the very lowest of the low in our society. All too often, their prison experiences include degrading situations such as violent, involuntary sexual activities with corrections officers. All too sadly, the intersection of sexism and racism victimizes women in prison, who have no one to reach out to for justice.

By not examining the conditions and consciousness of imprisoned women, we are left with only a male-dominated view of incarceration. Therefore, addressing issues that are specific to women's incarceration is critical. As Angela Davis suggests,

> Although men constitute the vast majority of prisoners in the world, important aspects of the operation of state punishment are missed if it is assumed that women are marginal and thus undeserving of attention (Davis 65).

The U.S. women's prison population has increased by 800 percent over the last 30 years. The incarceration rates for women, a third of whom are incarcerated for first-time, non-violent drug offenses, is increasing at nearly double the rate for men. There were approximately 11,212 women incarcerated in state and federal prisons in 1980;

there were more than 113,000 by 2012, according to The Sentencing Project. Despite their sustained presence in prisons, women are still rendered invisible, as Victoria Law argues in her essay *Invisibility of Women Prisoner Resistance*:

> The stereotype of the male felon makes invisible the growing number of women imprisoned under the various mandatory sentencing laws passed within the past few decades. Because women do not fit the media stereotype, the public does not see them and are not then aware of the disturbing paradoxes of prisoners as mothers, as women with reproductive rights and abilities, and as women in general.[8]

Also, because prisons are still regarded as male-gendered institutions, women's prison experiences are sometimes dismissed, leaving the impression women accept the injustices being committed against them, and do not fight to change or challenge their conditions. This assumption simply reinforces the invisibility of women in prison. In addition, women have a history of being exploited and neglected while incarcerated, often as an extension of the types of abuses they suffered on the outside. For instance, prison becomes a site of continual terror for some women and, as Davis argues, "a space in which the threat of sexualized violence that looms in the larger society is

[8] Victoria Law helped start Books through Bars - New York City, a group that sends free books to prisoners nationwide. In 2000, she began concentrating on the needs and actions of women in prison, drawing attention to their issues by writing articles and giving public presentations, culminating in her book *Resistance Behind Bars: The Struggles of Incarcerated Women* (PM Press, 2009). I am quoting her essay 'Invisibility of Women Prisoner Resistance' that appears on the Women and Prison website at http://womenandprison.org/social-justice/view/invisibility_of_women_prisoner_resistance/. April 27, 2011.

effectively sanctioned as a routine aspect of the landscape of punishment behind prison walls."[9]

Prison education studies have traditionally focused on male prisoners. Education is also often missing from the literature on women's prison issues. In fact, while researching this study, I found only a few sources focused solely on women's prison education; these issues were typically mentioned as a subtext in larger studies about prison education.

> While education on any level is not a particularly masculine concern, the omission of women in these studies indicates that researchers do not perceive this as an important issue for women (Law 77).

Karlene Faith notes in her 1993 study of the politics of women's incarceration that only 31 of the 1,250 references cited in the 1992 annotated bibliography of prison education are about women and concluded that:

> Prison educators have not written about women's institutions because so few significant programs have been developed within them, on the grounds that there are too few women in prison to justify a full range of educational choices (Faith 316).

The argument that there are too few women in prison cannot be made today, but Faith's quote implies a general dismissiveness of the importance of women's education. This is ironic given that women in state prisons were more likely than men to have

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[9] Davis, Angela. *Are Prisons Obsolete*? (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2003), 700.

received a high school diploma or attended college, about 36% of women compared to 32% of men, according the Bureau of Justice Statistics.

Methodology in Selecting Study Participants

Because people in prison are considered a protected population, there are special issues to consider when doing prison research. Institutional Review Board restrictions, denial of access to prisons, and the possibility of data being compromised are all possible roadblocks to navigate when doing prison research. I encountered two of these roadblocks during the course of my research. The initial plan included collecting data at the Albion Correctional Facility, where I taught a writing workshop in January and February 2012 as a New York State Prison Volunteer. The data was to consist of original, unpublished writing samples – essays, short stories, poems, etc. – provided by the women at Albion, and interviews with the participants based on the writing samples. My goal was to look for trends in the women's writings that would address some of the issues faced by incarcerated women then interview them about how they use writing to define their power and identity. In keeping with the guidelines of qualitative research, I wanted to study the women in their natural settings to "make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them."[10] As John Creswell explains, this type of qualitative exploration "is needed to study a group or population to hear silenced voices and explore the problem rather than use predetermined information from literature or rely solely on results from other research studies."[11]

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[10] Norman Denzin and Yvonna Lincoln, eds. *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research*. (Sage Publications, 2000), 3.
[11] John W. Creswell. *Qualitative Research & Research Design*, 2nd edition. (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage Publications, 2007), 38-39

Having original data would have allowed me to provide new perspectives on the issue while also empowering imprisoned black women to share their stories and have their voices heard.

After a five-month battle with my university's Institutional Review Board, I finally got approval in May 2012 to do the research at Albion. Prison administrators, however, denied me access in June. The letter I received from Diane Catalfu, Deputy Superintendent for Program Services on June 19, 2012, reads:

> Dear Ms. Willingham, I am in receipt of your recent letter expressing your interest in conducting your research on women offenders' writings, specifically at Albion Correctional Facility. Though this would seem to be an interesting topic, due to staff shortage, it cannot be approved at this time. Thank you for your interest in the women offenders at Albion Correctional Facility and good luck with your research in the future.

I had considered other alternatives to gathering the writing samples, including mailing the consent forms and interview questions to the women. This method is recommended primarily for researchers who do not have sufficient time to spend in the field. However, doing prison research by mail presents its own set of issues because it limits the control the researcher has over the information gathering process and there's the possibility the researcher won't get a response. Questions may be misinterpreted resulting in answers the researcher is not looking for and therefore unable to use. This method also restricts the researcher from asking follow-up questions on the spot and, because the inmate mail is inspected by prison personnel, the questions and answers may be

compromised.[12] A part of my study always included a chapter on the experiences of people who teach inside women's prisons. After it became necessary to revise the project, I decided to do a study that focused on people who teach or have taught in women's prisons or jails to get a better understanding of their experiences.

Initially, I was only looking for those who teach writing – the intent was to still tell the incarcerated women's stories, but through the instructors. I sent a query on two prison education listservs – Higher Ed in Prison and Inside-Out – and posted the request on Facebook prison groups. I explained in the query that I was interested in interviewing people who have or are teaching in women's prisons and am particularly interested in any issues instructors may have had with developing courses and getting them approved by prison officials, and what institutional barriers they may have encountered teaching inside. The request went out on a Saturday evening and within a few hours I began receiving responses from instructors from across the country, including New York, Washington State, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Tennessee, Kentucky and Iowa. What I ended up with is a variety of courses taught in women's prisons including writing workshops, business, theater, biology and sociology, which represents the complex spectrum of prison education. This immediate response to my request indicates a desire and need of the instructors to share their prison experiences as well as those of the women they teach. I interviewed the instructors via phone or Skype during the summer of 2012, and conducted follow-up interviews in the spring of 2013 either via phone, Skype or e-mail. It is also important to note that while I did not

[12] Bosworth, Mary et. al. "Doing Prison Research: Views from Inside." Qualitative Inquiry. V11, N2 (April, 2005), p. 249-264.

specifically ask for women, only one of the instructors I interviewed is a man. I explain the significance of this further in chapter two.

Researcher Positionality

As a prison researcher with incarcerated and formerly incarcerated relatives, I make no pretense at objectivity when I examine issues of incarceration. Simply put, I cannot separate the research from my personal experiences. However, my personal connection to the research creates opportunities, not limitations. It also puts me in a research-researcher position that social psychologist Michelle Fine refers to as "working the hyphen" – "probing how we are in relation with the contexts we study and with our informants…revealing far more about ourselves and far more about the structures of Othering" (Fine 135). Instead of ignoring my bias, I employ what is known in qualitative research as bracketing – placing the researcher's bias in a set of brackets and setting it to the side. The goal is to not allow the researcher's prejudices and beliefs to taint or influence the study participants' experiences.

Also, let me clarify that the fact that I taught a writing workshop inside of a women's prison and completed the same prison education training program as some of the instructors I interviewed, did not negatively influence my research. In other words, I did not reach out to a group of friends and say, "I want to interview you for my project." I did not know any of the instructors before I interviewed them. The fact that I have practical prison teaching experience adds valuable and constructive context to this project that I may not have had otherwise.

Critical Pedagogy: The Freirean Approach to Teaching College in Prison

I use critical pedagogy as my theoretical framework to explain how education defies the oppressive nature of prisons by creating spaces where critical thinking and other intellectual activities happen. Some of the instructors I interviewed have studied Paulo Freire as part of their prison education training and are typically attracted to his pedagogical approach because it allows them to help their students challenge the disempowering environment of their confinement.

Critical pedagogy is a theory and philosophy of education created by Brazilian educator Paulo Freire to "help students develop a consciousness of freedom, recognize authoritarian tendencies, connect knowledge to power and the ability to take constructive action."[13] Freire, considered one of the "most significant educational thinkers of the 20th century,"[14] is best known for his work with illiterate poor people in Brazil. Freire was appointed director of the Department of Education and Culture of the Social Service in 1946 where he began to implement a non-orthodox approach to education similar to liberation theology – an attempt to interpret scripture through the plight of the poor. While working as director of the Department of Cultural Extension of Recife University in 1962, Freire created a literacy program in which 300 sugarcane workers learned to read and write in 45 days. The Brazilian government approved Freire's approach, but he was subsequently considered a traitor and jailed for 70 days following a military coup. Freire published his first book, *Education as the Practice of Freedom* in 1967 followed a year later by his most famous book, *Pedagogy of the*

[13] Giroux, H. (October 27, 2010) "Lessons From Paulo Freire," Chronicle of Higher Education. Retrieved February 14, 2013. http://chronicle.com/article/Lessons-From-Paulo-Freire/124910/

[14] As described on the back cover of Freire's Pedagogy of the Oppressed

Oppressed, which continues to influence teachers, students and intellectuals nationally and internationally. Freire defines pedagogy of the oppressed as the "pedagogy of people engaged in the fight for their own liberation" and humanity (Freire 54). In order for the oppressed to regain their humanity, education must "happen with them, not for them" and they must become active participants in the pedagogy of their liberation (Friere 48). In addition, the oppressed must see first themselves as people, not property. "The oppressed have been destroyed precisely because their situation has reduced them to things. In order to regain their humanity … they cannot enter the struggle as objects in order to become human beings" (Freire 68).

All people, including those deemed ignorant, are capable of critical thinking, if given the right tools, Freire further argues. A Freirean approach to education works against a traditional education model that merely focuses on feeding information to students and is devoid of any kind of dialogue between teacher and students. This paternalistic teacher-student role is counterproductive to learning and places the teacher at the center and reinforces the students' perceived ignorance. Instead, Freire favored pedagogy that encourages students to engage themselves and others in critical thinking and dialogue, and allows them to reach their full potential. Critical pedagogy, as Henry Giroux states, is "about offering a way of thinking beyond the seemingly natural or inevitable state of things, about challenging common sense. It is a mode of intervention."[15] Giroux, a critical pedagogy theorist, further explains:

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[15] Giroux, H. (October 27, 2010) "Lessons From Paulo Freire," Chronicle of Higher Education. Retrieved February 14, 2013. http://chronicle.com/article/Lessons-From-Paulo-Freire/124910/

> Critical pedagogy also insists that one of the fundamental tasks of educators is to make sure that the future points the way to a more socially just world, a world in which critique and possibility – in conjunction with the values of reason, freedom and equality – function to alter the grounds upon which life is lived. It offers students new ways to think and act independently.[16]

Structure of the Study

The results of this study are presented in five chapters. Chapter one gives a brief historical narrative of the development of the competing models of prisons – rehabilitation vs. punishment – and women's prison reform. It also addresses bigger political themes – primarily, that education is the key to the debate between advocates of a punishment model and reformers' models of rehabilitation – and traces the evolution of prison education, with an emphasis on women's prison education.

In chapter two, I introduce the instructors interviewed for this study using a collective biography that highlights some of the sub-themes that emerged from the study, including how instructors deal with their privilege in the classroom. Chapter three examines how the instructors navigate the politics of punishment and negotiate over power to teach their classes. At the heart of this battle lies the paradox: instructors have to fight with correctional officers for autonomy while the officers fight to keep them in their place. The debate of whether it is really possible to create safe classroom spaces in prison is analyzed in chapter four. The instructors say that the prison classroom is

[16] Ibid.

oftentimes the only place the women feel safe enough to engage in critical thinking and creative expression, yet that does not necessarily mean the space is safe. Finally, in chapter five, I detail the various pedagogical techniques the instructors use in their classrooms, including establishing trust, which is one of the more delicate pedagogical issues the instructors say they face from students who are skeptical of their motives. I also place a special emphasis on writing in this chapter because it plays a key role in how the women cope with the traumatic experiences that contributed to their incarceration.

Conclusion

When James Baldwin addressed a group of New York City teachers about the paradox of education, he could have just as easily been speaking about prison education.

> The paradox of education is precisely this: that as one begins to become conscious one begins to examine the society in which one is being educated. The purpose of education, finally, is to create in a person the ability to look at the world for oneself, to make one's own decisions, to say to oneself this is black or this is white, to decide for oneself whether there is a God in heaven, or not. To ask questions of the universe, and then to learn to live with those questions, is the way one achieves one's own identity. But no society is really anxious to have that kind of person

around. What societies really ideally want is a citizenry which will simply obey the rules of society.[17]

Similarly, college-in-prison challenges the use of incarceration during a time when some politicians advocate for punishment over rehabilitation while prison education practitioners work under a rehabilitative theory of incarceration that calls for the use of education to transform incarcerated people. The nation's emphasis on punishment over education needs to be reversed.

[17] Baldwin's remarks are part of his "The Negro Child – His Self-Image" speech he delivered to a group of New York City teachers in 1963. His speech was later printed in the *Saturday Review* as "A Talk to Teachers.

CHAPTER ONE: FROM MASS INCARCERATION TO MASS EDUCATION: RESTORING HIGHER EDUCATION IN PRISON

Since its inception in 1790, prison education has been marked by extreme highs and lows, including a golden era when college-in-prison programs were considered the key to prisoner rehabilitation to a devastating end when the government pulled its funding out of the business. Recent events, however, are pointing towards a new national prison higher education movement sparking a renewal of the tradition, with the instructors I interviewed among the leaders who are at the forefront of this revitalization. Like the reformers who of the 19th century who advocated for and created education programs in women's prisons, there instructors are implementing and supporting higher education opportunities for incarcerated women.

This chapter gives a brief historical analysis of the evolution of prison education in the United States. The goal of this chapter is twofold. First, it addresses the political themes of prison education that suggest education is central to the debate between advocates of a punishment model of incarceration and reformers' model of rehabilitation. To illustrate this debate, the chapter lays out in chronological order the defining moments of prison education from the 18th to 21st century. Second, the chapter focuses on higher education in women's prisons, which were once described by Austin MacCormick as "the most hopeful of all American penal institutions." What I will show in this chapter is though women's prisons once led the way in vocational training and social education, they lagged in academic education programming. Women were not considered as smart as men and it was assumed that they were not interested in

learning to read or write (MacCormick 303). Academic programs – college, in particular – are now at the heart of women's prison education issues.

Early Prison Models

Prison education was introduced in 1790 when the Walnut Street Jail in Philadelphia when clergyman William Rogers created a religion-based education program that encouraged inmates to learn the bible by reading it in solitude (Bosworth 66). That same year, the jail became the Walnut Street Prison, the first state prison in Pennsylvania. By 1798, Walnut Street Prison opened a school with a library of 110 books. Walnut Street eventually became overcrowded and prisoners in solitary confinement were moved to the general population where they shared cells with other men. This led to fewer employed prisoners and a breakdown in the disciplinary system. As a result, reformers focused on determining the root causes of crime, which were thought to be a result of inadequate training in school and church. Pennsylvania subsequently constructed two state penitentiaries designed to rehabilitate offenders with a focus on inmate employment.[18] There were 15 prisons in American by 1820. These institutions, called penitentiaries, were places where prisoners could repent and be transformed, and had no rehabilitative programs.

The Pennsylvania System, consisting of the Western State and Eastern State penitentiaries, was based on the principal that solitary confinement fosters penitence

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[18]"A Historical Overview of Prison Labor in Pennsylvania: The Pioneer in United States Prison Labor." *Pennsylvania Correctional Industries*. Web. 09 July 2013. http://www.pci.state.pa.us/portal/server.pt/community/history_of_pci/17812

and encourages reformation. The Pennsylvania Prison Society ordered that solitary confinement and hard labor is the fundamental program at both facilities. This didn't last at Western State, built in 1827 in Allegheny County, because the small cell and inadequate air made solitary work impossible. The philosophy was better implemented at Eastern State, built in 1829. Prisoners here were kept in solitary confinement and saw no one except officers and the occasional visitor. Solitary confinement was later modified to include such work as shoemaking and weaving, the most productive industry of the time. Eastern became the national model for this "separate system" of confinement. Critics of this penal method argued that it was "too costly and had deleterious effects" on the prisoners minds.[19]

In contrast to Pennsylvania's separate system, the Auburn System in New York developed its "congregate system" where prisoners worked together during the day and kept in solitary confinement at night. Silence was enforced at all times.[20] The oldest existing New York State correctional facility, Auburn was built to relieve overcrowding at Newgate Prison in New York City and received its first inmates in 1817.[21] The Auburn System of corrections, which later replaced the Pennsylvania System, was less supportive of prison education because administrators considered education to be a distraction from prison labor. The warden successfully opposed an attempt to teach

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[19] "Pennsylvania system." *Encyclopædia Britannica. Encyclopædia Britannica Online Academic Edition*. Encyclopædia Britannica Inc., 2013. Web. 08 July 2013. <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/450186/Pennsylvania-system>.

[20] "Auburn system." *Encyclopædia Britannica. Encyclopædia Britannica Online Academic Edition*. Encyclopædia Britannica Inc., 2013. Web. 08 July 2013. <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/42435/Auburn-system>.

[21] "Auburn Correctional Facility." *New York State Archives*. Web. 08 July 2013. http://www.archives.nysed.gov/a/research/res_topics_legal_corrections_inst_auburn.shtml

younger inmates to read and write for “fear of the increased danger to society of the educated convict.” As the nation shifted towards more hard-lined crime control methods in the 1820s, rehabilitation and education were pushed to the side. However, in 1870 the National Prison Association declared “education is a vital force in the reformation of fallen women and men.”

Instruction in prisons was mostly religious up until the middle of the 19th century. Chaplains taught the prisoners to read the bible and based their instructions on religion and morals. A New York State law in 1822 stated that a bible would be given to each prisoner confined to a solitary cell; the law extended to all prisoners seven years later. As late as 1845, very few prisons had any kind of formal educational programs that taught the reading, writing and math. Instead, “chaplains taught reading, writing and arithmetic to a prisoner through the grated door of his cell in a semi-dark corridor lighted by a dingy lamp” (MacCormick 18). New York State passed a law in 1847 that allowed the appointment of two instructors at each state prison. According to this law, which is believed to be the first of its kind in any state:

> it shall be the duty of such instructors with and under the supervision of the chaplain to give instruction in the useful branches of an English education to such convicts as, in the judgment of the warden or chaplain, may require the same and be benefitted by it; such instruction shall be given for not less than one hour and a half daily, Sunday excepted, between the hours of six and nine in the evening (MacCormick in Correctional Education Today 18).

Though the intentions were good, the Prison Association of New York later reported that the law provided little education. The importance of academic work was recognized, but there was no significant education evident (MacCormick 18).

By 1876, New York State had taken "one of the most significant steps forward in the history of American penology, rehabilitation in general and education in particular" when the Elmira reformatory for men opened in 1876. Thirty inmates were transferred there from Auburn. Reformers rejected the punishment idea and instead favored individualized treatment for inmates that included educational, vocational, religious, and recreational programs (Britton 33). Under superintendent Zebulon Reed Brockway, Elmira rejected the 19th century penology practice of silence, obedience and labor and introduced the reformatory model of corrections – which emphasized rehabilitation and education. The goal was to reform prisoners using psychological – not physical – methods of discipline, e.g. encourage them with rewards instead of coercing them with lashes.[22] Brockway ran Elmira under three premises: personalized treatment instead of mass regimentation, intermediate sentencing, and parole. Brockway was also ambitious in the educational programming he began implementing in 1878. Educated inmates taught elementary classes six nights a week and Dr. D. R. Ford of Elmira Women's College taught geography and the natural sciences for advanced students (Gehring 46). Six public school teachers and three attorneys were hired the following year to teach elementary classes and advanced classes in geometry, bookkeeping and physiology.[23] Brockway also hired D.P. Mayhew of Michigan State Normal School to manage Elmira's

[22]"Elmira." Web. 08. Jul. 2013. http://www.correctionhistory.org/html/chronicl/docs2day/elmira.html

[23] Ibid.

school and be its Moral Educator Director (Gehring 46). Recognizing that not all prisoners would be interested in education, Brockway hired Syracuse University professor N.A. Wells to teach industrial arts. A trade school was later established in 1896.

The reformatory model of corrections helped to renew support in prison education programs in both women's and men's facilities. The next section will describe how this model impacted women's prison reform.

Women's Prison Reform

The first group of women was sentenced to Auburn Prison in 1825 and housed alongside men. This presented several problems because the physical structure and disciplinary system were not built with women in mind. As a result, women were exploited, neglected and often placed in dangerous and unsanitary conditions.

> Administrators treated women either as afterthoughts or as annoyances. Reformers' and legislatures' mandate to separate the sexes in congregate institutions worked to disadvantage women, as wardens placed them in makeshift quarters away from the main (men's) inmate population. At Auburn … women were initially kept in an overcrowded, unventilated, third-floor attic above the institution's kitchen. They were no allowed out for work or exercise (Britton 28).

It would be another seven years before the women were regularly supervised or given protection from one another. The conditions under which the women inmates lived were deemed worse than the men's. The words of an Auburn chaplain best illustrate the gravity of the situation: "To be a male convict in this prison would be quite tolerable; but

to be a female convict, for any protracted period, would be worse than death" (Lewis 164).

Women's prison reform came at a time when women nationwide were beginning to advocate for women's rights. The first women's rights convention was held in 1848 in Seneca Falls, New York, where 68 women and 32 men signed The Declaration of Sentiments that demanded women receive equal treatment in the law, education and employment. More women's rights initiatives soon followed, including the National American Woman Suffrage Association that fought for voting rights for women and The National Association of Colored Women that campaigned against lynching and Jim Crow laws, and led efforts to improve education for women of color.

In prisons, meanwhile, women reformers argued for the separate reformatories for women designed along three guiding principles: separation of women prisoners, provision of different, feminine care, and women's prisons run by female staff and management (Freedman 54). Furthermore, as Britton details, separate women's prisons were justified for several reasons:

> First, sexual exploitation of women could be prevented in sex-segregated institutions, and opportunities for rehabilitation enhanced for both men and women. Second, reformers noted that even in the best integrated prisons and female departments, women were seldom provided training programs or even exercise. Finally, reformers argued that separate institutions for women would allow for more efficient management of female offenders who, if housed in one facility, would create an inmate population of

sufficient size to allow for classification by type of offender and severity of offender (Britton 37).

Two models of independent women's prisons were introduced – custodial that replicated the male prison structure and "unwalled" that consisted of small, residential buildings. Women lived in these cottage-style buildings with a matron. Reformers believed the "unwalled" model best suited women because of the familial setting it fostered with the idea that women should be reformed, not punished. So, the women were taught to cook, clean, and wait tables. As a result, the women were domesticated – not trained in a skill – and taught to be subservient women in accordance with 19th century ideologies of female respectability. Once paroled, they were sent to work as servants. This simply perpetuated gender stereotypes of the gentle and domestic woman, and, following prevailing class and racial stereotypes, steered black women into domestic jobs as servants (Johnson 31). In 1874, the Indiana Reformatory Institution became the nation's first independent separate women's prison.

Women Prison Reform Leaders

The beginning of American the women's prison reform grew from the vision of English prison reformer Elizabeth Fry, sometimes referred to as the "angel of prisons." In 1813, Quaker minister Stephen Grellet visited the Newgate women's prison and was appalled by what he saw: hundreds of women and their children were sleeping on the floor without night clothes or bedding. He asked Fry, a member of the Society of Friends, for help. She donated bedding and enlisted other Quaker women to help make clothes for the children. Fry visited the prison herself the next day – ignoring the warnings by administrators that the "wild and savage" women would harm her – bringing

clothes and straw for sick women to lie on. Instead of seeing dangerous and out of control women, Fry "encountered starving, drunken, partially clothed women, often accompanied by their young children."[24] Fry offered clothing and prayer. The death of her daughter and other family problems prevented Fry from visiting the prison again for another three years. When she returned in 1816, Fry discovered the conditions were the same and vowed to make changes. Fry asked the women what she could do for them and their children; they stressed the need for a school. In 1817 Fry established the Ladies Association for the Improvement of the Female Prisoners at Newgate, a group of Quaker women that organized a school at Newgate. Fry wrote in her 1827 book *Observations on the Visiting, Superintendence and Government of Female Prisoners* that women in prison could be reformed through religious and academic instruction, and that it was the responsibility of the Ladies Association members to help them.

> It is a melancholy reflection that so large a proportion of the inhabitants of this country – a country possessed of so many advantages and so greatly advanced a civilization – are still left in a condition of almost extreme ignorance. This observation applies with peculiar force to those who are in the habit of breaking its laws. … Much, therefore, must depend on the instruction which such persons receive in prison (Fry 40).

Fry strongly recommended the women receive religious instruction that would include members of the Ladies Association's visiting committee reading the bible to the women once a day. The purpose was to instill the practice of "true repentance," Fry wrote. In

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[24] Freedman, Estelle B. Their Sisters' Keepers: Women's Prison Reform in America, 1830-1930.

addition, members of the committee “may be very usefully employed in the elementary instruction of the more ignorant prisoners. They ought to be taught to read, write, and cipher. … The prisoners ought to be supplied with books … of a generally instructive nature as it is most desirable to turn the channel of their thoughts to improve not only their habits, but their tastes and by every possible means to raise their intellectual and moral as well as their religious standards” (Fry 46-47).

Fry’s women’s prison reform in London became the model for reformers in the United States. Eliza Mosher, for instance, was appointed superintendent of the Massachusetts Women’s Reformatory at Framingham in 1880. Mosher initially served as the prison’s doctor in 1877. Like Fry, Mosher was appalled at the conditions the incarcerated women lived in – venereal disease, drug addiction, babies born with syphilis. Any attempts to help the women were blocked by the superintendent who “hindered and oppressed” Mosher and other staff members. Undeterred by the superintendent’s interference, Mosher and Sarah Pierce, the prison chaplain, practiced their own “reformatory treatment” by reading to the women and praying with them. Mosher only served as superintendent for two years, but during that time she implemented more educational programs including guest lectures from feminists and politicians, readings, musical performances, and visits from students at nearby Wellesley College (Freedman 74).

Reformers of the 20th century introduced a “new penology” that focused on rehabilitation of incarcerated people and preparing them for life outside of prison. Katharine Bement Davis became the first superintendent of Bedford Hills in 1907 and subscribed to the “anti-institutional” approach to prison reform. The new approach

included academic classes and training in industrial and nontraditional women's work. The goal was to prepare women for work other than domestic jobs in cooking and cleaning. Bedford Hills opened in 1901 and modeled after the cottage-style women's reformatory established in the 19th century. Four cottages separated the women by age and behavior. For instance, married women, mothers and inmates over the age of 21 stayed in Sanford Cottage (Freedman 131). Each cottage was named after a founder of Bedford Hills and included a flower garden, kitchen, and 28 rooms that the women could decorate (Freedman 132).

Davis hired a full-time instructor to teach basic skills, geography, history, current events or mechanical drawing classes during the week. She was also adamant about the women learning about the law, more specifically "that the law was not merely an abstract authority, but a method of conducting relationships between people" (Freedman 132). She started a series of talks on the law that began with its origins and ended with American democracy and citizenship. Davis's goal was to illustrate the "importance of women in such a democracy [even] though they take no part in actual government" (Freedman 132). The lessons in democracy also served as preparation for women housed in the Honor Cottage, where they elected officers and tried their own cases when someone broke the rules (Freedman 132). The Bedford Hills staff also adopted a Progressive educational method that included instructors making the class material relevant to the women's lives. As such, the women's daily experiences at the reformatory became the subject of many class lessons. "Our efforts are to fit girls for life and not to pass examinations," Davis wrote in a Bedford Hills report (Freedman 133). In addition to the academics, the women were offered singing lessons, gymnastics, and

weekly lessons in personal hygiene, as well as a recreational program that included amateur plays, musicals, and other entertainment. The goal here was to offer a well-rounded educational experience.

Another influential women's prison reformer who made her mark in education is Jessie Donaldson Hodder, the new superintendent of Framingham 1910 to 1932. Hodder came to Framingham with different goals than some of her predecessors, who had focused on religion and maintaining order. Bothered by the physical conditions at Framingham, she referred to it as "disintegrating … big shut-in house." Hodder sought to turn the prison into an "Industrial Training Institute for Women" that included expanding the school to include more academic courses, not just literacy classes. She also "changed the name from reformatory prison to prison, transformed a cell block into a gym, and called the residents women instead of inmates" (Freedman, Maternal Justice 186). Hodder continued to fight for vocational training opportunities for the women, but to no avail. Her requests for an integrated program of traditional and industrial classes were denied.

Austin MacCormick's Study of Prison Education

In 1927, the American Association of Adult Education recommended that the Carnegie Corporation provide funding to the National Society of Penal Information (NSPI) to study education and libraries in prisons across the nation. Austin MacCormick, assistant director of the Bureau of Justice, conducted that study for the NSPI. In 1927-28, MacCormick surveyed 110 state, federal, Army and Navy prisons and adult reformatories in the U.S. The outcome was bleak. MacCormick noted in his report

that he “did not find one single adequately staffed, well-rounded educational system” (MacCormick 684.)

> Trained personnel were seldom in charge, rooms and equipment were meager, and appropriations were inadequate. In short, the educational system in all but a few institutions was a haphazard, ineffectual imitation of education in the outside world (MacCormick 684).

MacCormick focused on creating a model for an effective prison education program. He began with a philosophy of prison education that would:

> consider prisoners not only as criminals in need of reform, but also as adults in need of education. Its aim will be to extend to prisoners as individuals every type of educational opportunity that experience or sound reasoning shows may be of benefit or of interest to them, in the hope that they may thereby be fitted to live more competently, more honestly, more satisfyingly, and more cooperatively as members of society (MacCormick 77).

Of the approximately 60 prisons operating at that time, a dozen had no education programs. Another dozen offered decent educational opportunities, but MacCormick described the education programs in the remaining three dozen prisons as having “so little significance as to be hardly worthy of note” (MacCormick 73). Of special note for us here, MacCormick did find that women’s reformatories were faring much better with their education programs compared to those at the male facilities.

> The reformatories for women, almost without exception, make education in the broadest sense their aim. They are the most encouraging of all our

> penal institutions. … In spite of their emphasis on education, in spite of their superficially impressive programs of academic and vocational education, the great majority of the reformatories for men must be charged with comparative failure (MacCormick 73).

With that being said, vocational education was not accompanied by strong academic education programs.

> The program of academic education in most reformatories for women is regrettably weak. This is largely due to the fact that vocational training makes a stronger appeal, that the two types of education are not sufficiently coordinated, and that many of the women are of low intelligence and find academic instruction difficult and dull (MacCormick 303).

MacCormick suggested that reading, writing and math should have been part of the women's job analyses. The goal, MacCormick wrote, was to give "individual prescription" rather than "mass prescription."

> The aim should not be to eliminate illiteracy or to give every woman a third grade education, but to meet specific needs and desires revealed by individual analyses and job analyses, including an analysis of the job of living. … Some women would like to fill in the gaps in their schooling or to brush up the points on which they are rusty. Others would like to comply with the educational requirements for positions which they hope to get on release. Others are interested in academic work without any relation to their vocational advancement. All of these women should be given an

> opportunity for as much education as they can assimilate and have time for (MacCormick 303).

MacCormick also noted that because of a lack of money, prison staff at women's institutions often doubled as teachers. For instance, the superintendent's secretary would teach typewriting and stenography classes (MacCormick 304). However, he adds:

> if the institution is near a fair-sized town or city, it is usually possible to employ teachers on a part-time basis, although they are not available during the day and are often too tired after a day's work to be effective as teachers in the evening.

MacCormick emphasized "more and better education" in American prisons that will be:

> recognized as having the same unquestionable place in prisons that it has in the world outside, and as probably having somewhat greater value because of the unusually heavy concentration of undereducated adults presented by our prison population (MacCormick 72).

MacCormick created the American Prison Association's Standing Committee on Education in 1930, which is known today as the Correctional Education Association, to continue studying education in prison. He also founded the Journal of Correctional Education in 1937, published by the CEA. Prison education was not to be considered "the sole agency of rehabilitation," MacCormick stressed, but it should play a significant role in preparing people for reintegration. Prisons failed in this regard, MacCormick concluded, primarily because of "outworn punitive theories."

> We are afraid of making the prisons too easy, too attractive. We still look on education as one of the dangerously soft phases of prison life. … Having long since recognized lack of education as one of the contributory causes of crime, we have not yet got around to doing very much about it. Moreover, we are not all convinced that it is worthwhile to do anything about it (MacCormick 74).

The tide seems to have turned beginning in 1930 when academic and vocational programs were implemented in all federal prisons. In 1931, MacCormick published his book “The Education of Adult Prisoners” based on his survey of prison education programs. According to the Correctional Education Association, MacCormick’s book “ushered in the modern era of correctional education.” New York State made significant progress after Governor Herbert Lehman was given the task of investigating the educational needs and practices of the state’s prisons, and hired trained educators to help reorganize the education programs in several prisons. New York State continued to make progress in prison education over the next decade. It had the most extensive educational program in the country as well as an education division in the state department of correction, a $350,000 budget and 157 trained personnel (MacCormick, 684). By World War II, New York had “the best statewide prison education system” (Gehring, 47) and influenced other states – California, Wisconsin, New Jersey and Pennsylvania – to implement, expand or improve their prison education programs. The State University System of Wisconsin, for instance, developed a full-time education program at its state prison (Gehring 47).

MacCormick stressed that “the prison won’t be turned into a huge school.” Rather, it would be a “community of employed men and women …each of whom has the opportunity to devote part of his (and her) time to that particular form of education which a skilled diagnosis of his (and her) individual case indicates he (or she) should follow” (MacCormick 75).

MacCormick also developed a theory on the types of education that people in prison should receive, including:

(1) fundamental academic education, designed to provide the intellectual equipment needed in further study and training and in everyday life;
(2) vocational education, designed to give training for an occupation;
(3) health education, designed to teach the fundamentals of personal and community health;
(4) cultural education, embracing the non-utilitarian fields which one enters for intellectual or aesthetic satisfaction alone;
(5) social education, which includes moral and civic education, and to which all other types of education and all the institutional activities should contribute.

MacCormick made it clear that education would be for all people in prison, including those on an elementary level and those who are more advanced. He also believed education programs should contain a mix of vocational and academic courses for a better-rounded curriculum. MacCormick’s prison education principles would serve as the guidelines for developers of prison education programs to model.

Miriam Van Waters and Framingham

When Miriam Van Waters succeeded Jessie Donaldson Hodder at the Massachusetts Reformatory for Women at Framingham in 1932, she laid out her vision for a “as non-prison like an atmosphere as possible” (Freedman, Maternal Justice 188). As she told a Boston Globe reporter “the goal of the modern institution must be to have institutional life approximate outside normal life as nearly as it can.” Van Waters removed the bars on the windows and added curtains. She also changed the name of the Framingham residents; she thought ‘women’ was not an appropriate term because “their faces are like children.” Inmate and prisoners resembled “herd names,” so Van Waters settled on students.

> If you call those in prison prisoners or inmates rather than students, you have (chosen to focus on) their custody, namely the shut-in-by-force and sentenced to hard labor and loss of rank” (Freedman 191).

Referring to the women as students instead highlights “their training and their willingness to learn.” She also chose students to suggest that Framingham was a school, not a prison. “Calling the inmates students also set the tone for her attempt to create a progressive educational environment in which she led as a teacher rather than a disciplinarian,” Freedman writes.

Framingham's educational mission stated that the basic principle of the educational department was to give the students as varied an educational program as possible. The four objectives,[25] as cited by director of education Ruth Weinberg, were:

1. To furnish opportunity for further education, which may aid in future living and purpose
2. To overcome illiteracy
3. To open entirely new fields of interest for those who may never have been exposed to such opportunity before
4. To provide worthwhile occupation of leisure time while the student is within the institution

More than 80 classes were offered between 1932 and 1959, including English, biology, typing, math and poetry. By 1935, 250 of the 296 women incarcerated at Framingham were enrolled in classes; five years later, 26 classes were offered (Chlup 4). The women could also take correspondence courses through the University Extension Division of the State Department of Education.

There appears to have been a "massive interruption" in higher education in prison during and after World War II due, in part, to "nearly an entire generation" of educators leaving for the war and not returning to the prisons (Gehring 48). Gehring adds: "This is the tragedy of correctional education history – the field had to reinvent itself after the war and really just began to revive during the mid-1970s, after decades of decline."

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[25] These objectives are listed in Dominique Chlup's paper "Principles of Adult Education at Work in an Early Women's Prison: The Case of the Massachusetts Reformatory, 1930-1960.

Pell Grants and Late-20th Century Prison Education

President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the Higher Education Act in 1965. Provisions in the Act allowed inmates to receive Pell Grants to pay for college. The Pell Grant, first known as Basic Education Opportunity Grant, was a federal grant that subsidized college education costs for students from poor families incarcerated in federal and state prisons. Incarcerated women and men qualified for the Pell Grant, renamed after Rhode Island Senator Claiborne Pell who sponsored the bill, because of their low income. The reasoning behind extending the grants to incarcerated students was to provide a college education to incarcerated women and men who may not have the chance to receive an education before incarceration. Furthermore, incarcerated people who obtain a college education while in prison are less likely to reoffend post-release than those who don't receive an education. Proponents of the punishment, not rehabilitation model of incarceration complained that offering Pell Grants were awarded to incarcerated women and men "at the expense of law-abiding citizens" and made "prison life too soft" (Zoukis 12). However, no traditional students were ever denied access Pell Grants because incarcerated students received them. In fact, when Bill Clinton ended prisoners access to the grants 1994, no additional grants were awarded to traditional students. "Funding that had previously gone to prisoner students, [had it been] equally divided among the millions of [traditional Pell] grant recipients, would have amounted to an insignificant extra five dollars per semester" (Zoukis 12).

In his article "Post-Secondary Education for Inmates: An Historical Inquiry," Thom Gehring explains that some colleges and universities did not use the Pell Grants to improve their prison education programs. Gehring said the community college where he

worked viewed its program as a “cash cow” (Gehring 50). He explains how some colleges and universities robbed the system:

> The general formula for BEOGs/Pell Grants was that the federal government provided approximately 50% of costs for fees and books, but several postsecondary providers were caught doubling tuition for inmate students in relation to those on campus, to collect 100% (Gehring 50).

There were insufficient libraries and resources for incarcerated students, as well as inadequate advising and no computer labs.

Shift in Prison Population

A little over 300,000 people were incarcerated in prisons and jails in 1973; there are more than 2 million today. The war on drugs, introduced by President Richard Nixon in 1971, is to blame for the exponential rise in the nation’s prison population. Two years later, New York Governor Nelson Rockefeller declared a War on Drugs during his State of the State address on January 3, 1973, to rid New York neighborhoods of drug dealers. The Rockefeller Drug Laws that became effective in September 1973 established mandatory minimums that made drug violations A-1 felonies which meant even first-time offenders could receive a minimum of 15-to-life. By the 1990s, the incarceration rates for women, a third of whom are incarcerated for drug offenses, was increased at nearly double the rate for men. Over the last 40 years, hundreds of thousands of women have been incarcerated for non-violent, first time offenses resulting from drug addiction, mental health issues or minor involvement in offenses by husbands or boyfriends.

According to the U.S. Department of Education, the growth in the nation's prison population increased the need for prison education. The 1970s became known as the "Golden Age" of prison education programs as "education was regarded the most important tool for rehabilitation" (Ryan & McCabe 451). This era included Adult Basic Education and General Education Development, vocational training, and postsecondary academic programs (Crayton & Neusteter 2). Also, in 1972, the first higher education program at the Santa Cruz Women's Prison Project at the California Institute for Women began. Professors Karlene Faith and Jeanne Gallick were teaching a course on women and society when the CIW women encouraged them to offer more classes. SCWPP, through a variety of courses that included Women and the Law, Drug Use in U.S. Culture, and Radical Psychology, "introduced the study of critical theory and substantive social issues affecting women's lives" (Faith 181). SCWPP, though innovative, was met with many challenges from prison officials throughout its four-year existence. The program was suspended and Faith temporarily banned from CIW in 1973 following an incident in which she signed a letter to an inmate "Venceremos" – the Spanish term for "we will overcome." The prison officer who read Faith's letter concluded she was part of a group by the same name that was connected with helping a prisoner escape from a nearby men's facility (Faith, 182-183). Women organized a sit-in, work strike and circulated petitions to have the program reinstated. Several more incidents caused SCWPP to be suspended over the next three years. The program – which had 100 women enrolled in it at any given time – was ultimately cancelled in 1976. While Faith doesn't attribute any one incident as the reason for the program's demise, she writes that if she has to name one factor, "it may be attributed to a combination of political and

organizational skills" (Faith 185), which included interference from officers who blatantly objected to education for inmates and the high turnover of the prison wardens.

The Demise of Pell Grants and Prison Education

There were 350 college programs in women's and men's prisons by the 1980s, during which time incarcerated women and men were receiving less than 1 percent of the Pell Grant Funding. But not everyone was in support of college-in-prison programs, despite studies that proved education in prison reduces recidivism. Between 1982 and 1994, conservatives doggedly advocated for bills to eliminate Pell Grants for incarcerated students (Ubah 76). Though each bill was defeated, the cumulative effect contributed to the demise of the Pell Grant. At the height of the crime scares of the 1990s, President Bill Clinton signed the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act in 1994. A significant part of the bill was the amendment to the Higher Education Act of 1965, which had authorized incarcerated students to use Pell Grants to fund their college education.[26] Incarcerated students were rendered ineligible to receive Pell Grants because the loss meant individual states would have to cover the costs. This resulted in the decrease of enrollment in prison college programs from 38,000 to 21,000, and all but eight of the nation's prison college programs closed within a year (Spaulding, 76). In New York, however, former Governor Mario Cuomo continued the state's funding of prison college programs through the Tuition Assistance Program. The Higher Education Services Corporation, the division of NYS's Department of Education that administers TAP grants, awarded $631 million in grants to about 300,000 New York

[26] Education from the Inside, Out: The Multiple Benefits of College Programs in Prison, a report by the Correctional Association of New York, January, 2009, p.1.

college students in fiscal year 1994-1995. Approximately 3,000 of those students – or 1 percent – were incarcerated students receiving TAP grants between $1,750 and $2,000.[27] But when George Pataki took office in 1995, New York banned incarcerated students from receiving TAP grants; only four out of 70 New York State prison college programs remained opened at this time.

One of the prison college programs affected by the elimination of the TAP grants was the Bedford Hills College Program at the Bedford Hills Correctional Facility, a maximum-security women's prison in Westchester, New York. In 2001, Michelle Fine conducted a collaborative study with The Graduate Center of the City University of New York and Women in Prison at the Bedford Hills Correctional Facility. In the study *Changing Minds: The Impact of College in a Maximum-Security Prison* Fine argued that Americans pay "the extraordinary personal, social and fiscal costs that all Americans pay today for not educating prisoners."[28] The study revealed three major findings.

First, college-in-prison reduces recidivism and saves taxpayers money. As part of the study, the New York State Department of Correctional Services tracked women 36 months post-release. The study compared 274 women who attended college in prison and to 2,031 women who didn't attend college in prison. The recidivism rate of those who attended college while incarcerated was 7.7% compared to 29.9% of those who did not. Second, college-in-prison makes the prison safer and more manageable with fewer disciplinary actions when the women are taking college courses. Third, a college

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[27] Ibid.
[28] Fine, Michelle et. al. *Changing Minds: The Impact of college in a Maximum-Security Prison*. September 2001, p. 4 http://web.gc.cuny.edu/che/changing_minds.pdf

education provides the women with skills and resources they will need for a successful transition into their community, thus reducing their chances of reoffending.

Mercy College ran the college program at Bedford Hills from 1984 to 1994; the last graduation was held in 1995.

> During the following weeks the women who had staffed the Learning Center, who had received their bachelor's and master's degrees and who had acted as role models, packed books, put computers in boxes, took posters off walls and turned their learning center into an empty shell. A feeling of despair settled over the prison as women experienced a loss of hope about their own futures and the futures of younger women coming into the prison.[29]

A group of women of Bedford Hills formed The Inmate Committee and, with the help of community and educational leaders, fought for their education. In March 1996, the seven women committee requested a meeting with then Superintendent Elaine Lord and the Deputy Superintendent of Programs to discuss the possibility of restoring the college program.

> We understand the public's anger about crime and realize that prison is first and foremost a punishment for crime. But we believe that when we are able to work and earn a higher education degree while in prison, we are empowered to truly pay our debts to society by working toward repairing some of what has been broken. … It is for these reasons, and in

[29] Ibid p. 6.

> the name of hope and redemption, that we ask you to help us rebuild a college program here at Bedford Hills Correctional Facility.[30]

Prison and state officials met to further explore the possibility of creating a new, privately funded college program. As a result, the College Bound program was implemented in 1997 offering a BA in sociology program, with Marymount College serving as the degree-granting college; 196 women graduated within in the first three years. As then-superintendent Elaine Lord recognized:

> Higher education can be a critical factor in a woman's ability to help her keep her family intact. It opens the doors to viable alternatives to cycles of criminal behavior and further incarceration. Within the prison, it can be a positive tool motivating women to change. There are no good prisons; some are simply more humane than others. Small changes can make large difference. It is in our hands to stop the cycle.[31]

However, funding issues reared its ugly head once again, causing College Bound to close in 2003, explains Aileen Baumgartner, who runs the Bedford Hills College Program. A group of professors who were teaching there at the time created a non-profit organization to keep the program going. They were able to sustain the program for a year-and-a-half with the help of money raised at educational fundraisers at local colleges. Administrators at Marymount noticed Baumgartner and the other professors were serious about keeping the program running – and managing to do so – and offered to have its fundraising office take over the fundraising. Baumgartner and the other

[30] Ibid.
[31] Ibid. This quote is attributed in the study to Elaine Lord in 1996.

professors turned over their funds to Marymount and dissolved their non-profit group. "We felt we'd be on much steadier ground, and we have been," Baumgartner said. "That was a good decision. They can't give us money from their general fund because the students on the outside are paying a lot of tuition … and we charge the women five dollars a semester … but what they do is very generous by raising money for us and there are all kinds of hidden costs like the registrar's time, all the administrative time."[32]

Today, the Bedford Hills College Program offers both non-credited college-preparatory courses and credit-bearing courses leading to an associate's degree in Social Science and bachelor's degree in sociology. The program has graduated 142 students; 44 bachelor's degrees and 98 associate's degrees have been conferred.[33] In a 2001 promotional video about the college program, some of the women – whose names are not given – incarcerated at Bedford Hills describe what an education means to them. "This is a turning point for many women. This is an opportunity for us to look at ourselves and our past and say, 'I don't want to do whatever it was that caused me to come here,' and make some changes."[34]

Towards a New National Prison Education Movement

There are approximately[35] 56 college prison education programs – those that offer credit-bearing or non-credit bearing courses – in existence today, according to the

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[32] Aileen Baumgartner phone interview, July 27, 2012.
[33] This is according to the program description on its website http://www.mmm.edu/study/resources/academicachievement/bhcp.html. Accessed 7/4/2013
[34] Bedford Hills College Program. YouTube Video. Accessed July 11, 2013. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ptqk1hSCSZQ This woman appears from 2:49 – 3:01 in the video.
[35] The Prison Studies Project, founded at Harvard University by Kaia Stern and Bruce Western, regularly updates its database of prison education programs as more programs are added or closed. There were 56 listed in the database at the time I wrote this chapter.

Prison Studies Project. This number pales in comparison to the 350 college programs that existed in the 1980s, but it does indicate a progression towards a new prison education movement. Support for this claim comes from the recent emergence of conferences devoted to higher education in prisons and some of the instructors interviewed for this study who suggest the seeds of a new movement have been planted. When I asked Tanya Erzen, director of the Freedom Education Project Puget Sound at the Washington Correction Center for Women, if she thought there is a renewed interest in prison education, she said national conferences and listservs dedicated to the topic of college in prison show there is at least some interest in a new movement.

> Is there a movement? Sometimes it feels that way because there's more movement forward, there seems to be more collaboration and so in that sense it does feel like there is momentum forward. I think it's only going to happen if we continue to actually really try and collaborate.[36]

One such collaboration occurred in April 2013 when college and university professors, prison administrators and activists, and community organizers convened for the Third Annual Higher Education in Prison Conference at Saint Louis University.[37] The 2014 conference is scheduled for October at the University of Illinois-Urbana Champaign. This recently established annual conference is an occasion for college-in-prison program leaders and instructors to meet and strategize with the intent of promoting and implementing higher education curricula in prisons across the country,

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[36] Tanya Erzen phone interview, August 8, 2012.
[37] I attended the conference.

and how to sustain and increase for-credit and non-credit courses in correctional facilities in the U.S. Panelists discussed such topics as fund-raising challenges, starting and sustaining a prison college program, creating the prison classroom, different models of education programs, and building connections between college campuses and prisons.

During the ending plenary session, conference participants developed what they call a "very preliminary statement of shared principles or broad commitments … for future discussion." This draft[38] of the principles includes:

- Commitment to higher education for critical thinking, pleasure, civic engagement – broad statement endorsing education as more than pathway to employment
- Intentional inclusion of incarcerated students, alumni, and student perspectives
- Commitment to treat with dignity and respect all potential stakeholders and partners (DOC officials, staff, university partners, students, family members, participants in other volunteer organizations)
- Shared interest in restoring Pell Grants
- Shared commitment to extend educational access: From Mass Incarceration to Mass Education
- Shared commitment to bring an end to mass incarceration
- Recognition of public interest in education as crime prevention and pathway to employment, reduction of recidivism, family reunification, safety and positive culture within prisons
- Inclusion of a broad range of organizations and models that contribute to arts and education, both credit and non-credit, and in a variety of settings (prison, juvenile facility, re-entry)

Though nothing concrete was determined during the 2013 plenary discussion, the fact that the conversation started illustrates there is a commitment to keep college in prisons. The discussion is planned to continue at the 2014 meeting. Other conferences

[38] The complete document is located on the SLU Prison Program website under the Conference Materials section at http://www.slu.edu/school-for-professional-studies-home/prison-program/2013-conference/conference-materials.

devoted to higher education in prison have happened this year. Towson University in Maryland sponsored a Prison Education in the Era of Mass Incarceration symposium in April featuring scholars, prison activists, and formerly incarcerated women and men. Arizona State University held its Third Annual Prison Education Conference in March. Students at New York University are working to develop a Prison Education Initiative to raise more awareness on the impact education and mass incarceration.

It is promising to see conferences and other initiatives contribute to the revitalization of prison education, but government funding is needed for this to be a more effective movement. For instance, on the national level reinstate Pell Grant eligibility for incarcerated women and men. There was a glimmer of hope among prison education advocates and instructors that government funded college-in-prison programs had the potential of making a comeback in New York when Governor Andrew Cuomo announced his prison education initiative. However, as I stated in the introduction to this study, that hope was short-lived after the governor nixed his plan following pressure from dissenters. The backlash from Cuomo's plan only reaffirms the punishment versus educational tension that has long existed in the history of prison education. At the center of that tension remains the political debate between advocates who favor a punishment model of prison and reformers who promote education as the crucial element in the rehabilitation of incarcerated women and men.

In chapter two, I introduce the instructors I interviewed for this study who are among the leaders in the revitalization of college-in-prison programs. Despite the challenges that continue to exist in prison education, these instructors have been

compelled to enter this renewal during a period in which prison education has faced one of its greatest political setbacks.

CHAPTER TWO: MEET THE INSTRUCTORS

Going into prisons to teach was a great way for Stephen Hartnett to get away from his "almost exclusively rich, white Republican students." Hartnett began teaching as a graduate student in southern California and said the experience "was really a bummer."[39] Twenty-four years later, Hartnett – professor and chair of the Department of Communication at The University of Colorado Denver – is still teaching in prison. He has taught college classes and poetry workshops in prisons and jails in Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, Texas, California and Colorado, and is one of the co-founders of PCARE, a national group of scholars who work on Prison Communication Activism Research and Education. For the last five years, Hartnett has been teaching public speaking and creative writing courses at the Denver Women's Correctional Facility. He brings a team of five-to-six UCD undergraduate and graduate students with him who serve as tutors to the women, and he is editor of *Captured Words / Free Thoughts*, a bi-annual magazine of poems and stories written by imprisoned writers.

Hartnett is one of the seventeen instructors – and the only man – interviewed for this project. This was not by design. As I explained in the introduction to this study, I did not intentionally recruit women as participants for this study; my query posted on prison education listservs simply asked for people who teach or have taught in women's prison. There is no concrete way to know whether the gender profile of the instructors who responded is simply a coincidence or indicative of a national trend among the gender of prison educators; there is no organization that tracks this information.

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[39] Stephen J. Hartnett, phone interview, March 26, 2013.

However, the Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program – an international prison teaching training program – reported that between 2003 and 2011, only 81 out of the 311 instructors who went through its training were men.[40] In addition, the majority of Inside-Out instructors are white women and most of the Inside-Out courses are offered in male prisons. Given these statistics, it is no surprise that all but one of the instructors I interviewed for this study are women, six of whom are trained Inside-Out instructors, and that all are white.

Because the focus of this study is higher education in prison, it should not be a surprise that more than half of my interviewees teach at colleges and universities and many of the programs they work in are offered by colleges and universities. There is a historical precedent for this: when higher education programs in prisons were thriving before Pell Grants were denied to incarcerated women and men in 1994, professors served as the primary instructors in college courses in prisons.

The seventeen participants in this study are from thirteen states: New York, Iowa, Washington, Illinois, Georgia, Ohio, Wisconsin, Pennsylvania, West Virginia, Washington, Tennessee, Maryland and Colorado. They include ten college/university professors and administrators, one doctoral candidate, one formerly incarcerated woman, three community volunteers and one medical doctor. The instructors teach a variety of courses in state and federal prisons, and county jails in the humanities and sciences. Their course topics include biology, writing, business, religion, theater, and

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[40] Van Gundy, Alana et. al. "Pushing the Envelope for Evolution and Social Change: Critical Challenges for Teaching Inside Out." *The Prison Journal*. 24 January 2013. http://tpj.sagepub.com/content/early/2013/01/20/0032885512472691

sociology, and some facilitate book club and writing workshops. Their prison teaching experience averages four years each. In addition, at least half of the instructors have edited or written books or journal articles about a wide range of prison issues – including higher education in prison, prison writing, and restorative justice – and their experiences working in these areas.

As I will illustrate in the next section, there is no one clear path an instructor takes to prison teaching; the majority of my interviewees said they got into prison teaching by chance. It is not my intention to give individual biographies of each instructor; rather, I will introduce some of the instructors by themes that are relevant to their experiences with teaching in prison and jail.

Deciding to Teach Inside

In 2009, Wende Ballew was considering starting another master's degree program in American Studies – she also has an MBA – when she felt called to do prison work. So, she "walked in blind" into the Lee Arrendale State Prison in Georgia to see what she could do. Ballew, a part-time instructor at Kennesaw State University, told me it is hard for her to explain the calling because "I was pretty reluctant to do it at first, and I did not have a clear direction of what I wanted to do within prisons." She initially thought she was supposed to go to seminary and become a prison chaplain, but she wanted to work inside the prison first and began volunteering as a drama teacher.

> Within five minutes (of her volunteer work) I figured out that I was not going to do chaplaincy, that I was never going to work being an employee of the department of corrections. That first year or so … I just planned to

> teach and go to my (graduate) classes and keep them separate, but I wound up doing my master's thesis on women's prisons.

Ballew completed her master's thesis on lesbianism and religious control in women's prisons, an ethnographic study that she completed mostly through the theater class. A year after she started teaching the theater class at Arrendale, Ballew created Reforming Arts, Incorporated, a non-profit organization that provides arts and humanities based education in prisons. She still teaches theater arts and cultural studies at Arrendale.

Like Ballew, Linda Pischke told me she initially ignored her "calling from God" to teach at a women's county jail in Wisconsin. She simply did not want to work with "those people." "Those people" are bad. "Those people" are not worthy of her time, Pischke said she would tell herself. But once Pischke went to the jail and met the women in her bible study/journaling class, she quickly discovered "those people" were not the hardened criminals she had imagined they would be. They were simply women.

> I had the expectation going in they were going to be hard and criminal like and not very nice people. We grow up labeling people nice or not so nice, and it embarrassed me internally that I was reluctant go do what God wanted me to do. The embarrassment and shame was that I was not seeing them as He was seeing them.[41]

Pischke's reluctance to teach in the jail derived from her lack of knowledge about people in prison. The only exposure the conservative Lutheran woman recalls having of

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[41] Linda Pischke taught at a women's jail – she doesn't give the name – in Wisconsin for 10 years. She chronicles her experiences in her book *The Women of Block 12: Voices from a Jail Ministry*. She was interviewed for this study on July 13, 2012; I quote both our interview and her book.

incarcerated people came from the media, which often reinforces the negative images of incarcerated women and men. Pischke's story is an example of a type of culture shock novice prison instructors typically experience when they are introduced to the correctional classroom and their lack of experience collides with unexpected aspects of prison culture.

Valerie Busler, a medical doctor who teaches biology at the Tennessee Prison for Women through Lipscomb University, told me she found it "enlightening" that some of the women at the Tennessee prison where she teaches were "a lot like me."[42]

> You just realize that people are more alike than they are different. You can't stereotype people no matter where they are or what group they're in and especially at the women's prison, I was just so impressed at how much they value their education, how willing they are to learn new things.[43]

Busler said her eyes were opened to the realities of what incarcerated women encounter on a daily basis and because of that, she believes they place a high value on education. This revelation that these women place such a high value on education has forced Busler to confront some of the stereotypes she had and to acknowledge the "dehumanization" incarcerated women face.

> How society sequesters away the incarcerated population, how little the general population knows how life is like for them and how they're treated, what the county jail is like before they even get to the state institutions. I

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[42]Valerie Busler, phone interview, July 30, 2012.
[43] Ibid.

> had my eyes opened to the dehumanization they've experienced, and then getting to see how this opportunity at education is a way to bring the humanness back to them. They see there are people who want to acknowledge yes you are a human being and you are valuable.

These initial experiences are confirmed in the scholarly literature on prison education. In his study "Go Teach in Prison: Culture Shock," education professor Randall Wright explains that going into prison teaching blindly can be "confusing, disquieting, and unsettling" (Wright 19).

> For many novice teachers, prison teaching is a "totally different" experience and prison is a "foreign place." Without comprehensive pre-service training, they find they have to "work by the seat of their pants" frequently lacking the cultural maps to understand their experience (Wright 19).

Pauline Geraci, author of *Teaching on the Inside,* describes prison for new instructors as "a strange paramilitary setting."

> It is like living in another country. You have to learn to negotiate and navigate a different culture, learn a new language and try to understand different mores and norms. You also have to juggle the dual role of compassionate humanitarian with the demands of security (Geraci 5).

The college experience can be just as intimidating for some of the incarcerated women as the prison environment can be for the instructors. Aileen Baumgartner – director of the Bedford Hills College Program – told me that many of her students never

had any college experience and are “blown away” at how different college is from high school and how difficult it is.

> They get frightened. They get terrified they’re going to fail and, as we know, they’ve probably already failed somewhere in their lives. Most of our students have been terribly abused as children or as adults, so there are a lot of anger issues and self-esteem issues, confidence problems, sometimes a huge chip on their shoulder, just the whole gamut that comes along with those awful experiences and betrayals that they’ve been through.[44]

Those painful experiences are what make teaching writing to incarcerated women a rewarding experience for Hartnett. He cites the women’s “hunger for learning” and understanding “that knowledge is power” as motivating force. After coming to terms with the issues that brought them to prison, Hartnett said his students are “looking for a route to redemption.”

> What that means is the classroom and the workshop is like three times more intense than a normal college classroom where half your students are checked out. If you go into a prison classroom, they’re checked in in an intense way.[45]

Part of that intensity comes from the women’s experiences with abusive relationships and other traumas they have encountered during their lives. The writing and public speaking projects the women create becomes therapeutic for them. By

[44] Aileen Baumgartner is the director of the Bedford Hills Education Program. This quote is taken from our telephone interview conducted on August 27, 2012.
[45] Ibid.

turning trauma into art, Hartnett explained, the women are able to regain some of the power they have lost while in prison. Likewise, Jean Trounstine, author of the book *Shakespeare Behind Bars: The Power of Drama in a Women's Prison*, learned that "art has the power to redeem lives" during the 10 years she taught at Shakespeare at Framingham women's prison in Boston. A self-described "60s rebel and dedicated teacher" who has taught drug-addicted kids and run-away girls, Trounstine said she never expected she'd teach college in a women's prison. "And, like most people, I am filled with prejudices, fears, and garbled TV images about the community of women living behind bars," Trounstine writes.

Similar to Pischke's experience with her bible study class, Trounstine describes how her assumptions about incarcerated women were entirely inaccurate and based on her ignorance.

> Certainly I'd heard of abuse behind bars, was curious about the crimes that women commit, and guessed that many inmate are immersed in poverty and hopelessness and have no avenues out, but I knew nothing of the fellowship that exists in prison. It is this community that sustains women who do time, cut off, often abandoned by loved ones and forgotten in their home towns. It is this community that taught me to value the prisoners' lives, to like and respect them, and to understand they are more than news stories tucked away on a back page in our local papers (Trounstine 2-3).

Trounstine added that her class became a community she describes as a "sisterhood" that celebrated her marriage and offered comfort when her mother passed. She came to realize that most women in prison are not dangerous.

> The majority does not engage in physical assaults or sit in cells making weapons. … What characterizes them more than anything else is their heartache. Instead of frightening me they seemed lost with tragic lives – lives like those of Shakespeare's characters, complete with flaws, comic mishaps, and ironic endings. I began to understand that female prisoners are not "damaged goods" and to recognize that most of these women had toughed it out in a society that favors others – by gender, class or race (Trounstine 2).

Empathy is what enables Jeri Kirby – the only formerly incarcerated instructor I interviewed for this study – to connect with her students on a level she said she would not be able to otherwise. Kirby served two years at the United States Penitentiary – Hazelton, high-security federal women's prison in West Virginia, for a drug conviction. Kirby explained to me that she always dreamed of going to college before prison derailed those hopes. She took the only two college course offered at Hazelton – a social psychology course and another she can't recall. Kirby attributes the lack of educational programming at the time to "a sign of the times" when college-in-prison programs were no longer the focus of prison reform. Instead, Kirby was required to take a rudimentary course about drugs. She knew when she got out of prison she was going to go to college. That is exactly what Kirby did when she was released in 1994.

With the help of financial aid and assistance from family, Kirby started her undergraduate studies at West Virginia University. The first semester went well, but Kirby had to take a break after the fall semester because "the funds dried up." During her reprieve, Kirby worked three jobs – a weekend chips stocker for Frito Lay, personal trainer at a local gym and cleaner in the bar where her mother worked – and returned to WVU part-time the following fall. After realizing she was "never going to finish going part-time," Kirby found a job at UPS working nights. This allowed her to take courses during the day. UPS also reimbursed her tuition and in 2004, Kirby graduated with a bachelor's degree in political science and legal studies. She started graduate school in 2005, graduated three years later with a master's degree in sociology and started her doctoral program in political science.

Kirby initially wanted to attend law school and was even accepted, but was told by the director of admissions that her felony conviction might be a hindrance.

> She said well that doesn't stop you from going to law school, but we can't guarantee you can practice. So I said I go through three years of law school and there's a chance the ethics committee won't grant me a license? And she said yes.[46]

Kirby did not want to take the gamble. She spoke to a mentor who was teaching at a local state prison who suggested she look into graduate school; the political science program at WVU recruited her for its PhD program shortly thereafter. Kirby now teaches

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[46] Jeri Kirby, phone interview, March 15, 2013.

criminology at WVU and runs a reentry program at Hazelton where she teaches an Inside-Out course titled Reentry and Reintegration. Kirby describes her return to Hazelton as “nerve-wracking” because she could not let go of her convicted felon status.

> One of my biggest battles was letting my title of felon hold me down and be ashamed of it. That’s what a lot of people in society believe we should be. It changes everything – soon as they (people) know you and view this, it changes their entire perspective. That’s what the felon title is – it’s a hook.[47]

Once Kirby recognized her felon title could be “an asset instead of a deficit,” she started using her story to help her incarcerated students.

> I go in to meet with the Inside students who are interested in the class. I usually start off with where I am today and I do that on purpose. I talk about going to college for as long as I did and having my master’s and trying to finish my PhD. I envision in my mind they’re sitting there thinking “Oh, great for you,” but then I say, “I’m also a convicted felon.” What all of a sudden happens is, “If she can do it, I can do it” and it’s very true because I was in the situation they are. Now, granted most of them have a lot more time than I had, but I battled over four years of probation, did the

[47] Jeri Kirby, phone interview, March 15, 2013.

> time, I deal with the stigmatization and being excluded from many things because of my title. I get it.[48]

Kirby's goal is to have more Inside-Out courses other than reentry classes adopted by the Federal Bureau of Prisons nationwide. For now, she says she is limited in what she can do.

> The problem is you have to speak their language their language right now is reentry. That's where all the funding is. So, really for them to say yes, yes, yes, that seems to be what you have to say – I want to teach a reentry-based class.[49]

This is not to say that reentry courses are not needed; after all, more than 650,000 ex-offenders are released from prison every year and need some assistance in finding jobs and housing post-release, according to the U.S. Department of Justice. And, as Kirby recognizes, incarcerated women battle with guilt and constant blows to their self-esteem because they feel like they have let their families and children down.

> I do my best to teach them they'll come out with more than they ever came in with, that they're actually going to have more to offer their family. I think education is extremely important for individuals who have never had the opportunity. Every semester I get an Inside student who says "these are college students – I can't run with them, do what they do." I always get the handfuls (of inside students) who are scared they can't keep up so when they do, they all of a sudden realize "Wow, I can do this if I'm on the

[48] Ibid
[49] Ibid.

outside." Specifically for women, the recognition of their ability is where it's really valuable.

There are no statistics that document the number of formerly or currently incarcerated people like Kirby who teach in correctional facilities, but anecdotal evidence suggests that it is not uncommon for people to teach while incarcerated or return to prison as an instructor. The most famous of these formerly incarcerated prison educators is Kathy Boudin. Boudin was convicted in 1984 of felony murder for her participation in an armed robbery that resulted in the death of two police officers and a security guard in Nyack, New York. She served 19 years at Bedford Hills where she taught a basic literacy course. Boudin was released in 2003 and is now an assistant professor at Columbia University. I detail the curriculum Boudin designed in chapter four. Author Pat MacEnulty spent 17 months in prison during the 1970s; she is now an associate professor at Johnson & Wales and has taught creative writing in prisons and jails in Charlotte, NC. Patrice Gaines, author of *Laughing in the Dark: From Colored Girl to Woman of Color – A Journey From Prison to Power* spent several weeks in jail in the summer of 1970 as she faced charges for possession of heroin. Gaines, along with her friend and business partner, teaches monthly workshops at the Charlotte Mecklenburg County Jail to help women successfully reenter society. And some of the facilitators in Voices from Inside – an organization that runs writing groups for currently or formerly incarcerated women in Massachusetts – have been incarcerated.

The Compassionate Prison Instructor

Instructors are typically encouraged by the prison or jail staff or administration to maintain an emotional distance from the incarcerated students. However, it helps when

instructors show some compassion towards their incarcerated students, as long as they do not cross and lines or grant inappropriate personal requests.

Randall Wright's study examines the experiences of women teaching in prison and argues that the caring relationships teachers develop with their students help to deter the oppressive nature of prison that treats inmates as objects. Calling attention to the caring relationship highlights the "qualities of human interaction that institutions such as prison … may have forgotten or dismissed" (Wright 202). He further argues:

> Despite the worrisome boundary issues, the voices of women who teach in prison suggest that caring teaching practices highlights the importance of connecting and community inclusiveness. These practices flow against the institutionalized dividing practices that separate them from us (Wright 202).

Instructors who care too much can find themselves in precarious situations. Ann Folwell Stanford, the former Cook County Jail instructor, told me that she really cared about the women in her writing workshop and was sometimes blinded by that emotion.

> I felt there were times I overpromised and it was in my enthusiasm to want things to be good. One woman said – and this still haunts me – "I love your earrings so much. Maybe when I'm out for my birthday you can send me some earrings." And I said yeah, maybe. Well, there was no way. I didn't even have her address, but I felt like that was me trying to please her or make things seem like they're going to be better than they are and that was something I struggled with the whole time I was there – don't over promise. Did I learn from it? Probably, but I think I still suffer from it

> because I want things to be better but you don't make things better by making a promise and not following through.

For Valerie Busler, the Tennessee biology instructor, it is hard not to care deeply. She describes developing a friendship with one of her incarcerated students following the death of the student's brother.

> We were close enough where I could offer her a hug and she received it well, like a genuine hug where she hung on for a while and cried on my shoulder and we've kept in touch through letters since then.

Facilitators of The Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program National Training Institute advise instructors to avoid emotionally bonding with their students because this type of risk with incarcerated people "often seem to have an unusual level of emotional depth and intensity." Relationships in prison – whether platonic or otherwise – can seem more meaningful and real than they would be on the outside, and are thus problematic for two reasons: they can be viewed by administration as a security risk and become a topic of gossip, thus undermining the credibility of the program and instructor (Pompa and Crabbe 11).

Another thing to consider is that some people are simply not meant to teach in correctional facilities. At the Taconic Correctional Facility in New York, an instructor "wound up having a meltdown"[50] because she could not connect with her students, Mary Donnolly, Taconic's academic coordinator, explained to me.

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[50] Mary Donnolly, phone interview, July 18, 2012.

> She let the fear takeover and started coming in with a dictator attitude like they weren't good enough, and the women rebelled. She ended up saying she couldn't do this anymore.[51]

Donnolly took over and started offering college preparatory essay classes to teach the women proper grammar and essay organization once she realized they did not know how to write in a "clear and concise way."

Instructors' Privilege in the Prison Classroom

During my interview with Ann Folwell Stanford, the DePaul University professor described the prejudice she experienced from a guest-speaker at Cook County Jail that almost kept her from teaching her writing workshop. Stanford explained that she was invited by a group of volunteers to give lectures at the jail's library. On her first visit, she simply observed a talk being given by a black female philosopher.

> (The women and the speaker) had read a novel together and she was sort of holding fort and I remember … after it was over I stayed to talk to her and the first thing she said to me was, "Why don't you white people get out of here? We don't need you here. What's in it for you?" I sort of stammered and … left thinking that she's right, I can't go in there. I have nothing to give. As I was driving home, I got angrier and angrier and thought, "Wait a minute. I do. I'm white. I acknowledge that I'm white, but I think that we can work together."[52]

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[51] Ibid.
[52] Ann Folwell Stanford, telephone interview, September 4, 2012.

The instructors I interviewed are largely white, educated, and middle-class who are not confined to the prison spaces in which they teach. Navigating this position is a fundamentally important part of prison education at the college level. Stanford acknowledged during her interview with me that her "acute awareness of privilege as a white middle-class academic, free to come and go in this enclosed space, added to my unease and growing sense of collusion" when she taught at the Cook County jail.

> My awareness of privilege and my sense that what I was doing made the jail look good and was, in some ways, placating the women, giving them something to do, which, on my worst days, I thought was close to the heavy drugging the jail employed on "unruly" prisoners. In other words, I asked myself the extent to which I was in collusion with the state by my very presence in the institution.

Stanford told me she realized that teaching the writing workshop was not about her.

> What mitigated this concern is that ultimately I believe I'm not that important, what I do was not earthshaking in any way, and if I could simply create a space where the women experienced themselves as creating, thinking people, then I had done my job and to hell with my concerns. I have to say that I also loved being there with the women. They taught me so much about "making a way out of no way," and they taught me how to teach them. "No, that's a dumb exercise," one would say, "why don't we write about _____." Or "give us homework! It's not like we are busy here."

Stanford is the Vincent de Paul Professor of Inter-Disciplinary and Literary Studies at DePaul University. She first offered poetry discussions to the women at Cook County

then began incorporating writing when it became clear to her the women wanted to write. Stanford's research includes modern and contemporary African American literature and because of that, she says she felt like she needed to be held accountable for her work.

> I went in there originally because I felt like I had gotten tenure based on articles and things that I've written about African American literature, which was my love, and I felt like I needed to give something back to be accountable to that community. One way I thought I could do that was through the jail, once I got invited. It wasn't about I want to give you something, it was really about accountability. Here I am a white person, I have tenure at an institution and a lot of my work has been in African American literature, so what is my accountability? I didn't know that much about the prison scene so as soon as I started the work, I realized how little I knew so I started doing research and reading.[53]

Stanford's work at Cook County led her to create and direct the DePaul Women, Writing & Incarceration Project (she no longer runs the project) and publish articles and book chapters about literature and women's incarceration. She and Tobi Jacobi are co-editing *Word by Word: Women, Writing & Incarceration*, a collection of work by scholars, activists, and incarcerated women. Jacobi is among the instructors featured in this study.

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[53] Ann Folwell Stanford, phone interview, September 4, 2012.

Other instructors say they, too, have been reminded of their privilege while teaching inside. Rachel Williams told me that when she reads or hears her students' stories in her writing class at the Iowa Correctional Institution for Women in Mitchellville she's "always surprised by how other people have lived their lives."

> I think that's the thing that always startled me. I am so privileged. I came from this middle class family, my parents have been married for 40-something years, now I have this nice job and nice house and I'm just very fortunate. I'm always reminded that some of these women have not had any of those opportunities in their lives and they're still here.[54]

Williams is an Associate Professor at the University of Iowa and teaches in the School of Art and Art History and the Gender, Women's and Sexuality Studies. Her research focuses on women's issues, community, art, and people who are incarcerated and has worked with incarcerated women since 1994. In the past 19 years, Williams has worked in women's prisons and jails in Florida, Wisconsin, Montana, Iowa, and London, England.

When I asked Brenda Chaney how her race and class privileges impact the globalization course she teaches at the Ohio Reformatory for Women, she told me a story that is similar to that of some of her incarcerated students.

> I have told the students … that I think there is a very fine line that separates us. For me, that is the background I have which could easily have led in a different direction. I grew up in a very poor family, oldest girl

[54] Rachel Williams, phone interview, August 9, 2012

> of seven children. I am the only one who went to college. Both of my parents were drop outs, my mom in 8th grade and my dad in 10th. Like many girls of poor families I married young to person who was emotionally abusive and threatened to kill both me and the kids if I tried to leave. It took a few years but I did it. At 27 I was single with a two year and a four year old, no money, no job, so I went to college. I was determined that my children would not stay poor.

Chaney added that she eventually got her doctorate, remarried and had another child. She told me that though she has a nice life now, she knows it could have been different.

> A different decision could have resulted in the complicated messes some of the women at the prison found themselves in. I think the women see me as a college professor, not a person, and have a vision that I have an upper middle class background because that is what they think college professors have. After reading their papers for three classes I know that many of them grew up in more affluent homes than I did. I know that I could have ended up in the same way they did.

Stephen Hartnett hesitated to expound on his answer when I asked him how his white male privilege impacts the writing and public speaking courses he teaches. Instead, he told me:

> You have asked a question that requires a book to answer. But, I will say this: for women students who have spent most of their lives surrounded by really bad men who beat them, raped them, stole from them, and then got

> them arrested, well, you can imagine that I and my team look pretty good by comparison. You can frame this as a question of "privilege" if you want, but it transcends that issue by far. Imprisoned women want respect, they want compassion, and they want people they can trust and respect in return. By being decent, caring, and responsible, you have already exceeded their expectations and most of their experiences with men.

It is especially important for prison instructors to critique their positionality because "the teacher always speaks from the perspective of the teacher's culture, from the position of the teacher's power," Rob Scott, director of the Cornell University Prison Education Program, argues in his article "Distinguishing Radical Teaching from Merely Having Intense Experiences While Teaching in Prison." These cultural differences can actually create opportunities for learning.

> Many teachers, coming from privileged backgrounds, will be interested in their incarcerated students' writing about experiences on the streets, or using non-academic English. This could be an opportunity to create intercultural exchanges that were not possible before or during the students' incarceration, or in the life of the teacher. Working in prison can lead teachers to see themselves differently, and the positionality of the teacher can provide a unique perspective on prison life (Scott 29).

In her study on running an empowerment group for incarcerated African American women, Patricia O'Brien describes the process through which she – a white woman – went through to gain the women's trust. O'Brien, a social work professor at the University of Illinois at Chicago, asked the women to help her understand their

experiences and what they wanted from the group. The women turned the tables on her and questioned her motives.

> They wanted to know instead what I was doing there. Why was I interested in spending Friday nights with a group of prison inmates? Why should they trust me? What was it like for as a white woman interacting with a group of mostly black women? These questions framed a shift where these women began the process of claiming their "soul" and establishing a place of relative safety where they could experience a sense of empowerment. By asking these questions, the women were challenging me to become much more authentic in the group process and provide an interactional means by which they could begin to talk about what most mattered to them (O'Brien 46).

Asking O'Brien these questions was the group's way of creating a "sacred space" where the women felt safe enough to "address some of the more distant issues of abuse and/or losses they felt as prison inmates" (O'Brien 46). Along similar lines, Betty Barrett – a social work professor at the University of Windsor – argues that it is typically impossible to create safe classroom spaces (a subject I will return to in greater detail in chapter four) for "racially, socially, and economically marginalized students" (Barrett 6). These students:

> live in a world which is inherently unsafe – a world where racialization, sexism, ableism, classism, and heteronormativity pose genuine threats to their psychological, social, material, and physical well-being. To contend

> that the classroom can be a safe space for these students when the world outside is not, is not only unrealistic, it is dangerous (Barrett 7).

Education activist Parker Palmer writes in his book *The Courage to Teach* that instructors "teach who we are" meaning "teaching emerges from one's inwardness, for better or worse."

> Teaching holds a mirror to the soul. If I am willing to look in that mirror and not run from what I see, I have a chance to gain self-knowledge and knowing myself is as crucial to good teaching as knowing my students and my subject (Palmer 60).

Linda Pischke, the Lutheran woman who taught in a Wisconsin jail, describes in her book *The Women of Block 12* that a "mirror to the soul" moment she experienced when teaching at the women's jail in Wisconsin. She writes: "I came to the jail to be a teacher, but God had other plans. He wanted *me* to learn. My instructors were women of a different cloth, women who opened their hearts to teach me about life, faith, and the true meaning of friendship."[55]

Feminist scholar bell hooks contends that "teachers must be actively committed to a process of self-actualization that promotes their own well-being if they are to teach in a manner that empowers students" (hooks 15). This type of "engaged pedagogy" requires teachers look past the fear that "the self would interfere with the teaching process" because "professors who are not concerned with inner well-being are the most

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[55] From page 13 of Pischke's book, *The Women of Block 12: Voices from a Jail Ministry*.

threatened by the demand on the part of student for liberatory education, for pedagogical processes that will aid them in their own struggle for self-actualization" (hooks 17).

In the same way, the unresolved biases instructors may bring to their prison classrooms will get in the way of teaching and learning. As such, it takes "constant vigilance" for prison instructors to be aware of the prejudices and stereotypes they harbor. The assumptions and stereotypes made by both student and instructor can be more damaging in a prison environment and prevent instructors from facilitating a successful class. One of the main goals of Inside-Out is to help educators confront their biases about incarcerated people before entering a prison or jail classroom. Under the Inside-Out model, college campus students take a semester-long course with students in prisons and jails. Inside-Out offers week-long training sessions in Pennsylvania, Michigan, Oregon, and Ontario, Canada. Six of the instructors included in this project – Coralynn Davis, Barbara Roswell, Brenda Chaney, Rachel Williams, Jeri Kirby and Barb Toews – are Inside-Out trained instructors.[56]

Through a series of self-reflective exercises and two days of teaching mock classes in a state prison, educators are challenged to face their biases or prejudgments about people in prison, and deal with those emotions before stepping into the classroom. The reason, as explained in the instructor's manual, is that:

> A high degree of self-awareness will provide more control over the implicit messages that are communicated to the class, a greater ability to create

[56] I trained as an Inside-Out instructor in August 2011.

> the kind of environment that allows students to take intellectual and emotional risks, and emotional protection, as well.[57]

During the Inside-Out training, instructors are asked to reflect on and answer such questions[58] as:

- What racial, gender, and class attitudes do you bring to this experience?
- What judgments do you have towards those who have been convicted of a crime? Those who have been victims of crime? Those who work in the criminal justice system?
- Do you have a tendency to see people who are incarcerated as innocent victims of social injustice? As monster who are getting what they deserve?
- Do you have different attitudes and beliefs about incarcerated men and women? About incarcerated people from different social backgrounds?

How instructors answer these questions will impact the way they approach their class, including the language they use and classroom environment they create. Teaching the mock class inside prison during training can also help some instructors understand why they want to do the work, or why they can't. In classes that follow the Inside-Out model, there is a higher risk of othering – treating certain people as intrinsically different from oneself – because in addition to the instructor's privilege, outside students may be perceived as privileged, too.

> In many cases, the instructor may be coming from a more privileged class and education background than many of the inside students, may be of a different race or ethnicity than the majority of the inside students, and may

[57] Lori Pompa and Melissa Crabbe, co-facilitators of the training, wrote the Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program Instructor's Manual. This excerpt is found on page 11.
[58] These questions are among several listed on pages 12-13 of the instructor's manual.

> well have never been convicted of a crime or incarcerated. Even in cases where an instructor shares a similar background with many of the students, there will almost certainly be at least one student in the class who comes from a completely different cultural context (Pompa and Crabbe 13).

Brenda Chaney's Inside-Out class at the Ohio Reformatory for Women is a good example to illustrate this point. Chaney, a sociology professor at The Ohio State University, Marion, taught a 10-week globalization course at the prison with 15 incarcerated women and 10 OSU students. In the first writing assignment, Chaney said both the inside and outside students wrote about how nervous they were of being judged by their classmates.

> The women at the prison were worried that the Ohio State students would be afraid of them; the Ohio State students would judge them. The Ohio State students wrote that they were really nervous, that they had a lot of preconceived ideas about prisoners and didn't want to be seen as elitist. I'm not sure where that came from, but several of them wrote about it. They all had stereotypes on both sides that they had to overcome.

Chaney discussed the comments with her students during the next class; she said it turned out to be a good exercise in realizing they were more alike than different. Chaney is now teaching her third Inside-Out class and continues to see similar comments in each one of the first response papers.

Coralynn Davis, women's and gender studies professor at Bucknell University, detailed a similar experience with her Inside-Out class at the State Correctional Institute-Muncy in Pennsylvania.[59]

> I often feel when we're in there that there's some kind of like 'oh here come those silly do-gooders again' and the Bucknell students as a group tend to be white privileged and they dress in a mode that kind of signals those kinds of class identities and so we parade in and out every week so I guess I imagine what that might be like for people who work there and people who live there. Occasionally, I'll hear comments from incarcerated students about what the Bucknell students are wearing, so there are (indications) that our presence there is complicated for people.

Davis said these class differences have helped her become more aware of her race and class privileges.

> My own educational background has nothing to do with incarceration. My personal background didn't teach me much about prison or incarceration experiences so in the beginning for me it was a huge learning curve. Just learning about the lives of the incarcerated students in the class has taught me a lot about my own life in terms of privilege and has made me learn new things about our educational system, about disparate local economies, about all kinds of things that have to do with our society.[60]

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[59] Coralynn Davis taught a "Women in Penal System" course at the women's prison in Muncy, Pennsylvania, for five semesters. I interviewed her for this study on July 23, 2012.
[60] Ibid.

In cases where instructors comes from a more privileged class and educational background than the students, the Inside-Out training model suggests instructors openly acknowledge that they and all students bring different experiences to the class that everyone can learn from. This is sometimes easier said than done.

> As the instructor, you will have moments of self-doubt, wondering if something you've said displayed a prejudice that could create a barrier to learning. You will find that, on some occasions, you will transcend you own limitations, and on others, you will make mistakes. The best thing you can do in these moments is have compassion for yourself, acknowledge your error, if appropriate, and keep moving on.[61]

As I will explain in the next chapter, instructors' positionality can also be a source of contention between them and the correctional officers; some of officers do not have a college education and resent instructors coming in to educate the women. The nature of education changes in controlled spaces such as prison. There is also something inherent about total institutions where power is exercised on the powerless by the state. The nature of what instructors are doing and communicating undermines what the officers are there to do.

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[61] Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program Instructor's Manual, page 14.

CHAPTER THREE: THIS IS MY CLASS, NOT YOURS: NAVIGATING THE POLITICS OF PRISON, NEGOTIATING OVER POWER TO TEACH INSIDE

Before Eliza Mosher became superintendent of the Massachusetts Women's Reformatory at Framingham in 1880, any attempts she made to educate the women were impeded by the superintendent. Mosher persisted with her own style of rehabilitative justice by reading to the women; after she became superintendent, she implemented more educational programs. That was more than 100 years later, but the power struggle between prison reformers and administrators and staff continues. As the literature suggests, it is par for the course for instructors to be met by some level of pushback from prison administrators and staff. More than half of my interviewees' stories support these claims in the literature. The instructors told me they sometimes find themselves navigating the politics of prison and negotiating over power to teach their courses.

They assume what education professor Randall Wright calls "stage-related identities such as the teacher as visitor, tourist, stranger, or settler" as they try to find their place in the prison structure (Wright 21). The politics include overcoming some of the institutional barriers put in place to impede or prevent the prison educational process. For instance, Coralynn Davis – the Bucknell professor who teaches at Muncy – describes not have having a dedicated classroom space to teach her course. Other accommodations – such as having class in a small conference room – have to be made, which make for unfavorable teaching and learning conditions. This issue of space – both its physical and theoretical significance – is further examined in the next chapter.

The political navigation also includes instructors negotiating over power with correctional officers[62] to teach their classes. The instructors explain that this source of contention is usually found in their interactions with the officers more so than prison administrators because they are on the front lines daily controlling the flow of outsiders entering the prison. At the heart of this battle are instructors fighting for the autonomy or academic freedom some are afforded on their college campuses, but neither of these privileges is guaranteed at the prison where they – as outsiders- within – have to abide by the prison's rules. Jim Thomas argues in "The Ironies of Prison Education" that "the teacher in prison must negotiate between satisfying capricious whims of staff and protecting course integrity" (Thomas 31).

For instance, when Valerie Busler taught her biology class at the Tennessee Women's Prison she had to provide a list of materials she wanted to use in each class for approval. If the list was not approved, she would have to rework her class assignments. This is not to say that all relationships between instructors and the correctional officers and administrators are problematic – some instructors recall having amicable working relationships with correctional officers and administrators – but I contend that it does highlight the direct impact the prison organizational structure has on the way instructors are able to teach their classes. Sandra Matthews, a special

[62] Regarding terminology, the title prison guard is now consider an offensive term. Correctional officer is the more widely accepted title. Kelsey Kauffman, a college professor and former correctional officer who recently restarted a college program at Indiana Women's Prison, explains in her book *Prison Officers and Their World*: "I depart from the standard practice of referring to individuals employed to maintain security within prisons as "guards" or "correction[al] officers." My use of the term "prison officer" reflects my orientation toward those I studied and their role within prisons. "Guard" is too suggestive of a static relationship, something one does with inanimate objects. In any case, its connotations are derogatory and belittling. "Correction officer" conveys a fanciful (and, to my mind, unseemly) notion of the relationship between keeper and kept. "Prison officer" simply denotes an individual granted official authority within the specific domain of a penal institution. (5)

education instructor who has taught in adult and juvenile facilities, argues in her article "Each Day a Challenge":

> These professionals trained to be part of a helping profession, are charged with the duties of educating prison inmates within a system designed for punishment. People from opposing ideological backgrounds must somehow work together in order to accomplish a very difficult mission (Matthews 179).

What this chapter will show is although the officers do not have the power to reprimand instructors they do have some control and exercise it through subtle ways, such as purposely keeping an instructor waiting. Finally, this chapter will show that despite the tensions some of my interviewees say they experience with prison staff and administration, other instructors revealed they had no major issues implementing their education programs or teaching inside, suggesting relationships between instructors and prison administrators are not always adversarial.

Relationships with Officers

When I asked Wende Ballew to describe her relationship with staff and administration at the Lee Arrendale State Women's Prison, she matter-of-factly stated, "If I were ever respected by more than two staff members at that prison ever, I would throw a big ol' party."

> They call me drama lady. It varies the amount of respect and disrespect. Despite evidence based studies (that confirm education in prison is beneficial), they believe the only way to transform or change a woman is

through salvation. They really just don't see the point of me coming in and doing plays or teaching a film class.[63]

Ballew said this pushback from staff makes it hard for to schedule plays, but she is "just very tenacious about" making sure her students get to perform their work. Similarly, Tobi Jacobi – who runs a writing workshop in the women's jail in Fort Collins, Colorado – describes an antagonistic relationship with some of the officers in the jail's housing unit who "sometimes will … sort of hyper-enforce the rules." She recalls one particular incident that stands out in her mind when an officer was out of line with her.

> I just find it really interesting because we hear so much in the media about how pregnant women are treated inside, so I think I was maybe seven or eight months pregnant with my second son and I had this guard who, he was just a jerk. He was so infantilizing. It was just amazing. I had been coming there for what, five, six years? He wanted me to physically count, orally count out loud to show I knew the number of people I was taking (to class). He made me walk next to them and count out loud. Usually, we just stand by the door and they go down the line and take the women's names and then we go, but this man he was just very rude. All the women were talking about it, asking me if I were OK. It was just really interesting and important for me to have that experience because I'm sure they have it all

[63] Wende Ballew phone interview, July 26, 2012.

> the time. It was painfully obvious to everyone he was being inappropriate.[64]

Jacobi's incident illustrates what Thomas refers to as the "fucking with the prisoner or instructor" game in which:

> Staff is able to disrupt the educational environment by invoking discretionary authority in ways that disrupt class, threaten students, and block access to resources. This reduces the instructors' teaching effectiveness and contributes to tension between staff and prisoners (Thomas 29).

Linda Pischke, who taught the bible study/journaling class at the Wisconsin women's jail, provides another example of officers antagonizing instructors. In her first three years at the jail, Pischke said the officers were "polite, but aloof, sometimes rude." As she describes in her book *The Women of Block Twelve*, some nights the officers would even pretend they did not know who she was or why she was there.

> Week after week, we would arrive at the visitor window, pick up the phone, and speak our names and the reason for our visit to an unseen face behind the wall of black glass. 'Jean and Linda from St. Vincent de Paul Jail Ministry. We're here for the women's group.' 'Sorry, ma'am, I have no information about that. Who did you say you were?' And so it went, more questions, delayed responses, and sometimes, long periods of waiting.

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[64] Tobi Jacobi, phone interview, August 27, 2012.

Pischke said every Wednesday night, she and Jean received "frequent reminders to keep us in our place" and that they were "no different than the women who lived at the county jail, powerless and dependent on the mercy of the guards who found numerous and not-so-subtle ways to keep us in our place."[65] When the officers would finally let them in and escort them to the barbershop where the journaling group was held, they would barely make eye contact or even not say hello.

> We were a pain in the butt to them. They had to take time out of their busy schedules to escort us a whole 25 feet to the room then go and get the women. You could tell we were just in the way.[66]

But the tide started to change a bit with the emergence of a newly built jail and new captain, which Pischke said helped change the officers' attitudes over time. As she explained to me in an interview:

> The halls were longer now. We had to take a longer trip to the area where we were and sometimes they would comment and let out some of their feelings like 'oh these women are the worst, I hate working with the women, they're so difficult' and we would talk to them about how it wasn't difficult for us, but perhaps because we were grand moms and they had a difference reason for being in our room than being the cell blocks, so that all changed. We couldn't change the rules but we could change their hearts in some way.

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[65] Pischke, Linda. The Women of Block Twelve: Voice from a Jail Ministry, Pischke Publishing, November 26, 2010. More information about Pischke's book and jail ministry can be found at http://www.thewomenofblock12.com/.
[66] Linda Pischke, phone interview, July 13, 2012.

In addition, Pischke and other volunteers would make small gestures such as bringing the officers homemade cookies during Christmas and Easter, which Pischke says helped to ease the tensions between the volunteers and officers. However, an interesting turn of events happened after Pischke published her book; the book did not sit well with the captain, who Pischke said is supportive of her work otherwise.

> She's very angry about my book. This is a woman who has never emailed me more than one sentence at a time, very terse. But she wrote me a single-spaced page about my book. She read it in a hurry and she felt that I had put them down and that I had picked on the jail. She said, "Of course you didn't name the jail." And I wrote back and said, "I didn't name the jail because this isn't about the jail, it's about the women." I even pointed to a couple of things she totally misinterpreted in the book and I thanked her for her opinion and never really heard from her again. She hasn't banned me, which she could've done. I don't know what to make of it other than she felt very threatened that I dared to talk about her institution. I burned a bridge there, but we're still making cookies.[67]

Tensions between instructors and correctional officers tend to occur when the teaching and prison cultures are both vying for control. A battle for authority ensues as a result of this tension – officers try to enforce the rules and instructors work to maintain the educational integrity of their classroom. In their article "Negotiating the Politics of Space: Teaching Women's Studies in a Women's Prison" University of Michigan-

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[67] Ibid

Dearborn professors Lora Bex Lempert, Suzanne Bergeron, and Maureen Linker describe how every visit to the prison where they taught a women's studies course involved "some struggle for control" over their classrooms and "a challenge to our authority as university professors."

> For instance, until very recently we did not determine when the break would occur during our three-hour class because this was announced by the guard on duty in the classroom building. We successfully challenged this practice and now we determine the break within a set of parameters agreed upon by prison administration. There are other ways that the material conditions of teaching in the prison result in confrontations with the guards that challenge our authority. We are told the level at which the lights can be dimmed when we're showing a movie, or informed that we must keep the classroom door open so that the guards can better monitor the class, even under our protests that this chills the classroom climate and stifles open conversation. These interventions generally fall under the guise of the correctional officers' concern for our safety, and reflect their manner of identifying us as "nice ladies" who need protection instead of seasoned university professors who are skilled assessors and managers of our own classrooms (Lempert et. al. 202).

The way instructors are able to each their classes are sometimes hindered by institutional rules and constraints on what materials they are allowed to use. Busler teaches a basic anatomy and physiology class and has been met with several obstacles when bringing in supplies for her class. Prison administration banned Busler from

bringing in any specimens – e.g. human or animal organs – so, as she explained during our interview, she had to get creative.

> I found some Jell-O molds out of science education magazine … made the brain and heart out of Jell-O molds. (She wanted to use fake urine that they use at the university) but they wouldn't even let me bring that in because the inmates might keep some and use it to fake a drug screen test. I had to bring in Gatorade and things like that that had some salts and sugar in it that could have an abnormal urine test but they couldn't use to fake a drug test.

Busler told me she had to submit a list of class materials she wanted to bring in each week. Prison staff check screen the items on the list and run them through metal detectors. This level of scrutiny caused Busler to fall behind in her course during the semester and she found herself constantly reworking her list to accommodate the change in her schedule.

In a similar case, Tobi Jacobi and Stephanie Becker describe in their article "Rewriting Confinement: Feminist and Queer Critical Literacy in SpeakOut! Writing Workshops" that "the pen incident of late 2011" almost shut down a writing workshop they conducted at a women's jail in Colorado.

> Pens with on/off "clicking" mechanisms were inadvertently allowed to circulate beyond the workshop room of the jail workshop. Unbeknownst to facilitators, a weekend of upheaval, room searching, housing unit stripping and lockdown occurred—and the program was almost suspended—

> because several women were discovered writing with pens that were not available through the commissary (Jacobi and Becker 36).

This type of regulation is contrary to the workshop's purpose and diminishes its benefits which Jacobi and Becker describe as "its ability to distract … to encourage individual emotional release, to alleviate the duties of staff in one area of the building by reducing the number of people under direct surveillance" (Jacobi and Becker 36).

Writing instruments were also a source of conflict between Pischke and the captain of the Wisconsin jail where she conducted her journaling group. Pischke wanted to bring in "pretty pencils" for the women in her group, but was told they were only allowed pew pencils. She explains in her book why providing the pencils was so important to her.

> In my mind, giving a woman inmate a pencil without an eraser was a dignity issue. It said I didn't trust her; I expected her to cheat. It took away her freedom to write and erase, to make a decision, or change her mind. I could not give the women pew pencils.

Pischke said her pride got the best of her. She bought the pretty pencils, cut off the ends and replaced them with colorful eraser caps. The women were able to keep the pencils and Pischke, proudly boasting her small win over authority, wrote in her book, "I did not fit easily into the role of submission." Pischke wanted the women to have the pencils because she "felt it was important for the women to have something soft, feminine, pretty." Ironically, Pischke told me that after her book was published the captain "made it an absolute rule" that the women were no longer allowed to have the pencils.

‘Pick Your Battles Wisely’

The instructors’ stories have illustrated what Thomas refers to as a “game of status and control” between instructors and staff that “requires instructors participate fully in resisting, defusing, and mediating among the tensions inherent in prison life” (Thomas 30). Therefore, in addition to preparing for and teaching course content, instructors have to learn to navigate the tensions between the cultures of prison and academics. Coralynn Davis’s experience with corrections officers at Muncy did not involve an offense against her, but one of her Bucknell students who took her *Women in the Penal System* Inside-Out course. She explained to me that a female officer made inappropriate comments about “body searching” one of her male students.

> She was sort of like elbowing the other correctional officers like “let’s have a little fun with these kids,” but there was this whole gender dynamic, a racial dynamic to it (the officer was white, the student black) a class dynamic. She sort of finished her little joke and we left and we processed it as a group on the outside and talked about what some of the identity dynamics there were, what it meant and whether we should do anything about it.

The incident was reported to the prison’s volunteer coordinator, and Davis and her students received a formal apology. Aside from that incident, Davis said she has not encountered an overwhelming amount of opposition from the prison staff or administration. Instead, she describes her experience as a “feeling of opagueness” where she was left to figure out who all the players were and what they thought about her being there.

> From the beginning … I was trying to navigate an arena where I was getting very little direct sense of how folks were feeling … and I spent a lot of time feeling out where are the edges of what's possible to do in here. In what ways do I need to prove myself or prove what the class is accomplishing in order to make another request? Who are my allies? (There was just) a lot of feeling like I'm groping around in the dark to try to understand my surrounding. That's just something that's unfolded overtime and I think it's the nature of the institution as a part military and very hierarchical place that is … just very hard to figure out. The direct resistance in terms of "in your face kind of what you're doing is dumb or counterproductive or a pain in our asses," very little. My sense is that that would be talk that would happen not to my face.[68]

At Cook County Jail in Chicago, Ann Folwell Stanford told me she dealt with ambivalent officers when she first started teaching her writing workshop at Cook County, but it was the "red tape" she had to deal with that eventually caused her to leave.

> I ran a project where I trained adult students to do creative writing workshops and we would send them in teams to three different prisons and Cook County jail and another jail in the county on the north coast so we, that's where I ran into the biggest issues because there was so much red tape. Cook County was sued at one point and after that a bunch of

[68] Coralynn Davis, phone interview, July 23, 2012.

> incarcerated people did a class action suit and won against brutality and after that, the county made it difficult for anybody on the outside to come in. They didn't want us witnessing what was going on, so that was about that time. I struggled for another two years then I realized this just was not working because I'd have students ready to go in and they just kept putting me off and putting me off and saying "well, the reports haven't come back, the background checks haven't come back," so I stopped at County because of that.[69]

Stephen Hartnett, who runs the writing workshops in Denver, told me that dealing with correctional officers comes down to a battle of wits.

> A lot of the institutional barriers hinge on your interpersonal ability to deal with the managers of a specific facility. There's still a large majority of the staff and guards who are men and so I do a whole training program with the tutors before we start our program to say, "Look – these male guards are going to do everything they can do to make you feel uncomfortable. They're going to mess with you. They're going to do everything they can do to intimidate you. We talk about how to handle that, how to diffuse that situation. So, a lot of the institutional impediments – it's almost like a game: the guards mess with you and if you handle them effectively, the guards stop messing with you.[70]

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[69] Ann Folwell Stanford, phone interview, September 4, 2012.
[70] Stephen Hartnett, phone interview, March 26, 2013.

Or, as Barb Toews told me she learned from teaching an Inside-Out course at the women's federal prison in Philadelphia, it is best to "pick your battles wisely" and simply abide by the officers' rules.

> I also know when to push back, politely, and keep my mouth shut. Ultimately, the most important thing to me is when I'm in that classroom I can treat my students like humans. You don't get in the way of me treating my students like humans, then we're gonna be good. The hardest part – and I haven't figured out how to do this with students – is how to keep the students under control with those sorts of things. They wanna push back on things. They wanna get in the staff's faces and on a couple of occasions I've had to tell them to back off. Part of my opening thing with students is I deal with staff; you do not deal with staff.[71]

Brenda Chaney had a similar discussion with her Ohio State-Marion students when she taught an Inside-Out course at the Ohio Reformatory for Women.

> I told my outside students it doesn't matter if you like the rules or not, it's their prison, so we're gonna follow their rules because I want to continue to go back to that prison for as long as I can and I don't want the Ohio State students to antagonize the administration because I have to work with them in the future.

Here is the bottom line as I see it: it does not matter how many degrees instructors have, where they are from, or how privileged they may be out on the outside

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[71] Barb Toews, phone interview, August 7, 2012.

because once they are inside the correctional facility they are not in charge and, in many ways, are at the mercy of the officers just like the women in their classes. As Pischke writes in her book:

> There were only two kinds of people inside the jail – those who made the rules and those who are expected to obey them. It didn't take long to find out which group I belonged to and the realization stuck in my throat like a piece of dry bread.

As Pischke further explains in her book *The Women of Block Twelve*, instructors lose a bit of their freedom, too, when they enter a prison or jail to teach. Playing by the jail's rules became "an exercise in obedience" for Pischke and a game she had to master.

> Everything I wanted to do for the women was at the discretion of the captain. The newsletter was read before publication. Guest speakers went through a background check and turned in an outline of their topic. My program plans were reviewed and usually, but not always, approved. And sometimes if I had been very good, I could bring a treat for the women. The jail was about rules and the rules applied to everyone. They were absolute. Our ministry was there by invitation and it was clearly understood the welcome mat could be withdrawn at a moment's notice. It was not a democracy but a game of "Captain, May I?" and I learned to play it well.

'They Would Be Better Off Learning How to Weld'

Some of the instructors I interviewed surmised that part of their struggle with correctional officers originates from the officers' own lack of a college education.[72] As a result, they tend to resent the education the incarcerated women are receiving and take it out on the instructors. As Aileen Baumgartner, director of the Bedford Hills education program, explained to me:

> One of the things is that we know very well that a lot of the correctional officers don't have college degrees, can't afford to go to college if they do, they have to take out loans. And here are these women, these "criminals," these "convicts", these "felons," getting a free education. I run into that just from regular people on the outside, so we don't argue with that. We just say, 'Yeah, I know. It sucks. We think everybody should be getting a free education, actually.'[73]

In addition, Shatzer says at a private institution like Lipscomb where the tuition is significantly higher than a state education is "perceived as a high price tag to what the ladies are receiving and I think a lot of the officers feel like they're not deserving of the opportunity. That's my impression of the dynamic there."[74] The anti- prison educational bias was also made clear when Rachel Williams attempted to start an undergraduate educational program at the Iowa Correctional Facility for Women three years ago,

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[72] Corrections officers must have at least a high school diploma or GED to work in state and local prisons and jails. Unlike the state and local levels, the Federal Bureau of Prisons requires corrections officers need at least a bachelor's degree, three years counseling experience, or both.

[73] Aileen Baumgartner, phone interview, July 27, 2012.
[74] Christin Shatzer, phone interview, July 16, 2012.

> I called the department of corrections and the director of education at that time … said to me – and I was stunned – "What good would a college degree do for these women? They would be better off learning how to weld." I could not believe she said that. I just had to sit for a minute. I'm not a classist. I don't believe everyone should go to college and if you don't go to college your life is going to suck, but there's a whole lot of evidence that says people who finish a college degree, their recidivism rates are lower, they do have a better chance of being employed, it helps their self-esteem. There are a number of benefits, obviously, and her suggestion of welding was the stupidest idea ever.[75]

To add insult to injury, Williams said the prison shut down their volunteer program after administrators decided to take on a treatment-based model of rehabilitation. That meant Williams could no longer offer her writing classes.

> I had a discussion with one of the wardens and she said, "Well that means the little art classes, we're not trying to do that anymore because that doesn't really help the women make better choices in life." I had to sort of stop and say, "Well I've been doing research on this area for a long time and actually it does." What they wanted – and I understand – was classes about domestic violence, financial stability, classes about parenting, you know those kinds of things. So they weren't interested in creative writing.[76]

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[75] Rachel Williams, phone interview, August 9, 2012.
[76] Ibid.

Kristenne Robison, a sociology professor who teaches a course at SCI-Cambridge Springs in Pennsylvania, recalled a conversation between the prison's superintendent and school principal during which the superintendent expressed doubts about the purpose of higher education for the women. Robison said the superintendent asked, "'Well, what do the women get out of this anyway?' Even though she's supporting it, it's like she's questioning the value of a college class at a women's prison." During our interview, Robison added that she has learned to overlook any opposition she may get from correctional officers.

> Sometimes the guards will stand in the front of the classroom and they don't need to do that. I just ignore them, don't draw any attention to them and just go about my normal business. I don't want to paint the guards with a broad stroke. Some of the women said their COs will sit down with them and go over their readings and ask them what they're learning, so there are just a couple who give the whole a bad name.

'We've Been Waiting for Someone to Do This'

Not all relationships between instructors and administration and staff are adversarial. In fact, some of the instructors describe how easy it was to implement their education programs or classes at the prisons where they teach. Take the case of the Goucher Prison Education Program as an example. GPEP grew from a prison writing workshop at the Maryland Correctional Facility for Women. Barbara Roswell and six other Goucher College professors were teaching the workshops when they decided to form a nonprofit group and create a college-in-prison program. The professors figured it was only logical to develop a program since they were assigning the women college-

level work and the workshops mirrored the ones offered at Goucher. As Roswell explained to me during our interview,

> We start raising money. We talked to a community college in the area called Anne Arundel Community College and poof! We have a college degree program. It was pretty amazing. We moved even further forward and a few of use at Goucher went to Max Kenner at the Bard Prison Initiative and said, 'Max, you have money to do a national replication of the Bard Prison Initiative; come help Goucher do this.' Goucher is now hosting a prison education program both for men and women, both degree-granting programs. That's pretty awesome, all from one little prison writing program.

Once Bard provided the grant money, Goucher became the degree-granting institution so administrators at Anne Arundel pulled out of the program. The Goucher Prison Education Program now enrolls approximately 50 incarcerated students. Their tuition, books and supplies are funded through grant money and private donations. Sustaining a college-in-prison program does come with a set of challenges and juggling the set of tensions that go along with creating a college-in-prison program is a constant balancing act, especially in the early stages, Roswell added. These tensions include the "tactical and strategic" questions that need to be considered when developing a program, such as "should we try a pilot program and see if anyone will bite, or create something sustainable and excellent." She explains:

> A lot of time goes into those questions of where to push, where to pull back and it's a dance. It's like being on a tightrope. You don't solve this

> once you're constantly moving back and forth. For us there are two others that continue to be part of our balancing act and that's the wish to give ambitious and intellectually energizing courses and to make sure that every moment is kind of electric, attention is given to skill building, and we're creating a strong foundation.

Some things have worked well, said Roswell, including developing effective ways of conducting admissions interviews, and creating writing and math placement tests, while other things remain a challenge, such as struggling to get access to the computer lab. Roswell told me she acknowledges that despite the smooth transition from prison writing workshop to prison education program, creating and sustaining a college-in-program is a lot of work that she does not take lightly, but the challenge is also what makes it "really an honor and really special … to continue to make this something one can be proud of."

Brenda Chaney, a sociology professor at The Ohio State University, Marion, found it remarkably easy to convince the warden at the Ohio Reformatory for Women in Marysville to allow her to come in and teach an Inside-Out course. In fact, the ground work had already been laid for Chaney by former Inside-Out instructors.

> After I finished my (Inside-Out) training, I sent an e-mail to the warden and she set up an appointment with me and she was thrilled and she said she's been waiting and waiting for someone to come along and say they wanted to do an Inside-Out class at Marysville. I went in with notes and pamphlets and all kinds of things to make a case for having an Inside-Out class and there she was (saying) where have you been? We've been

> waiting for someone (to do this). When I actually started to set up the class, some Inside-Out instructors before me … had already met with the department of corrections and made a plan so that every prison in the state would be allowed to have Inside-Out programs. So, I didn't have to get permission. That had already been approved at central office.[77]

Chaney taught a globalization course and now facilitates a book club. What was difficult for Chaney was recruiting students from OSU-Marion to take the class. Per the university's rule, Chaney had to have 10 students enrolled to keep the class on the schedule. Chaney said she later learned from other Inside-Out instructors that it is not unusual for them to face challenges when recruiting campus students. Chaney explained there were a couple reasons why she had issues recruiting students.

> One, it's a regional campus and students on regional campuses don't join things, so even though it was a class for which they would receive credit it required some initiative to drive to a prison once a week. Two, for some reason some students thought it was only for criminology and criminal justice people and it wasn't. I'm going to have to start recruiting as soon as school starts just because I want to keep that class going, but the only way I can do it is if I get students.

Thirteen of Chaney's OSU students ended up registering for the class; nine completed the course. In addition, Chaney requested 15-20 incarcerated students for

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[77] Brenda Chaney, phone interview, July 25, 2012.

her class; she got 14. A case manager at the prison chose the women from among those who participate in the dog training program at the prison.

Though Chaney has an idyllic relationship with the prison staff and administration – she even receives passes from the prison administration to bring in supplemental books and DVDs for her course, and cookies on the last day of class – she is not blind to the politics that are involved with teaching in prisons.

> When people start thinking and learning, it can't *not* (sic) change how they are seeing the world. For the women who start thinking and can start seeing themselves doing something other than what led them to prison, that's political. If you and I were running a prison, what we would want is people who follow the rules and are docile and don't make waves. The question, then, is when people are challenging what they were and asking "Why can't I be," is that going to present a control problem? From the perspective of the prison bringing in Inside-Out or any outside organization, I can see how they would see it as a threat. As educators we know thinking and challenging is the route to change. From the perspective of a prison administrator, the question is "Is this going to be a threat to order?" Many people in prison were not successful in education and at some point they just stopped thinking they could do it. If we tell them they can, they see they can and nothing bad will ever come out of that.[78]

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[78] Ibid.

At Bedford Hills, Baumgartner said the officers see her and her staff as a "very benign presence in the facility that makes their job easier rather than harder." The officers are also aware of that the administration is very supportive of the college program, so they are not too interested in making trouble for Baumgartner and the instructors, she added.

> They know we don't break the rules and that we make the women work hard – they earn their degrees, their credits – and they just don't bother us. They'll help us from time to time. We get more help than we do problems. We've been lucky that way, too. I've heard some horror stories. Mostly the women tell me … their employers – whether they're officers or they're civilian employees or counselors – will, if they have papers due, let them skip work and come to the writing center and type their paper.

The Indiana Department of Corrections did not hesitate to lend its support when a local professor proposed an idea to reinstate a college-in-prison program at the Indiana Women's Prison after the state legislature voted to eliminate the Correctional Education Program. Indiana once had one of the best college-in-prison programs in the country with 2,400 incarcerated women and men – 15 percent of women and 10 percent of men – enrolled in college programs in prisons across the state. The Correctional Education Program offered courses from two- and four-year colleges taught by instructors from Ball State, Indiana State, Purdue North Central, Ivy Tech, Oakland City University and Grace College. However, after the state legislature passed a budget that eliminated state funding for higher education in prison, the CEP was obliterated "almost overnight." As a result, the colleges and universities who were providing the education

withdrew their instructors, books, computers and supplies.[79] The last graduations were held in June 2011. The following year, Kelsey Kauffman, a professor at DePauw University, led an effort to reestablish the college program at the Indiana Women's Prison and took her idea to the Department of Corrections. Under Kauffman's proposal, volunteer faculty would teach the courses and the program would not cost the state a dime. The DOC enthusiastically offered its support.[80] That was the easy part. Kauffman explains:

> The biggest hurdle was to find a degree-granting institution that would be willing to give credit to prisoners with no promise of remuneration. Fortunately, the program was embraced by Martin University, one of the state's least-well-endowed colleges but with a mission that mirrored our own.[81]

Kauffman received a $15,000 grant and raised an additional $10,000 over the past two years to fund the program. In the fall of 2012, three instructors – a retired teacher, a retired college professor and a retired newspaper editor – began teaching the first cohort of 18 women at the Indiana Women's Prison. The number of students increased to 35 by the spring semester and to 50 by the summer. The program

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[79] Kelsey Kauffman is a former correctional officer who holds degrees from Yale and Harvard and has spent 40 years teaching in and writing about prisons. Her book, *Prison Officers and Their World* (Harvard University Press), is one of the few studies of the impact of working in prisons on officers; she has also written many articles especially on women's prisons, prison nurseries, and race and prisons. She has taught for many years part-time at DePauw University and in three Indiana prisons through Indiana State University. I just recently learned about the Indiana Women's Prison college program; Kauffman forwarded me a copy of the grant application she wrote when applying for funding for the program. The information included in this section is taken from that application.

[80] Ibid.
[81] Ibid.

continues to grow: by September 2013, 70 women were enrolled in courses taught by nine current or former faculty members from DePauw University, Butler, Ball State, the University of Indianapolis, Indiana University and Wabash; as of today, the program includes 80 students and 14 instructors, all of whom are volunteers. The goal is to increase enrollment to 150 – 25 percent of the prison's population – and graduate the first cohort this year.[82]

In Tennessee, Lipscomb University recently graduated its first cohort of women at the Tennessee Women's Prison. Nine women from TWP graduated in December with associate's degrees from Lipscomb. The women took one class a semester for seven years. The courses, which include students from the main campus taking the classes with the incarcerated women, are taught by Lipscomb faculty.[83] Lipscomb professor Richard Goode coordinates the Lipscomb Initiative for Education – LIFE – programs that has been offering courses in Nashville prisons for the past eight years. Goode first approached the Tennessee Department of Corrections in 2006 about LIFE starting a liberal arts undergraduate program at Riverbend Maximum Security Institution, a men's prison. However, as Goode explained to me via email, Sharmila Patel – Director of Education for the TDOC – "asked if we would consider the women's prison because everyone forgets about the women. Her recommendation proved to be wise."[84]

The original LIFE cohort began with 15 women, but six had either been paroled or transferred to other prisons. The TDOC selects the women who take the courses;

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[82] Ibid
[83] Though this classroom combination of traditional and incarcerated students is similar to the Inside-Out classes, it is not an official Inside-Out program.
[84] Richard Goode, e-mail correspondence, March 11, 2014.

they must have a two-year record of good behavior and high school diploma or GED. The nine women who graduated in December are now working toward a bachelor's degree and two new cohorts totaling 29 women are currently enrolled in courses and working toward the associate's degree. More than 50 women have taken courses at TPW through LIFE since the college program began in 2006. Shatzer, who taught a business course, said the administration at TPW has been very supportive of Lipscomb's education program. She recalled a time, however, when it appeared as if the program was in jeopardy.

> There was a thought they wanted to change the focus at this particular institution, have it more high needs and mental health and so they would move everyone that was fairly high-functioning someplace else, which would mean none of (the women who were taking courses) would be eligible for taking these classes. Thankfully, that didn't actually pan out though it seemed at the time it was a high probability that was going to occur. Not everything is always smooth sailing; we have to be aware that things might change.[85]

Negotiating over power to teach inside correctional facilities often becomes a game a political tug and war between instructors and the facility's administration and staff as all parties vie for status and control. I have provided several examples to illustrate how instructors have to navigate the politics of prison to teach their courses. As such, it is clear that teaching inside a prison or jail has less to do with instructors

[85] Christin Shatzer, phone interview, July 6, 2012.

preparing and teaching their courses and more to do with learning how to effectively walk the line between punishment and education. The instructors, who occupy a precarious outsider-within status, must also learn their place among the prisons' or jails' typically male-dominated hierarchy. This can be tricky because while the instructors are not under the officers' control in the way the women they teach are, they do relinquish some of their power once they are inside because they are expected to follow the rules of the facility. The officers do not have the authority to punish instructors, but they find ways to antagonize instructors in many cases just because they can. I say this source of conflict between instructors and staff offers an opportunity to reconsider the ways in which we use prisons and education. In rethinking prisons and rethinking education, I think it is important to not view all prisons and jails strictly as places of punishment and see them instead as places of possibilities to develop educated people before releasing them back into society.

CHAPTER FOUR: SAFE PRISON CLASSROOMS: ARE THEY POSSIBLE?

Ann Folwell Stanford had always considered her writing workshop at Cook County Jail to be a safe space for the women. Despite being inside the jail's chaotic environment, Stanford said the women helped create a space where they felt free to express themselves through creative expression. Yet, as Stanford soon learned, classroom safety can sometimes be compromised without a moment's notice. During my interview with Stanford, she described a fight that happened in one of the workshops after a white woman made a disparaging comment about black people. Black women make up the majority of the jail's population and Stanford's writing workshop.

> (The white woman) had written a poem about her neighborhood and said "my neighborhood was so clean you could've eaten off the sidewalk before the black people moved in." It was a very provocative poem and insulting poem and she was doing all of the generalizing and all of that stuff, and I probably should've intervened more quickly but I was actually horrified. The woman sitting next to her said, "How can you say that?" and she said, "It's true, it's true. I'm not saying you did it and I'm not saying I'm racist, but the blacks came in and ruined my neighborhood and they're dirty … but I'm not being racist." The (black) woman said, "Well, that is racist" and the white woman jumped up and went over to her and pushed her and the black woman grabbed her hair and pulled it. Then I think the white woman scratched herself and drew blood because I never saw

> anything happen. Anyway, the guards came running in because they heard the furor and I did not think it was necessary but they came in. Here's what happened: the white woman tells her side, the black woman tells her side, I step in and say this is what I saw and the black woman was carted off to the psychiatric ward and was drugged and the white woman was told to behave. They said (the black woman) had an anger problem and we're going to have to drug her. And I saw her a few months later and her eyes were clouded and she just was vacant. That was really upsetting and I could see the politics of race really up close. It was so clear. I just felt like here it is – the black woman had an anger issue and needed to be drugged and the white woman was defending herself.

After the fight, Stanford said an officer asked if she wanted him to stay in the classroom with her. She declined because she did not feel she was in danger. In fact, the remaining women in the workshop decided to write about their reaction to what had just unfolded.

A safe classroom space is especially important in a prison classroom because, as my interviewees told me, it is oftentimes the only place in the prison where the women feel like people, not just inmates. But my interviewees' experiences also indicate that safe is such a relative concept – what is safe to one student may not be safe to another. That is not to say that safety cannot happen in a classroom, but prison instructors especially are not in a position to guarantee safety in a space that is out of their control.

As this chapter will show, the instructors I interviewed have varying opinions on whether it is truly possible for them to create safe learning spaces in the prisons and jails where they teach. Their experiences support the literature on feminist critiques of safe space that indicates that despite the best of intentions, it is not always possible for an instructor to create safe classroom spaces. This chapter also details how some of the instructors use critical and feminist pedagogies as foundations for which to create classroom spaces. Both pedagogical approaches are used by Inside-Out as part of its training for prison educators. Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* and bell hooks' *Teaching to Transgress* are required reading for the training.

Critical Pedagogy and Safe Space

In thinking about pedagogy, prison instructors like the ones I interviewed are typically attracted to the Freirean approach because it allows them to encourage independent thinking amongst their students in an environment where they are otherwise stripped of their independence. Critical pedagogy favors a student centered approach and, among other things, allows for open dialogue between teacher and student. But using the Freirean approach in the prison classroom may not be the best option as Laura Rogers, a writing instructor at Albany College of Pharmacy and Health Sciences, discovered when she taught a writing class in a New York State prison. Rogers admits in her article "Finding Our Way Within: Critical Pedagogy in a Prison Writing Class" that she attempted to implement a Freirean approach to teaching "without completely understanding Freire's ideas or the difficulty in enacting them in a correctional facility environment" (Rogers 23). Rogers discovered several barriers when attempting to implement a critical pedagogy approach that she had not considered. For

instance, it is not always safe for incarcerated students to openly and honestly express their feelings in their papers. Rogers learned that by asking them to do so, she was asking her students to open themselves to possible disciplinary action from correctional officers and prison administrators.

> My efforts to have students locate their stories within the social and cultural forces they found themselves in brought me face to face with the reality inmate students were writing in. Although I had always known that student work was potentially under surveillance, it was only when I asked students to investigate the circumstances of their lives that I became more aware of the real consequences for inmates. I had not anticipated that my ignorance of the prison environment would cause problems for students (Rogers 30).

Rogers began "to understand the aims of prison and school seemed not to be the same. According to the prison, inmates should be silent, compliant and dependent; I wanted students to be questioning, independent, individually responsible, and critical" (Rogers 32). Rogers concluded that although critical pedagogy in a prison classroom may not even be possible, "prison teachers can still reflect and theorize about their work, the conditions and restraints under which they teach, and can support students through real dialogue in their effort to attain meaningful growth" (Rogers 41-42).

Jodie Michelle Lawston, author of the book *Sister Outsiders: Radical Activists Working for Women Prisons*, developed and facilitated a writing workshop at a California women's prison using a Freirean approach, but like Rogers she found her prison classroom was not conducive to this method of teaching. The goals of the

workshop were to improve the women's writing and communication skills and expand their critical thinking and political consciousness.

> The idea was that the facilitators and the incarcerated women would all be learners and teachers, and was therefore grounded in Freire's notion of the pedagogy of reciprocity. Prisoners were seen to have their own base of knowledge that we from the outside could learn from; they were not empty vessels into which we poured our knowledge (a la the banking concept of education).[86]

But, "the bureaucracy of prisons and the hostility some staff had toward outsiders and toward educational programs for women" posed a challenge, Lawston explains.

> Given that one of the basic tenets of critical pedagogy is that social and economic conditions cannot change until oppressed subjects have the tools to understand and resist the forces of their own oppression, this resistance presented a significant obstacle to the overall effectiveness of the program.[87]

Despite the challenges, the women in her workshop were able to cultivate their critical voice by writing "eloquently about their past and current life experiences, their hopes and dreams, and in addition, applied the critical consciousness that they already had developed from living in a prison environment to their writing." Ironically, it was the development of the women's "critical consciousness" that Lawston believes ultimately

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[86]Lawston, Jodi and Gabriel Jones. "Critical Pedagogy in Prisons? A Brief Reflective Essay." http://razorwirewomen.wordpress.com/2011/12/01/critical-pedagogy-in-prisons-a-brief-reflective-essay-by-jodie-lawston-and-gabriel-jones/. Accessed 24 July 2013.
[87]Ibid.

led to the demise of the writing workshop. Lawston writes, “The more vocal and critical women became, the more the institution sought to silence them. Of course, that silence is always short lived, as women clearly know how to resist and find their voices to critically analyze the institution around them.”

Kathy Boudin, an assistant professor at Columbia University who served 19 years in Bedford Hills, designed a critical-thinking curriculum to teach a basic literacy course during her incarceration. It was during her job as a teacher’s aide in 1986 that Boudin noticed the lack of critical thinking the students were exposed to. Students completed assignments in their workbooks; the teacher checked the answers then students made corrections. There was limited interaction between teacher and student. Aside from the occasional post-movie discussion, there were no class discussions and writing was rarely encouraged.

> The learning process was entirely defined by the teacher and it was narrowly confined to a limited body of information. Day after day, year after year, women came to class and silently read workbooks in which they repeated discrete skills in preparation for periodic tests (Boudin 187).

This rote style of instruction and learning is exactly what Friere cautions against because it stifles students’ creativity and transformation. This “banking concept of education” – which Freire defines as the “act of depositing, in which students are depositories and the teacher is the depositors” – only allow the students to receive, file and store information. The problem, as Freire explains, is

> It is the people who themselves who are filed away through the lack of creativity, transformation and knowledge in this misguided system.

> Knowledge emerges only through invention and reinvention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world and with each other (Friere 72).

This style of teaching and learning in a prison classroom is especially detrimental because it renders incarcerated students and their experiences insignificant. But, as Boudin contends, the struggles of incarcerated students are vital components of their education.

> Inmates in correctional facilities face a multitude of problems that begin with the decisions and acts that led to their incarceration. The choices they made or did not make, the consequences they face, their own internal world, and their social reality all become part of the need for critical understanding (Boudin 141).

Furthermore, Boudin observed that the banking teaching approach in the basic literacy course was doing more harm than good for the women.

> I believe this approach, with its excessive emphasis on obedience and limited possibility for initiative or constructive learning, with its lack of attention to self and its undervaluing of affect in learning, was detrimental to basic mental health. And in denying the possibility of making choices, solving problems, looking at different options or figure out one's own opinion, it thwarted the possibility of helping women change their lives (Boudin 188).

After making these observations, Boudin began to wonder if she would be able to create the space necessary to "do meaningful work" and whether it would be feasible for

an inmate to teach a course, given the limited responsibilities afforded to people in prison.

> Would it be possible in a prison classroom to create conditions for self-awareness, a space where people felt safe to identify and address their own problems and then struggle towards solutions, to imagine the world as it could be otherwise? (Boudin 185)

Boudin designed a critical-thinking curriculum that included three basic steps:

1. Listening: identify and define the learners' concerns as the focus of critical thinking
2. Reflecting and dialogue: learn more about problems
3. Activity: develop ways to express and share lessons learned

Boudin focused the course on the issue of AIDS; at that time, close to 20 percent of incoming women tested positive for HIV. The women in the literacy class wrote a play about AIDS and personal experiences with the disease. Boudin used a Freirean approach to place the women's lives and experiences at the center of the class, and allow them the chance to share their feelings. This participatory approach is especially important in prison classrooms because it gives students an opportunity to express their ideas in a non-threatening, non-hierarchical atmosphere, something that isn't common in the daily life of prison.

> The students' growing consciousness of themselves as being part of a community, first in the classroom and then in the prison, became a positive factor in literacy development. The classroom had been a place in

> which each person individually felt locked into her own sense of failure. But as people began to talk about their fears and questions concerning AIDS, something changed in the classroom. A sense of community, an awareness of common experiences and feeling of support began to grow. The feeling of community influence literacy ability, as well as intellectual and emotional growth (Boudin 195-196.)

Boudin's literacy class was such a success that education supervisors helped her develop a proposal to implement a peer education program at Bedford Hills using the curriculum she had used in the course. The superintendent approved it, but prison administrators pulled the plug halfway through the planning. Boudin cites the paradox of prison and education as the reason.

> Both the support and withdrawal of support for the peer education program can only be understood as aspects of the broad contradictions among the primary prison goals of control, punishment and deterrence, and that of rehabilitation (Boudin 203).

Feminist Pedagogy and Safe Space

Similar to critical pedagogy, feminist pedagogy focuses on "empowering students to become critical and creative learners."[88] Feminist artist Judy Chicago coined the term feminist pedagogy in the 1970s to develop new teaching models that challenged dominant educational approaches. Chicago applied feminist principles to her studio art

[88] Shackelford, Jean. "Feminist Pedagogy: A Means for Bringing Critical Thinking and Creativity to the Economics Classroom." Alternative Pedagogies and Economic Education, V82, N2, 1992: 570-576 http://www.utsc.utoronto.ca/~pchsiung/summer/SCMEDIA/Shackelford.pdf Accessed January 6, 2013.

classes and developed the first feminist arts program in the United States at Fresno State University from 1969 to 1971.[89] Feminist pedagogy positions gender and power as its central themes and encourages the transformation of students from passive recipients of knowledge to active knowers who see themselves as agents of social change. At the core of feminist pedagogy is a reimagining of the classroom as a community of learners where there is "autonomy of self and mutuality" between teacher and students.[90] Students are encouraged to "engage freely in the discourse of the discipline or topic and come to rely less on the authority of the instructor."

Feminist theorists who advocate for safe classroom space argue it is necessary for students to be able to freely exchange ideas and cultivate or awaken their critical consciousness. Those who oppose argue that safe classroom spaces are counterproductive to learning, especially when the course content deals with issues of race, class and gender – topics that are typically not safe. From a black feminist perspective, Patricia Hill Collins argues that the emerging black women's literature community offers another safe space where black women can articulate a self-defined standpoint. Collins explains these spaces are safe because they "represented places where black women could freely examine issues that concerned us." These spaces "were never meant to be a way of life. Instead, they constitute one mechanism among

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[89] Wylder, Viki Thompson D. and Keri Fredericks. "Evoke/Invoke/Provoke: A Case Study of Judy Chicago's Feminist Pedagogy, Vanderbilt University, Spring Semester 2006" *in Florida without Borders: Women and the Intersections of Local and Global* http://www.academia.edu/1057218/Evoke_Invoke_Provoke_A_Case_Study_of_Judy_Chicagos_Feminist_Pedagogy_Vanderbilt_University_Spring_Semester_2006. Accessed January 9, 2014.

[90] Shrewsbury, Carolyn M. "What is Feminist Pedagogy?" Women's Studies Quarterly, Vol. 15, No. 3/4, Feminist Pedagogy (Fall - Winter, 1987),pp. 6-14 http://www.jstor.org/stable/40003432 .Accessed: 26/12/2013 16:49

many designed to foster black women's empowerment and enhance our ability to participate in social justice projects."[91] Likewise when women write in prison, they arguably are creating a safe space in which they can express their voice within a collective environment. Although typically perceived as part of the state's repressive structures, prisons are also examples of what Collins calls "alternative institutional locations"[92] where women who are not commonly perceived as intellectuals can be found. And, even in classrooms that are located in such an oppressive place as prison, the intellectual conversations and creative expressions that happen in those spaces defy the oppressive nature of the prison and present a unique opportunity for incarcerated women to analyze their lives and the world around them. Along similar lines, Katherine McKittrick argues in her book *Demonic Grounds* that "spaces that are fraught with limitations are under-acknowledged but meaningful sites of political opposition."

Annette Henry, education professor at the University of British Columbia-Vancouver, takes another perspective of safe space when she argues in her article "There Are No Safe Spaces" that the classroom is not a safe space because learning about such issues as race, ethnicity and gender is difficult and that "pedagogies deemed liberatory or emancipatory set us on dangerous terrains. Henry's argument is the opposite of what critical pedagogy promotes. "Learning by examining our own lives and exposing personal social histories is dangerous (Henry 2)." She also counters the

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[91] Collins, Patricia Hill. (2004). *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness and the Politics of Empowerment* New York: Routledge, 110.
[92] Ibid., 14

"liberal feminists" argument of safe spaces being places where "students can express themselves and become empowered. There is nothing safe about engaging students in rigorous and critical ways" (Henry 2).

Tanya Erzen, the Washington State religion instructor, told me some of her students clashed over religious differences in her class that included a Wiccan priestess, Christians, and a lesbian couple who Erzen described as "very, very anti-religious." As a result, Erzen said in the beginning of the class she had to explain that the course is "the academic study of religion and why that's different than if you have a particular kind of faith commitment and how it's different in the way we analyze it."

> The one thing that really sticks out in my mind is we weren't even talking about anything related to this but one of those women who identified as Christian got defensive … was clearly skeptical of evolution theory and some of the students I could tell were getting really riled up to go at it and have this conversation. I said, "Could you clarify to me, I don't understand how that example relates to the chapter we were talking about." That in a way diffused what could've been (disruptive.) Once the disruptive person sort of dropped on her own accord, people were very respectful to each other and at the beginning of the class we … reviewed an agreement about listening and respecting other people's opinions and not attacking other people for what they believe. I do think people adhere to that pretty well even if they do strongly disagree.[93]

[93] Tanya Erzen, phone interview, August 8, 2012.

Though it may be true that such issues as race, religion and class are unsafe topics, the instructor has the power to minimize the level of uneasiness, argues Barb Toews, who teaches in the women's federal prison in Philadelphia.

> The instructor can either perpetuate those issues or not. Is the instructor open to engage with them (students) when they (the issues) come up or does the instructor ultimately shut them down? So, we don't do something because we can't create a perfect frame of safety? Does safe mean feeling good or getting to that level of discomfort and not being shut down by it, and being able to explore discomfort and have that be a good thing?[94]

In other words, there has to be some level of discomfort to experience growth and instead of ignoring the conflict, instructors have to learn how to manage it. Otherwise,

> teachers would be doing a disservice if they attempt to ignore conflict. When everyone's voice is accepted and no one's voice can be criticized, then no one can grow. We need to be able to respond to those (other) voices, to criticize them, to sharpen our own friction through dialogue (Boostrom 407).

Education activist Parker Palmer makes a similar argument in his book *To Know as We Are Known: Education as a Spiritual Journey* when he says "because a learning

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[94] Barb Toews follow-up Skype interview, March 18, 2013.

space can be a painful place," it must be a hospitable place that "receives each other, our struggles, our newborn ideas with openness and care" (Palmer, 73).

> A learning space needs to be hospitable not to make learning painless, but to make the painful things possible, things without which no learning can occur – things like exposing ignorance, testing tentative hypotheses, challenging false or partial information and mutual criticism of thought (Palmer 73).

The classroom also needs to be open and have clear boundaries in order for it to be a healthy learning space, Palmer adds. Creating a classroom that is too comfortable is not necessarily a good thing or could backfire, says black feminist theorist bell hooks. She argues that the difficulty that is sometime experienced in the classroom is important for intellectual growth and "that cozy, good feeling may at times block the possibility of giving students space to feel there is integrity to be found in grappling with difficult material" (hooks 154). In order to achieve freedom in the classroom, bell hooks says educators must move the beyond the boundaries in the classroom to discover the possibilities that are there.

> In that field of possibility we have the opportunity to labor for freedom, to demand of ourselves and our comrades, an openness of mind and heart that allows us to face reality even as we collectively imagine ways to move beyond boundaries, to transgress. This is education as the practice of freedom (hooks 207).

Kyoko Kishimoto and Mumbi Mwangi question whether instructors have the power to create the safety, or if the safety is created through trust-building exercises

between instructors and students – but only after each has gone through "moments of vulnerability and processes of self-disclosure." Kishimoto and Mwangi argue that "self-disclosure and self-justification" are successful strategies for building safe classroom spaces and establishing trust (Kishimoto and Mwangi 99).

In her article "Cultivating the Art of Space" Australian researcher Mary Hunter examines safe space in the context of performance and theater studies and observes four ways in which safe space is used: safe space refers to physical qualities of a place that provide safety from danger; similar to feminist usage, safe space is used metaphorically to mean a space that bars discriminatory activities; in more abstract term, people and practices of the space are comfortable and familiar with one another; the paradoxical relationship between safe processes and unknown risky consequences.

The politics of space in prisons or jails may also hinder instructors from creating an environment conducive to learning. In their article "Negotiating the Politics of Space," three University of Michigan-Dearborn professors describe the challenges they faced teaching in the correctional facility including a "struggle for space and recognition" of their "legitimacy and authority" as college professors.

> Values such as critical thinking are antithetical to the bureaucratic, rules-based culture of the prison, and we therefore face authoritative resistance in our attempts to create a classroom space based on these values.[95]

On the other hand, there are times when the correctional facility itself becomes a safe place for some women – a chance to escape the clutches of addiction or an

[95] Lempert, Lora Bex, Suzanne Bergeron and Maureen Linker. "Negotiating the Politics of Space: Teaching Women's Studies in a Women's Prison." NWSA Journal, 17: 2 (Summer, 2005), pp. 199-207. http://www.jstor.org/stable/4317140

abusive partner or pimp. This is not to say that women are free from harm while incarcerated – prisons and jails are still places of institutionalized violence and abuse against women. Rather, the prison or jail represents a "loophole of retreat" for some women – a place of captivity that is also one of healing. The women are given the chance to think critically, learn, express their voice and awaken their intellectual consciousness. As the University of Michigan-Dearborn professors note, "Locked into the opaque and repressive conditions of their environment, some have used the lessons and opportunities of our classrooms for reflection, self-understanding and analysis."[96]

The physical makeup of the room can also go a long way towards creating a safe space. Aileen Baumgartner, the Bedford Hills college program director, told me that the classrooms at Bedford Hills look more traditional with blackboards and desks that are housed in the prison's class building.

> There are no bars on the window, so that's good. It's a space that's full of their artwork and photos of the graduations. All the physical things of the areas we have any input in are non-prison like, so it's a space that they can come to and feel like they're a student rather than an offender or an inmate. We create a space where they can say things that could be seen as radical – not like, 'let's get a bomb and blow the place up' – but they can critique without worrying they're going to get written up or be seen as subversive in some serious way. That, too, helps.[97]

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[96] Ibid.
[97] Baumgartner, Aileen. (27 July 2012). Telephone interview.

Creating such an intimate classroom space fosters empowerment among students, one of the principles of The Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program National Training Institute. Part of the training includes techniques on how to create safe learning environments. Below are some examples.[98]

- Setting the Tone: Avoid using labeling terms such as convict, inmate, prisoner or any word that based on someone's conviction or charge. Instead, use "I" statements. For instance, when posing an example an instructor might say "Suppose I rob a bank …" rather than "Suppose you rob a bank …"[99]
- Speaking and Listening: The instructor needs to be a good listener to promote a sense of power and transformation in class. It's also important to strike a balance between the extroverted and introverted students, challenging the former to pull back to allow the latter a chance to speak.
- Circles: It is important for students to sit in a circle rather than in a traditional classroom format. People who are sent to prison are excluded from the community, so the circle format that includes outside students symbolizes bringing the incarcerated students back into a community.

Toews told me that the circle proved to be an effective technique to get her students to share their feelings.

> What became interesting is … every so often as the circle came around an outside student would say something that was equally open and forthcoming that shaped the rest of the class period. Someone at the end of the class expressed appreciation for the person to open the door and take the risk to put her neck out.

[98] These techniques are listed under the Classroom Dynamics section of the instructor's manual, pages 14-20.

Whatever technique is used, the key to creating a safe space hinges on the instructor's role as a facilitator who works *with* students. The Inside-Out program is influenced by Freire's theory that a teacher is someone who is "directive of the (learning) process and is not doing something to the students, but with the students."[100] As such, Inside-Out instructors are trained to "serve as the individual who creates an environment conducive to learning and exploring."

> It is important to create a safe and bounded space in which there is room for the unexpected to emerge, as well as for power to be shared among all participants. … The challenge is to facilitate in the best sense of the word – to make the learning process easy by creating an atmosphere where students are excited by the work in which they're engaged.[101]

Coralynn Davis, the Muncy instructor who is also an Inside-Out trained instructor, has found that most of the class participation comes from her inside students. Some of the imbalance in exposure has to do with course content, and the age and experience of the inside students. For instance, most of the incarcerated women have been through some kind of individual or group therapy where they're expected to share their feelings, so it comes natural when they're in class, Davis explains.

> It's something that resonates with at least a good portion of the incarcerated students to speak from the personal, to really kind of reflect on personal experience, so that's another reason I think it's uneven. But

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[100] Friere, Paulo. (1987). *A Pedagogy for Liberation: Dialogues on Transforming Education,* p. 46. Westport, CT: Bergin & Garvey.
[101] Pompa, Lori & Melissa Crabbe. (2004). *The Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program: Examining Social Issues through the Prism of Prison*, Instructor's Manual, pp. 16-17. Philadelphia: Temple University.

> what I'm constantly told by the incarcerated students in the class is they feel like they have something very valuable to share and what happens is gradually certain members of the class get more comfortable sharing deeper things and some are more wanting to do that than others.[102]

Though Davis has said she does not think safe classroom spaces are possible in prison, her example illustrates her students find the class safe enough to share their feelings and supports Robert Boostrom's claim that space is needed for people in diverse groups to express their individuality.

> People should be able to present themselves openly and speak freely without fear of censure, ridicule or exploitation. The space is safe when individuals and groups know that they will not face criticisms that would challenge their expressions of individuality. In a safe space people are encouraged to speak their minds freely (Boostrom 406-407).

Baumgartner told me that if her students feel safe enough to share and express their feelings in class, then that is all that matters.

> There is no doubt that for our students, prison, in its random enforcement of often vague rules, is not a 'safe' place. That said, our students tell us that in the classroom space, they do feel safe in ways that matter deeply to them. In the classroom, the women talk freely about race, class, and gender, often citing their in-prison experience as examples (as well as their out-of-prison experience). The topics the women choose for their

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[102] Coralynn Davis, phone interview, July 23, 2012.

> senior theses testify to their sense that they can critique the system they live within (wrongful incarceration, eating disorders inside facilities, violence as a means of control, etc.). We don't encourage any particular focus, we allow them all as long as they are done academically (same as on the outside, in short). Yes, the classroom is a transformative space, too. I'm not so sure it would be, though, if they didn't feel free. Maybe that's the thing: they need to feel free, if only for a limited time, in a limited space.[103]

Davis says though her students have the freedom to openly express themselves in class, her prison classroom is not a guaranteed safe space.

> I do not think it is possible to ensure safety in any classroom setting, all the more so a classroom in a prison, where inmates' – and even teachers' and administrator's – behaviors are closely monitored and the penalties potentially harsh. In my prison class, the students create a list of "guiding principles" for our classroom engagements. The guiding principles are intended to create a context of open, honest, and respectful engagement. We also reflect on our quality of engagement across the semester, since the exchanges are so critical to everyone's learning and the subject matter for many students hits so close to home. I have been fortunate in that over the years, I've been able to exercise considerable academic freedom and freedom from direct oversight while teaching, which in turn allows students

[103] Aileen Baumgartner, phone interview, July 27, 2012.

> more “freedom” to express themselves, as well. Such freedom is at the pleasure of the prison administration.[104]

Likewise, Toews told me that safe and unsafe classroom spaces can happen in any educational environment. The fact that the classroom is in a prison does not mean it will be any less safe than a classroom on a college campus.

> You can have surveillance and control and all those sorts of things, punitive approaches in a regular school environment just like you can in a prison environment. To present them as can you or can’t you in a prison is forgetting you can have lack of safety in a regular educational environment. What we see in prison is happening in schools too – with the school to prison pipeline and the criminalization of teenaged behavior and the complexity of all that stuff. Schools inherently can be unsafe places.[105]

In addition, Toews told me she considers safety to be more psychological than physical. She explains:

> Safety for me would be in the context of participants in the class – instructors, guest speakers, students – can say what they want to say, can feel when they come in that classroom space, that psychological space, that they can sort of breathe and be fully human. I realize that in a prison there could be a staff person sitting close by that’s listening, but still within our circle in the classroom or corner of the room, we’ve created safety. It’s all about what the instructor and other students make for people. I

[104] Coralynn Davis, phone interview, July 23, 2012.
[105] Barb Toews, phone interview, March 18, 2013.

> ultimately see it as a psychological thing, not a physical manifestation you can pull out and design for people.

In short, because safety is not tangible it is difficult to definitively say what it looks and feels like. For instance, during an interview with Christin Shatzer, she explained that Lipscomb University's prison education program does not have an "intentional structure" in place to create safe space and that it "comes down to how the faculty member runs the classroom."

> What our faculty members are doing often then is to facilitate as much small group work as possible so people get to know each other in a more small-group context. Small group interaction before large group interaction has been one of the main thing to support a feeling of safety.[106]

Sometimes instructors just have to "reclaim that space," as Ann Folwell Stanford suggests, from one that is designed to "dehumanize" to one that empowers, which is what she did in the writing workshop she taught at Cook County jail in Chicago.

> The fact these women are picking up a pen and they're writing on paper and they're writing what they think and what they want to write … it changed the space from a space of dehumanization to a space of thinking and creativity. To me, that was the real radicality of it all, that these women were allowed for those brief minutes to be part of a thinking, learning, writing and creating community. That's kind of the way I saw the work I did. Its function was simply to provide that space. Whether the

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[106] Christin Shatzer, phone interview, March 15, 2013.

> women were transformed, whether they had self-esteem built up, that's none of my business; to me, my business was about creating a space that then they could be the real creators.[107]

The women in Stanford's writing workshops became "co-creators in this space-making" by critiquing the exercises, and telling her what they wanted to do and what was meaningful to them.[108] Participating in this type of ownership is empowering to the women; it illustrates they have some sort of control, no matter how small, over their lives.

In the writing workshops she facilitates in Colorado women's jails, Tobi Jacobi explained to me that she works against the traditional school-based model of education – for instance, she does not assign homework – because, she said, many of the women have had negative experiences with school. Instead, Jacobi incorporates a feminist pedagogy approach using community building exercises – e.g. having the women read their writing aloud in a group – to help create a "strong sense of self as a writer."[109] This technique helps the women feel the workshop is "a space where they can take some risks."[110] Though Jacobi incorporates some of the feminist pedagogical principles in her writing workshops, she "hesitates a little bit about a romantic idea of safety because it seems it oversimplifies the situation a bit."

> We try to embody all that and I think that's where that claim of safe space comes from – it's a kind of community and dynamics that exists. I also

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[107] Stanford, Ann Folwell. (4 September 2012). Telephone interview.
[108] Ibid.
[109] Jacobi, Tobi. (27 August 2012). Telephone interview.
[110] Ibid.

> recognize that there's been a lot of feminist critique on the idea of a safe space or a safe classroom, and that sets up a false expectation of what that can really be. When a young woman writes about incest and six other women affirm her experience or look her in the eye and tell her "that happened to me as well," … she feels that she is not alone – which is incredibly powerful – but I'm not sure it's safety. I'm not sure that's what that is.[111]

Stephen Hartnett, who teaches the writing workshops in Denver, explained to me that the key to having a successful prison writing program is to "create a cultural aura" that includes "not only a safe space, but an empowering space, an encouraging space."

> Partially what that means is that we always very clearly tell everyone you can't do anything in this workshop – whether it's a presentation or it's writing – don't do anything that would come to haunt you in a court of law. So, we don't want to hear speeches on your crime, for example. Once you learn how to do that and participants understand these parameters, then you can create a space that's full of laughter and tears and honesty, and you can create the sort of environment that usually doesn't happen in prison.[112]

Once that space is created, Hartnett added, everyone in the room has the potential to become active participants in the learning process.

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[111] Jacobi, Tobi. (8 August 2012). Telephone interview.
[112] Stephen Hartnett, phone interview, March 28, 2013.

It doesn't matter if you're a murderer or rapist or drug dealer – everyone has potential and the trick is creating space where that can blossom. The other one is everybody's got a story to tell; even the student in the back of the class who doesn't want to tell you that story, their story is in there. Part of creating a safe space is getting to a point where people feel comfortable speaking about their own lives. They're an open book. They want to talk. They're just not used to having anyone who wants to listen.[113]

[113] Ibid.

CHAPTER FIVE: 'IT'S A WAY TO GET OUT OF PRISON': PEDAGOGICAL PRACTICES OF PRISON INSTRUCTORS

Once the instructors have negotiated over power, maneuvered the political landmines of prison and created as safe of a classroom space as possible, they also face the challenge of experimenting with pedagogy appropriate to their students. In this chapter, I illustrate how instructors build rapport with the women because, as they have learned, if the women do not trust them it will be nearly impossible to teach the course. The instructors attribute the lack of trust primarily to the fact that most often, many of the women in their classes have had negative educational experiences and they sometimes have reservations about taking a college course and doubt their ability to succeed. One of the ways the instructors establish trust is through self-disclosure, a feminist pedagogical technique used to "humanize" the instructor. Instructors have to be careful, though, of crossing the line between sharing too much and just enough. Once the rapport and trust are established, I give examples of some of the classroom exercises the instructors employ to awaken the women's critical consciousness and encourage creative expression to help the women define their agency and efficacy. This is the point in the chapter where I focus primarily on writing courses and workshops. The instructors who use writing in their courses say that writing plays a significant role because it can be transformative for the women, especially when it is done in a place like prison or jail where creativity, self-expression and literacy are not typically encouraged. The writing allows the women to challenge the disempowering context of prison and becomes a cathartic exercise for them. While these classroom exercises can offer great emotional breakthrough moments for the women, the instructors say they sometimes struggle to

find ways to cope with the unexpected emotions that come along with reading and listening to the women's stories. Because many of the classroom exercises and discussion are deeply personal and emotional, privacy is a major issue for some of the instructors. The presence of a staff member in the classroom can create a tense atmosphere and dissuade the women from actively participating in class. None of the instructors I interviewed reported stories of self-incrimination or potential threats to ongoing parole proceedings as a result of the women's writings. Finally, this chapter ends with what happens to the women's writings. Half of the writing instructors have published or continue to publish the poems, stories, essays of the women in their workshops or classes. This can sometimes be a cause of concern. Some of the instructors told me that some of their students' writings were stolen or their students have been teased by other women for writing.

Breaking the Ice, Establishing Trust

Establishing trust and a rapport with incarcerated students is one of the most important issues prison instructors face because, as my interviewees told me, it could make or break a class. It is also one of the more delicate barriers to overcome because some incarcerated students may be skeptical of the instructor's motives or have had prior negative experiences with education and do not feel confident in their abilities to complete the course. My interviewees describe using a variety of techniques to build rapport with their students, including something as simple as showing up for class regularly to more complex techniques involving sharing personal stories.

Brenda Chaney, who teaches the globalization class at the Ohio Reformatory for Women, said the women in her class were shy on the first day. Only one of her 15 incarcerated students had previously been to college.

> Most of them had gotten GEDs, so they weren't sure. They didn't have any idea what to expect. At the beginning of the class, some of the women were hesitant because they felt they didn't have the writing skills for a college class. College students have spell check and grammar check, but the women were writing long hand on lined paper.[114]

Chaney copied some spelling and grammar rules for the women to help them with their assignments. Linda Pischke told me when she arrived for the first day of her bible study/journaling class at the Wisconsin women's jail, she was greeted by women who were "very uptight and resistant to my being there."[115]

> They were very quiet. I could see through their body language that they were unsure of themselves. There was also a sense of 'What are you doing here?' and 'Why do we have to sit through this?' Looking back now, I think they distrusted people coming in. I think they feel that possibly before they know you there's that sense of 'What is it you want from me?' I don't think they expect us to give them something without expecting something in return. So they're hesitant to share or to be open.[116]

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[114] Brenda Chaney, phone interview, July 25, 2012.
[115] Linda Pischke, phone interview, July 13, 2012.
[116] Ibid.

Pischke faced another obstacle: the unpredictable nature of jail. Jail is usually where people go after they are arrested to await trial and/or sentencing. Because the turnover is so high, teaching in jail can be difficult as Pischke learned and described in her book.

> If a woman chose to attend, she did so out of curiosity or the desire to escape the intense atmosphere of the block for an hour or two. She might come one time, a few weeks, or a couple of months, and then she was gone.

Pischke's class would be filled with new students on some evenings, forcing her to start all over. She describes in her book how she soon realized she would have to change the way she approached the class.

> A series of writing lessons that flowed smoothly from one week to the next was not practical for a class at the jail. In fact, it was a miserable failure. The block provided no privacy for women's journals … and while some of them could write quite well, it was not their primary interest or method of communication. The women were easily bored and lacked the motivation to complete assignments. They were noisy and sometimes took control of the class.[117]

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[117] Pischke, Linda. The Women of Block Twelve: Voice from a Jail Ministry, Pischke Publishing, November 26, 2010. More information about Pischke's book and jail ministry can be found at http://www.thewomenofblock12.com/.

Pischke was soon joined by another ministry team member, who she simple refers to as a retired nurse named Jean, to help her with the class. Pischke and Jean tried different approaches – e.g. art therapy and short writing classes – to see what worked. They soon learned each class had to be "self-contained" with no assignments and the "importance of creating a routine, of letting the women talk until they had nothing else to say" was the key to having a successful class. One activity that helped Pischke build rapport with her class is one in which the women had to reveal five things about themselves, but one of the things had to be a lie. The others would have to guess which facts were true and which one was not. Pischke described during our interview how she started to see some depth in some of the women's revelations.

> They took a lot of pride in saying who they were and where they had come from. They were very happy that someone was interested in hearing what they had to say. Even though it was a game, I felt it was very important to them to … play that game. I immediately felt a sense of OK, they're sharing, they're warming up, they want to be here at this point. When they started laughing and having fun together, then I knew I really had connected with them, that I had really made a difference. It felt great. I wanted to come back.[118]

Simply showing up is sometimes more effective than any trust building exercise, as Kristenne Robison discovered while teaching her sociology class in Cambridge Springs, Pa.

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[118] Linda Pischke, phone interview, July 13, 2012.

> I think some of them were distrustful of us because they didn't know if we were trustworthy because of various experiences they've had in prison. I think how we really gained their trust was just by coming back every week, being upbeat, giving them the space to say what they needed to say and not being judgmental of it. We just had to prove ourselves by being there.[119]

Robison added that getting her college to offer the women credit for the course also helped earn their trust.

> I got paid $100 per woman and I donated my paycheck to them so they could get credit. To be honest, I never expected to get paid to do this so it's not like I was some savior. It's just that Westminster insisted on paying me if it's going to be a credit-bearing class so I said OK since you're insisting on paying me and you have to have this money, pay me and I'll just donate the money back.[120]

Sometimes the rapport simply does not happen. As with traditional classrooms, instructors are not always successful in reaching all of their students. Barbara Roswell, a writing professor at Goucher college who helped create the Goucher Prison Education Project, describes a time when she and students in her writing workshop "never quite jelled" primarily because there were too many people in the workshop – 10 of her Goucher College students, 14 incarcerated women, a teaching assistant and herself.

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[119] Kristenne Robison, phone interview, August 6, 2012.

[120] Ibid.

> There were a few of the inside women who were posturing and trying to put a show on for each other, those women never fully engaged. I would say no harm done. I don't think anything bad happened, but I wouldn't say that those women would say it was meaningful. Some trust really didn't get built there.[121]

Let Me Tell You about Myself: When Prison Instructors Self-Disclose

Self-disclosure, one of the teaching strategies of feminist pedagogy, is another technique some of the instructors said they use to build a rapport with their students. Clinical psychologist Evelyn Torton Beck defines self-disclosure as "a way of teaching that bridges the personal with the academic, humanizing the teacher and personalizing the teaching process."[122] Instructors not only establish trust with their students when they reveal personal stories about themselves, but doing so also strengthens the student-teacher relationship by deemphasizing the traditional teacher-student hierarchy. When instructors self-disclose, they acknowledge their vulnerability and promote empowerment among students and themselves.

> Any classroom that employs a holistic model of learning will also be a place where teachers grow, and are empowered by the process. That empowerment cannot happen if we refuse to be vulnerable while encouraging students to take risks. Professors who expect students to

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[121] Barbara Roswell, phone interview, July 24, 2012.
[122] Beck, Evelyn Torton. "Self-disclosure and the commitment to social change" Women's Studies International Forum Volume 6, Issue 2, 1983, Pages 159–163.

> share confessional narratives but who are themselves unwilling to share are exercising power in a manner that could be coercive (Beck 159).

Wende Ballew, the Georgia theater instructor, provides an excellent example. Ballew incorporates improvisation – acting without preparation – and storytelling into her theater class then chooses a theme based on the types of stories that evolve out of the improvisation. One of the themes that evolved was violence and its negative impact on the women's lives. Ballew recalls one story of a student who is serving 23 years to life for killing her mother. The woman, Ballew told me, revealed to the class that her mother sold her for heroin when she was a child; she killed her mother after noticing the abuse had started on her younger brother. In order for Ballew's students to let down their guard and share such intimate details of the most horrific times of their lives, Ballew said she, too, had to be willing to do the same to gain her students' trust. So, at the beginning of each quarter, Ballew began by sharing her family's personal experiences with prison.

> Although I have a couple master's, I share I've never been to prison. I've never been addicted to drugs, but my father is serving 40 years and (I have) cousins that are meth addicts and things like that. I'm just real with them from the very beginning and we do a lot of trust exercises, things that feel silly to them, take them a little bit out of their comfort zone and … before you know it it's there.[123]

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[123] Wende Ballew phone interview, July 26, 2012.

Ballew added that although she feels she is meant to do prison teaching, she recognized she had to deal with her feelings surrounding her father's incarceration before beginning the work. This experience also helped her establish trust with her students.

> My father's not wrongly incarcerated. He is where he is supposed to be. He is serving a 40-year sentence this time. He has been in and out of prison all my life and so I had some pretty negative issues around him, but before I did this I went to see him – he's in Texas – and we had a special visit where I talked to him for four hours. It humanized him.

Being able to "humanize" her father also helped Ballew see the humanity in her incarcerated students.

> For me, that is the biggest thing – that prisoners are invisible to most people. They don't see them and to me I believe they are the biggest marginalized 'other' in our society and it's hard to 'other' somebody that's part of half your biological makeup. I tell my students they are not defined by those few minutes that they did something terrible or they were at the wrong place at the wrong time. That's how I look at it and I think they really respect that and respond to that. That's how I think it enables me to talk to other people about it.

Ballew's story illustrates how self-disclosure can also carry an emotional price. It is not just simply a matter of sharing a minor childhood secret with students. Rather, it requires that instructors be "wholly present in mind, body and spirit," Beck says, yet

vulnerable in a space that has the potential to become unsafe for both students and instructor. I will analyze this issue of safe prison classroom spaces in the next chapter.

Jeri Kirby, the formerly incarcerated woman who teaches reentry courses in West Virginia, reveals to her students that before she became a college professor and started her doctoral program, she was once in their position.

> I honestly have the best of both worlds because I'm able to go into Hazleton – it's one of the most highest-security facilities in the country – and because I've been inside, they trust me on a level I don't think they'd trust anyone else. I get all the time … "Well, you know. You've been here." It's not even the prison time. It's the events that led up to my incarceration. I went down for a drug charge … with 13 other people. There were shootouts with the cops – not with me personally, but with these other 12 individuals. The point is for me to be sitting here saying it, it sounds like something out of a movie, but the credibility of that time and when I talk about some of the events, things they can actually relate to, they're like oh you do know. So that credibility with the inside students I believe … gets me just a little further than it would if I hadn't been through that.[124]

Alexandria Mageehon argues in her study of incarcerated women's experiences with education that though correctional educators are encouraged to avoid sharing personal issues with the women – the fear is they may use the information to manipulate the instructor – it helps when a teacher shows compassion without crossing

[124] Jeri Kirby phone interview, March 15, 2013.

the line and entertaining inappropriate personal requests (Mageehon 196). Robison doesn't have incarcerated relatives, but is able to empathize with the women on some level.

> I shared a story with the last class on the last day about how I could be in there and I told them what I did and I was lucky I didn't get caught. I was actually questioning whether I should do it. It's something we learn as instructors when and what should we tell students about ourselves to build rapport, when is it too much.[125]

But as Ann Folwell Stanford, who ran the writing workshops in Cook County Jail, learned, identifying with the women on a personal level can "form a bridge" between the instructor and students. She told her students about her younger years as a "very wild kid" who got an adrenaline rush from shoplifting. Stanford said although she was never arrested, her experience made her think 'what if?'

> I would say to the women, "If I had been black and I been born in another time, I'd probably be in here with you." It helped me to understand the fact that I did a lot of stuff that they incarcerate people for now, so why am I not there and they are? All of us can figure ways to connect, to cross that bridge somehow. I can never know their experience. I can never know what it's like to have family in prison, but that's the beauty of imagination

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[125] Kristenne Robison, phone interview, August 6, 2012.

> and that's the beauty of looking for similarities while respecting the differences.[126]

Classroom Exercises

In addition to trying different techniques to build rapport with their incarcerated students, instructors also incorporate a variety of classroom exercises, projects and homework assignments designed to stimulate critical thinking and deepen class discussions. The instructors do not typically shy away from challenging the women, but they are sometimes surprised at the level of creativity or critical thinking some of the women already possess. For instance, Robison uses a timeline exercise in her sociology class to illustrate the sociological imagination. In the first part of the assignment, the women were asked to describe significant events in their lives; many of the women listed such traumatic events as molestation and rape. The second part of the assignment challenged the women to go deeper and make broader connections.

> One part of the sociological imagination is to have women make these connections between their own personal biographies and the larger social world. So, we gave their timelines back and said pick five of the events on the timeline and elevate this from the personal to the social. Keep in mind we had talked about the sociological imagination in class and this was kind of their first place to practice it. When they came back – wow – just the really rich and in-depth reflection that allowed the women to think about these events in their lives that elevated them to think about these

[126] Ann Folwell Stanford phone interview, September 4, 2012.

> other structures that could be put in place. It turned into a really accidental amazing exercise. It was pretty early in this class and you never know what people will reveal to you. I wasn't surprised to read about the number of women who talk about being raped or molested as children. I was more surprised about how many of them put it on their timeline, that so many of them felt comfortable enough to do that and to write about it.[127]

Aileen Baumgartner sees what she calls a "need to tell" happen often in the lower-level writing classes at Bedford Hills. She explains that in a prison writing class, the stories students write about can be "so tragic or so difficult and painful" and are difficult to grade. For instance, in one assignment she used a quote by Albert Einstein – "In the midst of difficulty lies opportunity" – to get the women to describe a specific personal hardship (one other than being in prison) and explain how it created an opportunity.

> Well, it's all "When my father tied me to the bed and raped me" that's a specific instance. "My mother looked in the window and saw him she took me in the car and when I was 12 and left me in the parking lot at Walmart with $60 in my pockets and a note saying 'she can't come home anymore.' " And I'm going OK, alright. We got the difficult situation, but how do you grade something like that? And that's the problem. It's very difficult, so one of the practices we have is we don't grade.[128]

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[127] Kristenne Robison, phone interview, August 6, 2012.
[128] Aileen Baumgartner, phone interview, July 27, 2012.

Instead, Baumgartner and her instructors implemented a non-graded first essay to allow the women to tell their stories without the pressure of instructors having to figure out a fair way to grade them.

It is sometimes hard for Tobi Jacobi to plan exercises for her writing workshops in Colorado women's jails because she and her co-facilitators are not always sure what will come out of the writing.

> If someone's writing, for example, about rape – which happens pretty often – then we need to take some time to help the group deal with that experience. So, that's the part we can't really plan for because we don't know who will come and who will choose to read in that opening. Then the rest of the workshop consists of anywhere from two to four different writing exercises that we bring in. We might ask questions, five some ideas, create a prompt on the spot. We might bring in samples from established writers. Typically, we invite women to write from their experiences, about their experiences and find connections when we bring in published work.

In other exercises, Jacobi said she will have the women experiment with different sounds and language; she will also bring in a bunch of different words in a basket and have the women pick a few words to use as prompts. The women are then asked to share their work, though it is not mandatory that they do so, and invited to submit their work for individual feedback and/or publication. Jacobi said she usually closes the workshop with giving the women ideas to work on during the week.

The assignments in Chaney's globalization class usually yield less harrowing responses, but they do challenge the women to change their way of thinking about the

world around them. Chaney used the book *Where Am I Wearing: A Global Tour to the Countries, Factories and People that Make Our Clothes* by Kelsey Timmerman. Timmerman is a journalist from Ohio who traveled the world to visit the factories and people who made his clothes to make the connection between impoverished garment workers' standards of living and the American material lifestyle.

> I started the discussion with should people be more concerned about their own people than other nations. The idea is that what we do affects everyone. At the beginning of the class – this was maybe the second meeting – someone actually said, 'We should put a bubble around the United States and we can do what we want and when we have what we want then we can think about someone else.' By the end of the quarter, the students were laughing about that. They said, 'I can't believe I used to think that we should put a bubble over us.'[129]

More importantly, Chaney said this assignment helped the women to start "thinking beyond themselves" and their environment.

> Everything we do – whether you're in prison or a college professor – affects everyone else. When they started talking about 'I never knew this, I wish I had known this before, I'm so glad I took this class because I recognize that even in prison, what I do is affecting someone else' I felt

[129] Brenda Chaney, phone interview, July 25, 2012

like whatever hassles I had driving a hundred miles a week going to that prison, that it was all worth it.[130]

The women in Christin Shatzer's Foundations of Business class at the Tennessee Women's Prison were able to show off their innovative skills when they designed their own businesses. Shatzer said the women wrote their own business plans, evaluated the market for viability and demand, and the marketability of the goods or services they were proposing, and created a budget.

> We had everything from two ladies were envisioning a spa and a healthcare center they could run. There were two ladies that were going to do a home repair, maintenance, and plumbing for women by women kind of model. There was a proposal for a coffee shop and bookstore where they were going to have spoken word poetry opportunities for younger kids to come and read and hang out. We had a couple of proposals for non-profit organizations, youth development, job training. We had one proposal for a catering business that would use all local sources, locally grown organic food that would serve some of the high-end hotel chains in town, so some really some creative stuff the ladies were excited about.[131]

Shatzer said this project was especially important for the women who would eventually be released and looking for ways to go into business for themselves since it is typically harder for people with felony records to find jobs. The project also gave the women an outlet to express their creativity.

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[130] Ibid.
[131] Christin Shatzer, phone interview, July 6, 2012.

> Even though this isn't creative writing, it's not fictional writing, the ladies really did find opportunities for freedom and voice in designing something like a future business they might choose to run, that they would be excited about getting behind. They were excited about getting to use a lot of their passions and interests and talents in this particular project. In that way, it certainly did accomplish something that maybe wasn't a primary objective but certainly an exciting secondary objective which was the ladies felt very empowered and had a voice working on this particular project.[132]

The Power of Writing in Prison

This section focuses primarily on the experiences of eight of the instructors I interviewed who teach writing in women's prisons and jails to illustrate how, through a variety of writing exercises, writing helps incarcerated women reclaim and define their power and identity. Women in Stephen Hartnett's writing workshops in Denver typically use their writing to cope with their experiences with violence and other traumatic life events. The issues they write about are always gendered, Hartnett said, which is typical for a writing workshop in a women's prison.

> We got a lot of women who are also mothers. We got a lot of women who are processing abusive marriages, a lot of women who are coming out of abusive relationships or early abuse in their childhood, so there's really a lot of early life trauma the women want to write about. I think that's why they come to the workshop. It really is straight up therapy. We've created

[132] Ibid.

> a space where the women can talk about these things in a supportive environment and by turning trauma into art, they've gained some control. They've gained some power.[133]

By turning trauma into art, Harnett said the women in his workshop feel empowered in an otherwise disempowering environment. Baumgartner told me she will often see these types of stories in the Marymount College – the degree-granting college at Bedford Hills – application essays that require the women to write about someone who has made an impact on their life. While some may write about a parent, an aunt or uncle:

> I say 90 percent of them this summer that I've read were negative impact and all about abuse. I would have to put them aside because it became traumatizing. I just couldn't continue to read them at once and when I sent them off to Marymount, I sent them with a warning to the reader down there, the admissions officer, to go slow on this and keep a box of Kleenex at your side. It's very tough and here they are getting into college and telling their story to someone at Marymount they've never met. There's this real driving need to put it out there.[134]

In Erika Duncan's Herstory Writers Workshop, incarcerated women are "dared to share." Duncan, a novelist and essayist who began Herstory in 1996, describes this

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[133] Stephen J. Hartnett, phone interview, March 26, 2013.

[134] Aileen Baumgartner phone interview, July 27, 2012.

dare approach as one “where the study of what creates reader empathy replaced more traditional techniques of teaching writing.”

> It’s pretty important to distinguish what we’re doing which is much more of a sustained approach where we’re actually daring people to write books and we’re also giving them the tools to continue to build on a very powerful opening structure that will begin to tell their story, to sustain it week after week. It’s very different from a lot of the very fine works that are being done not only in this country but all over the world where people just jump in, write a poem, write about their feelings. The idea of the sustained story is different and probably to talk to that one is two things: one is that most of the people inside do not have much caring for themselves so by the time you find people in jail, they’ve already been so beaten down.[135]

It becomes especially empowering for the women, Duncan said, when they can “create scene after scene” of their own story because it gives them a sense of ownership of their life.

> If you’re the actor in your own story you really can’t just write this poem this day and that poem the other day. You’re really learning how to organically build on what happened there and the next stages. Not only does it keep the reader’s attention but it makes you see everything very differently.

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[135] Erika Duncan, phone interview, August 14, 2012.

Coralynn Davis says some of her incarcerated students are eager to share their experiences with her Bucknell students.

> It's educational for them, because they want to be able to create a narrative about themselves that says "I've been through this and now here's where I am. I am not that, this is something that happened or I went through or I did and now here's where I'm at." I think they get a lot of affirmation from the outside students and so it's almost like sharing on that level has to do with … it brings a sense of worth, I have something valuable to contribute and I have knowledge that's important and so a lot of incarcerated students come around to that.[136]

The topics women write about vary and often depends on the types of prompts instructors will give. For instance, Stanford described to me how in her workshops at Cook County Jail, women wrote a lot about religion, family, and politics.

> I would ask them to go ahead and write about God and religion, but don't use any religious words and see what you come up with because sometimes it became a cliché. I really wanted to push them in the direction of crafting something unusual for themselves. Then they wrote about their families, their children a lot – you could just see the anguish of women whose children were outside and they were in – their children's boyfriends, fantasies of what they were going to do when they got out.[137]

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[136] Coralynn Davis, phone interview, July 23, 2012.
[137] Ann Folwell Stanford, phone interview, September 4, 2012.

When she would ask the women to write about some aspect of their childhood, Stanford learned that sometimes proved to be too difficult for the women.

> I would ask them to write about their favorite room in their house when they were growing up and sometimes that was problematic because they'd say "My house was a nightmare. I can't write about anything." So then I'd say write about your favorite room you would like to have, or something like that.[138]

Stanford also told me that other times she would let the women choose their own topics to write about.

> Then they would write about incarceration and the politics of incarceration and that was not necessarily prompted by me. They were very concerned and wrote about what it means to be a citizen and what they've learned and there were lots of poems about drug addiction and alcoholism and trying to stay sober or clean. They wrote about really what all of us write about, which is the raw material of our lives, and the only difference is they're experiencing their life behind bars.[139]

Stanford describes writing as a way for incarcerated women to build bridges "to the self, to family, lovers and friends, to each other and to the community of readers

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[138] Ibid.
[139] Ibid.

who have no idea who the writers are, but may be changed a bit through reading their words."[140]

Rachel Williams and her students at the Iowa Correctional Facility for Women noticed the voices of incarcerated women were missing from the Iowa Women's Archives,[141] so they decided to add some. For 18 months, Williams's students wrote chronological accounts of their lives followed by self-portraits that were inspired by the women in the archives. Some of the women also kept diaries that they submitted to the archives. But they didn't want their work to stay in prison with them, so Williams organized a performance of her students' writing that included women from the community reading the incarcerated women's work. Williams tried to match the community women and incarcerated women by age and race so the audience could have a visual representation of the author. Approximately 100-150 people – including families of the women – packed a small auditorium in the University of Iowa's library to hear the women's stories. Some of Williams's students wrote about being mothers and explained to their children why they are incarcerated. Others wrote about life before prison or their dysfunctional families. Most of the women did not write about their crime.

> I had one or two people who wrote about their crime. That wasn't something we focused on. I said the purpose of this is for you to put a picture out there of how you want people to see you and for most people

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[140]Stanford in "Where Love Flies Free: Women, Homeand Writing in Cook County Jail" that appears on the Women and Prison website at http://womenandprison.org/social-justice/view/where_love_flies_free_women_home_and_writing_in_cook_county_jail/.

[141] The Iowa Women's Archives is a collection of more than 1100 manuscript collections that chronicle the lives and work of Iowa women, their families, and their communities. The collection is housed at the University of Iowa.

> that's how they see you – by your crime – they don't see the other parts. That was something we really tried to move away from a little bit. But, I'm not a censoring sort of person. I know that there's value in writing about that as well, explaining your point of view that isn't necessarily recorded in the legal court.[142]

Similarly, Stanford explains how in her effort to avoid having a workshop in which the women labeled themselves as "inmate writers," she was actually leaving out a critical part of their story.

> In the earliest sessions I tended to focus more on teaching basics of poetry – imagery, form and rhythm – and less on their actual experiences in jail. What I know now from more than fourteen years of teaching adults, however, and what the women at County confirmed was that the most powerful work emerged when it was connected both to something outside the self and to their experience – in and out of jail. To avoid looking at the incarceration experience was to deny the women important raw materials for their creativity.[143]

Through writing the stories, Williams explains, the women find meaning because it allows them to see how relationships with different people have impacted them, or how different moments become real turning points in their lives.

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[142] Rachel Williams telephone interview, August 9, 2012.
[143] Stanford, Ann Folwell. "More than Just Words: Women's Poetry and Resistance at Cook County Jail." Feminist Studies, V30, N2, The Prison Issue (Summer 2004): 277-301

> For some of the women, they never tried to figure out what does this mean? Why is this significant? How did it shape me into a person? So I think it reconnected them with their feelings. The writing gave them a chance to figure out how they would share that experience, make it make sense and portray them in whatever light they needed to be portrayed in for that. It gives you a chance to shape your story.[144]

Williams also describes the transformation in her students once they discover their writing skills.

> Many of them have had negative educational experiences and they don't see themselves as having the intellect or the ability to do something like writing, so for them to see and understand … anyone can do this – I think many women felt transformed and could see themselves in a positive way. They would share their writings with their families and their families would say, 'I didn't realize you could do this, this is amazing.' It really changed their identity for some of them. I think for many women … it just really added something to who they are and how they see themselves.[145]

Chaney also described seeing this change in her students.

> I can see how being in prison can make a person feel like they were a failure. 'I messed up my life, my kids are with foster parents … and I'm sitting in prison,' so I think that being able to write requires some

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[144] Rachel Williams telephone interview, August 9, 2012.
[145] Ibid.

> organizing, requires thinking through topics and communicate them. I think it gives a person a sense of accomplishment that here I am with a prison GED writing papers for a college class and I'm doing it and I didn't think I could do anything. It makes them think, 'maybe I'm not so bad after all.'

The classes become a way for the women to mentally escape from prison, Chaney added.

> When the women were writing their reflection papers for the Inside-Out class, I read over and over again that for a couple of hours every week they are normal people. When they were in the Inside-Out class, they were college students with other college students discussing college topics. When they are in the book club for a couple hours, they are college students discussing a college book. I think it's a way to get out of prison. For a couple of hours a week, it's an escape for me, too. I continue to believe there's a fine line between who is there and who is not there. I have the position where I can take something in. Even if it's just an Inside-Out class or book discussion group, I have the ability to take something in that they otherwise wouldn't have.

Roswell told me she is usually "blown away" by the powerful writing the women create in her workshop at the Maryland Correctional Institute for Women.

> There's something about the women at MCIW. They have found a way to remain hopeful, sustain themselves, continue to grow and make an incredible impression. I think what all of us takes is this sense of humility and inspiration. It's not like count your blessings – well, there's a little bit of

> that – but it's also like some way we find a way to also tap into ourselves and what we didn't know was there as a result of working with people who are tapping into that for themselves.[146]

Roswell uses writing prompts in the workshops to guide the women to dig deeper into their lives and produce richer writing. For instance, Roswell uses Kathleen Norris's poem "Rain" as a prompt to help the women develop their writing voice. In the poem, Norris writes, "Until I moved to North Dakota, I didn't know about the rain that it could come too hard, too soft, too hot, too cold, too early, too late." Roswell likes the rhythm of the poem and uses Norris's "compelling voice to propel us to something else."

> On any given day, some people write about a prison experience, some people write about their children, their grandparents, their growing up. We're pretty deliberate about giving prompts that allow people to tap into good times, where they were, sort of releasing who they were that's sometimes stripped away. I think the beauty of that writing workshop is there is no agenda besides the people in the room. That's where I think the power is. We have no goals we have to reach besides goals that the group wants to reach, and that's a really amazing classroom experience.[147]

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[146] Barbara Roswell phone interview, July 24, 2012.

[147] Ibid.

Roswell also described to me the emotional growth she sees in the women during the course of the workshops. By the end, they are better listeners and more introspective.

> I think the women start to trust their voices much more. They start to take all kinds of risks. They start to reveal more as time goes by, usually not about their crimes but about their childhood or maybe experiences of child abuse, maybe about relationships. I think there's some kind of absolution that goes on and sometimes people will talk about something that was painful or they want to forgive themselves and reenter something they don't like. There's a lot of connecting with the past. Their language gets richer and they learn to use craft and language to make meaning. I think that's ultimately the power of a writing workshop. Your focus is on the craft and the writing, but it's also kind of the hook and all this other stuff gets pulled along with it.[148]

She also notices that during the course of the workshop, the women will "start to trust each other more and become allies."

> They tell each other stories they wouldn't just tell if they were sitting around, so different parts of themselves become part of the community. I think for us, a big part is how the community changes, not how the individual changes. I think what I have learned about writing is this interesting mix of playing to your strengths and then pushing against the

[148] Ibid.

> norm. The writing is so amazing when you give people the space and trust them.

The Emotional Side of Teaching Writing in Prison

While sharing personal stories can be therapeutic for the women, the instructors are left to process the tragic stories. Instructors are left to find their own coping mechanisms to deal with the weight of such stories. “It can be very, very, emotionally heavy,” said Stephen Hartnett.

> Prison is an unhappy place to begin with and you spend two hours hearing stories about childhood rape and it’s very, very heavy. But, on the other side, the women are often funny. They are full of laughter and irony and compassion so there’s always a balance between getting totally bummed out and getting uplifted.[149]

Ballew told me that for about three weeks out of the semester, she cries after class during her 90-minute drive home. Toews describes the “emotional wall” she puts up to help women better deal with their experiences.

> I have to grab a tissue here and there. I’m here to facilitate. They’re sharing a personal experience and I’m here to help find the learning from that experience, so …that’s more of the approach I take than really becoming heavy with that, which I think is a good thing but there are some things that I miss then. I don’t necessarily hear certain things emotionally

[149] Stephen Hartnett phone interview, March 28, 2013.

> or intellectually that someone is communicating, so I sometimes find out about this from my students' papers.[150]

By putting up her emotional walls, Toews is not implying that she doesn't care about her students. Rather, she uses this tactic as an effort to remain objective when she is facilitating her class. Robison also retreats as a coping mechanism.

> I would say that it's really great having two upper-level students (who co-teach the course) with me. When we leave, we get to process together. Initially, I'm not real emotional. I think in some ways, I tend to go to my head. Especially with students, I don't usually cry in front of them but we talk about stuff and what I really like to talk with the students about is how they feel about being in the prison and how they respond to grading the assignments. I think that since I've been working there, I've actually been more emotional in my general life. Things that maybe didn't get to me before get to me now and I just tear up a lot more than I used to. In some ways, that's good – I'm more sensitive, I'm more open to these kinds of emotional experiences for people.

Another factor instructors must consider is whether the sharing of personal stories does the students more harm than good. Robison, for example, worries that students in her sociology class may not have someone to talk to or the coping skills necessary to deal with the emotions shared in class.

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[150] Barb Toews phone interview, August 7, 2012.

> I also get nervous about these issues because I'm there once a week for three hours and I don't see them for another week and I don't know how they're processing this information. If there's somebody writing about sexual abuse that they experience, depending on where they're at, how long they've been there, who they have access to that's healthy – I don't know that. That kind of concerns me.

Ballew also worries that she's "going to bring them down too low" then leave them alone to process their emotions, and how it may impact her relationship with the students. But, what Ballew finds is her students feel relieved that they shared.

> (The students say) "Oh I had such a great weekend. I feel so energized. I just felt so good," whereas I felt totally depressed the whole weekend. It really solidifies their sense of community within them … but for me, except for those two or three weeks (when she cries), they revive me. They have become something that I need. I need to be there. I need to be around them. They really do give me the energy.

Williams said she writes with her students to help process her emotions.

> I am a firm believer in you can't ask your students to do something you're not willing to do yourself. I think that's true when you talk about share your writing. I need to be able to do the same thing and if they want me to share, I need to be open and able to do that, able to model for them in a certain way.

Privacy

It is also important that the women know that whatever they share in the classroom stays in the classroom. This confidentiality is vital in such a place as prison where nothing is sacred and privacy does not exist. Therefore, some instructors are reluctant to have staff members in the classroom with them when they teach. Williams said she shuts the door when teaching her class.

> I've been at this prison for 10 years and a well-known volunteer there and have a really good relationship with people. What's interesting is I'm in the room alone with the women so we shut the door and do what we do and often times I work at night and so there's count and so the women are in my class during count. It's funny the moment that the CO comes in there to check badges, they shut up. They just shut down and they're quiet, so it's kind of interesting that most of the officers don't know what we do. They know it's a writing class, but they aren't really witnessing what happens in that class.

Stanford eventually had to compromise with prison staff at the Dwight Correctional Center after they requested that an officer be present in the room during her writing workshop.[151]

> They wanted guards to sit in on the workshops and I said only if they write. That didn't go over real well. Finally, we agreed that guards could sit right outside the door. There were times when they wanted guards to be in the

[151] Dwight was a maximum-security prison for women in Illinois. It was closed in March 2013.

> workshops and that had such a chilling effect, as you could imagine. The women would often write about the officers – they called themselves officers but they're guards, I look at them as guards – and they'd write really derogatory poems. One woman wrote this wonderful rhyming quatrain about this one guard and she said between you and me … the only difference is you got a Smith & Wesson on you, and it's legal. Things like that they never would have written if a guard had been sitting in the room.[152]

Stanford added that the staff claimed having an officer in the room would be for her own protection, but she did not feel she needed it.

> I would say I've been doing this for 10 years and I've never needed protection. Dwight was a maximum security and the women were in for murder, but women coming to a writing workshop are not interested in murdering the person doing the workshop. Let's at least be logical here.[153]

Chaney, the Ohio instructor, admitted to me that she was initially bothered when she learned a case manager would have to sit in on her globalization class, but it worked out in the end. It helped that the case manager had already built a rapport with the women through the dog training program he runs; the women trusted him and did not mind him being in the room, Chaney added.

> The visiting hall has a table at the end of the room and the staff member sits at the end of the table and does paperwork. He never interfered, he

[152] Ann Folwell Stanford, phone interview, September 4, 2012
[153] Ibid.

> never did anything. Usually, after class was over he would ask me questions on topics we discussed; having a staff member there turned out to not be a problem.

In fact, when Chaney started facilitating the book club in 2012 at the prison, there was a time when the case manager asked to participate. Chaney and the women were discussing Phillip Zimbardo's book *The Lucifer Effect* about the Stanford Prison Experiment. He "raised his hand and said, 'Dr. Chaney, can I be a part of the group?' So, he came over and joined the discussion."

Sometimes privacy becomes an issue outside of the classroom, especially when it comes to protecting women's writings. Pischke explains that because the women in her bible study/journaling class did not have a secure place to store their journals, the lack of privacy put them at risk for ridicule by some of the other women on the cellblock.

> Anything they've written was anybody's game as far as (other women) might grab them (journals) – they were very juvenile, very middle school in their emotions. So it's like ok you don't have a place to lock this so it's under your pillow. The lack of privacy really did affect them, but if we did a lesson right in the class that day then we were done with it. They could choose to tear it up or do whatever they wanted with it. It was more private.

Williams told me about a similar incident in which the journal of a woman in her writing class was stolen from her locker while she spent time in the hole.

> Her journal ended up in the yard and that was just devastating for her. The staff said I don't know where it went. I said I'm pretty upset about this, this

> woman's been working on this for a year, it was going to be in the Iowa Woman's Archive and they said you know we're really sorry. There were a number of clerks and none of them copped to it. That was devastating. The staff was careless, that's one thing, but the power – just the power over people is just horrible.

Even if instructors can create a space where the women say they are "free" to write or empowered by doing so, there are still the institutional reminders that let them know they have no power and are not in charge.

Sharing the Writing

Despite the risks, some of the instructors I interviewed consider sharing the women's writings an important part of the process. They will either publish anthologies of the women's poems, short stories or essays, or simply share some class assignments with other instructors. Stanford published a collection of poems from all of her writing workshops that she would distribute at community events. She wanted the collections to be annual publications, but she could not sustain the fundraising while teaching and working other logistics. Then Stanford got a chance to guest-edit a local magazine called *Real Conditions* that proved to be a great opportunity for her and the women in the writing workshops.

> I had poems from Cook County and, this is real interesting, they allowed me to bring in a photographer. (The women) were photographed, works they had selected and I helped them with, we put them in the journal and again I tried to make that circulation as wide as possible and of course all the women got several copies to distribute to all of their family and friends.

> I did it again the following year doing some workshops in the juvenile detention center for girls. It just happened serendipitously that the night I was doing the Cook County workshop I said, 'Oh, tomorrow I'm going to be going to the detention center to do a workshop' and they said, 'Oh, we want to write some poems for the girls.' So they all wrote poems for the girls, which I went home, typed up and took in the following day. The girls were so excited they wrote poems back to the women. In the next edition of *Real Conditions* I was able to guest-edit I had both poems from the women and poems from the girls. It was really fun because it was a dialogue and I thought what a loss that we don't allow women in jail to mentor girls in detention because they didn't want the girls to follow their paths.[154]

Stanford added that "getting those narratives out is a big issue," but she also recognizes there are some instructors who do not think it is their place to share the women's stories.

> One woman who's a friend of mine does performance workshops and she says I would never take the women's writing out because it's theirs and it doesn't belong to me to distribute. She said I respect the people who do and I understand that, but I would never do that. So, there are different views about this but I do think it's important for those narratives to get out

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[154] Ibid.

> as much as possible. A narrative isn't going to change the world, but it does allow for a revision of the disabling narratives that the state tells.[155]

In an ironic twist of sorts, the Riverhead Correctional Facility purchased 250 copies of the Herstory anthology *VOICES* in 2010 to use in its training at the Suffolk County Correctional Academy. Reading the writing of the women the trainees will eventually guard is a requirement for graduation from the academy.

> They actually will discuss the things that bring women to jail. It helps to have them know who the women are and try to dispel that notion that they're just these unspeakable thieves and really take a look at what happened to them and why they're there. The two officers who instituted this … they said their attitudes towards the women have changed so much over the years and after hearing their stories they thought that nobody should be guarding anybody if they didn't at least have a sense of who they were.[156]

Hartnett is editor of *Captured Words/Free Thoughts*, an annual magazine of poems and stories written by imprisoned writers, many of whom are women in his writing class at the Denver women's jail. Chaney has not published her students' writings, but is so impressed with their work that she has bragged about the women's work at a meeting with other Inside-Out instructors.

> I know it's hard for someone with a prison GED to write for a college class. It's hard for undergraduates who are 20 years old and haven't had a break

[155] Ibid.
[156] Erika Duncan, phone interview, August 8, 2012

> in their education. I was just really proud of them and wanted to share what they were doing.

Roswell admits that while she and her co-facilitators are repeatedly in awe of the women's writings at MCIW, they have never published them. Roswell describes this omission as "somewhat devastating."

> We talk about it all the time, but we've never done a book or anything. That was the downside to this more amorphous group of people leading it instead of one because the buck didn't stop with any one person. I think in a certain way it was the function of some personalities, mine included, that are a little perfectionist. The writing that people are doing there is so strong, it's so mature, it's very much of the Wally Lamb *Couldn't Keep It To Myself* quality, so we somehow got ourselves in a place where just knocking it off into some little thing seemed … we just had an appetite to do something more ambitious and I think we got caught between wanting to do this amazing thing and not quite having the where with all to do that, so we ended up doing nothing.

My interviewees described in this chapter the challenges they experience when experimenting with different pedagogical techniques. While they ultimately are able to provide engaging intellectual activities, some of the instructors are left struggling to figure out what works and what does not. As such, there needs to be more training opportunities available for people who want to teach in a prison or jail. The lack of training some of my interviewees have suggests that the bare-bones, go-it-alone approach to prison education many of them use does not always work. For instance, as

many of my interviewees have indicated, constantly reading or hearing the women's traumatic stories can be emotionally taxing. They are not trained therapists and are usually not prepared to deal with this type of emotional backlash. This provides further evidence of a great need for the government to reenter the prison education business and provide pedagogical support for instructors.

CONCLUSION

I set out in this study to describe the lived experiences of instructors who teach college courses in women's prisons and jails and examine how these instructors navigate the politics of teaching inside. My goal for this study was to understand what it means to teach in such an oppressive place as a women's prison and how the instructors experience prison as outsiders within. I focused my study on women's prisons because gendered nature of prisons as matters of incarceration are typically told from the male perspective. Also, prison education studies have traditionally focused on male prisoners and issues of education are often missing from the literature on women's prison issues. In this concluding chapter I will discuss the major findings of this study, its limitations and directions for future research.

Research Findings

This section summarizes my research findings to answer my research questions: "What are the lived experiences of instructors who teach in women's prisons and jails?" and "What are the politics and challenges of teaching in women's prisons and jails?" Chapter one highlighted the correctional versus educational tension that has long existed in the history of prison education. At the center of that tension remains the political debate between advocates who favor a punishment model of prison and reformers who promote education as the crucial element in the rehabilitation of incarcerated women and men. Current events brought that debate to the forefront again when New York Governor Andrew Cuomo announced his plans to use taxpayers' money to fund college-in-prison programs across the state, but quickly reneged on his plan following pressure from lawmakers who claimed it was not fair for incarcerated

people to get a free education while hardworking taxpayers did not. What I showed in this chapter is despite the highs and lows that have marked the prison education tradition, recent events are pointing towards a new national prison higher education movement sparking a renewal of the tradition, with my interviewees among those leading the way. Like the reformers of the 19th century who advocated for and created education programs in women's prisons, my interviewees are implementing and supporting higher education opportunities for incarcerated women.

I introduce my interviewees in chapter two using a collective biography that highlights some of the sub-themes that emerged from the study, including how instructors deal with their privilege in the classroom. With the exception of one man, all of my interviewees are women and all are white. This was not by design as I did not intentionally recruit women as participants for this study. There is no organization that tracks the gender and race profile of people who teach in prison, so there is no way to know if this was simply a coincidence or indicative of a national trend among the gender and race of prison educators. Some of the instructors I interviewed explained how teaching in prison serves as a reminder of their race and class privileges, and they are often forced to critique their own positionality. The gender and race profile of my interviewees does create future research opportunities, but also proved to be a limitation of my study, both of which I will discuss later.

In chapter three, my interviewees learned ways to navigate the politics of punishment and negotiate over power to teach their classes. More than half of the instructors told me stories of having to fight with correctional officers for autonomy while the officers fight to keep them in their place. Some of my interviewees reported having

no problems with administration and staff, but the literature suggests it is par for the course for instructors to be met by some level of pushback from prison administrators and staff.

Chapter four is where I examine whether it is truly possible to create a safe learning space in a prison classroom. A safe classroom space is especially important in a prison classroom because it is oftentimes the only place in the prison where the women feel like people, not just inmates. Yet, my interviewees have varying opinions on whether it is truly possible for them to create safe learning spaces in the prisons and jails where they teach. Their experiences support the literature on feminist critiques of safe space that indicates that despite the best of intentions, it is not always possible for an instructor to create safe classroom spaces.

Once the instructors have negotiated over power, maneuvered the political landmines of prison and created as safe of classroom spaces as possible, I examine in chapter five how they also face the challenge of experimenting with pedagogy appropriate to their students. Establishing trust and rapport with their incarcerated students was a major issue my interviewees described in this chapter. Many of them learned that if the women do not trust them it will be nearly impossible to teach the course. The instructors attribute the lack of trust primarily to the fact that most often, many of the women in their classes have had negative educational experiences

I placed a special emphasis on writing in this chapter because it plays a key role in how the women cope with the traumatic experiences that contributed to their incarceration. Stephen Hartnett, who teaches creative writing course in a Colorado women's jail, used the term "turning trauma into art" to describe the effect writing has on

the women in his classes. While the writing may be therapeutic for the women, they sometimes come with a cost to the instructors. Some of my interviewees described the emotional baggage they carry after reading the women's stories of abuse or neglect.

Limitations of the Study

I encountered several limitations while conducting this study. First, logistical and financial constraints prevented me from interviewing the instructors in person. Though I was able to collect good anecdotal data via the phone and Skype interviews, I would have liked to been able to visit some of the instructors' classes to see for myself how the instructors interact with their incarcerated students. This would have strengthened my analysis.

Second, not having any solid statistical information on the gender and race of prison instructors did not allow me to fully put into context the gender and race makeup of my interviewees. For instance, I could not compare the number of white women instructors to black women instructors. Third, there is limited research on how an instructor's gender, race and class privileges impact the prison classroom. Though some of my interviewees provided good anecdotal data, I do not think it was sufficient to fully analyze this issue.

Recommendation for Future Research

My next goal is to research how prison instructors' race, class and gender privileges impact their prison classrooms. In addition, the privileged role of the researcher is an important part of this story that needs to be explored.

I am also interested in the long-term effect of college-in-prison programs on women's post-release success. This project primarily focused on what happens in these

prison college classrooms, but it is equally important to know what impact these programs have on women longer after they leave prison.

What I Have Learned

I have gained some experience with dealing with prison politics and teaching in a women's prison during the course of my doctoral journey, but the instructors I interviewed helped clarify the true intricacies of teaching in a correctional facility. I have learned that education challenges the use of prison as an institution of social control and that scares the powers-that-be who are too blinded by their own short-sightedness to see the real benefits of educating people in prison. College-in-prison should not be something that happens *in spite of* the correctional system, but as a legitimate objective of the system.

Appendix A: Interview Request Posted to Higher Ed in Prison and Inside-Out Listservs

I am writing my dissertation – *Write On, Sister! How Incarcerated Women Use Writing to Reclaim and Define their Power and Identity* – on the politics of women's prison writing and the role writing plays in the "rehabilitation" of women in prison. One of my chapters analyzes writing programs or classes offered in women's prisons and the experiences of the people who teach or run these programs/classes. Part of my goal is to set the women's writings in a larger context to provide a deeper understanding of the conditions under which they write and learn.

I want to interview people who have or are teaching in women's prisons to include their experiences in the chapter. I am particularly interested in any issues instructors may have had with developing courses and getting them approved by prison officials, and what resistance – if any – have they encountered once inside and teaching.

If you are interested in being interviewed, or can suggest someone I should speak to, please let me know by **Friday, July 13**; I would like to schedule interviews between Monday, July 23, and Friday, August 10. I anticipate each interview lasting between 45 minutes to an hour. The interviews will be audio recorded and conducted via phone or Skype, whichever is easier for you. I will forward consent forms to anyone who agrees to participate. Feel free to e-mail me here or call me at 716-378-6359 if there are further questions. Thank you for your consideration in helping me with my dissertation. I look forward to hearing from you.

Breea Willingham

Appendix B: Informed Consent

University at Buffalo, State University of New York

Write On, Sister! How Incarcerated Women Use Writing to Reclaim and Define Their Power and Identity

Informed Consent Form

This consent form explains the research study. Please read it carefully. Your participation is voluntary. If you wish to with withdraw from the study, you may do so at any time by alerting the principal investigator of your decision. There will be no repercussions from your decision. If you withdraw from this study, no further data will be collected but any information that you have provided may be retained by the researcher and analyzed.

By agreeing to participate in this study, you agree to let me use the information voluntarily shared with me through interviews between the principal investigator and you for the purposes of dissertation research and subsequent papers that stem from the research. You will have the right to review the data.

This study, titled "Write On, Sister! How Incarcerated Women Use Writing to Reclaim and Define Their Power and Identity," is being conducted by Breea C. Willingham (bcw2@buffalo.edu) under the supervision of Dr. Carl Nightingale (cn6@buffalo.edu). Any questions, concerns or complaints you may have about this study can be answered by Ms. Willingham and Dr. Nightingale. They can be reached through the Department of American Studies, University at Buffalo, Buffalo, NY, 14260 or by telephone at 716-645-0818 for Dr. Nightingale or 716-378-6359 for Ms. Willingham. All complaints will be kept confidential.

PURPOSE: You are invited to participate in a research project that analyzes the politics of women's prison writing and the role writing plays in the "rehabilitation" of women in prison. The purpose of the study is to examine how the writing process helps women to redefine their power and agency, analyze the impact of writing programs or classes offered in women's prisons and the experiences of the people who teach or run these programs or classes. The goal is to set the women's writings in a larger context to provide a deeper understanding of the conditions under which they write and learn. The results of the study will become part of the final dissertation project for the researcher. Participating in this study will give you the opportunity to be part of a project that will give voice to an often voiceless segment of the American prison system and address broader social problems with race, class and gender oppressions experienced by incarcerated women.

PROCEDURES: If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to share your experiences as an instructor in a women's prison. You are free to not answer any questions you do not wish to answer. In addition, you will not be asked to provide details

about the crime(s) for which the women you teach are serving time. You may be asked questions about the topics women write about or types of educational exercises done in class, but you won't be asked to provide details that may reveal the identity of the women you teach. After the interview is completed, you will be asked if you are willing to be interviewed again at a later date if there are any follow-up questions. If you agree to do so, you may be contacted by Ms. Willingham for a second interview. You may withdraw from the study at any time by informing Ms. Willingham that you no longer wish to continue with the study. Withdrawing would have no foreseeable repercussions.

CONFIDENTIALITY: Information regarding your participation in this study will be recorded confidentially. If you choose to be a part of the study, the interviews will be audio taped. Within one week of the creation of the tape, it will be used by the researcher, Ms. Willingham, to create a transcript of the interview. Throughout the duration of this study all tapes and transcribed interviews will be kept in a locked file which only Ms. Willingham and Dr. Nightingale will have access to. Ms. Willingham and Dr. Nightingale will be the only people to listen to the tapes. If you withdraw from this study, no further data will be collected but any information that you have provided may be retained by the researcher and analyzed. The transcriptions made from the tapes will be destroyed within two months of the completion of the study.

In order to monitor this research study, representatives from federal agencies such as NIH (National Institutes of Health) and OHRP (Office of Human Research Protection) or representatives from the UB Human Research Protections Program may inspect the research records.

RISKS: There are no known risks to participating in this research. Any significant new findings developed during the course of this research that uncovers new risks, which may affect your willingness to continue participation, will be provided to you in writing.

BENEFITS: There are direct benefits to you for participating in this study. You will have the opportunity to be part of a project that will broaden and add to generalized knowledge of women's prison writing and education, and address broader social problems with race, class and gender oppressions experienced by incarcerated women.

COMPENSATION: You will not be paid for participating in this study.

STATEMENT OF VOLUNTEERING FOR THE STUDY:

I freely and voluntarily, and without element of force or coercion, consent to be a participant in the research project titled: **"Write On, Sister! How Incarcerated Women Use Writing to Reclaim and Define their Power and Identity."** The research is being conducted by Breea C. Willingham, a doctoral candidate in American Studies at the University at Buffalo. I understand the purpose of this research project is examine how the writing process helps women to redefine their power and agency, analyze the impact of writing programs or classes offered in women's prisons and the experiences

of the people who teach or run these programs or classes. I understand contents of the research project may be published.

I understand my participation is totally voluntary and I may stop participation at any time. I also understand that I will not be paid for my participation.

My signature below will constitute my consent to participate in the research project. All of my answers to questions will be kept confidential to the extent allowed by law.

I understand that this consent may be withdrawn at any time without prejudice or penalty. I have been given the right to ask and have answered any questions concerning the study.

NAME OF SUBJECT (Please Print)

SIGNATURE OF SUBJECT and DATE (mm/dd/yy)

Audio Tape Release Form

I give consent to be audiotaped during this study:

Please initial: ____Yes ____No

STATEMENT OF PERSON OBTAINING CONSENT

I certify that the nature and purpose, the potential benefits and possible risks associated with participation in this research study have been explained to the above individual and that any questions about this information have been answered. A copy of this consent will be given to the participant.

(Print) Breea C. Willingham	Signature of Person Obtaining Consent
	Date

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