"An eth-what-graphy?"

"Ethnography," I said. "It's kind of like…a diary…but you let other people read it. And it sounds a lot smarter than any other diary I've had before."

"Doesn't sound like school to me."

"Me neither," I agreed. "Must be why I liked it."

They assumed that once I was done with my project, I'd stop coming every week. In the very beginning, I may have thought the same thing. But leaving doesn't seem like an option anymore; I haven't figured it out yet. That thing that first pulled me to walk in hasn't stopped pulling. I'm too attached. Being apart of this work has, to put it bluntly, ruined my life. I don't think I can justify doing anything else.

Background

Restorative Partners is a non-profit agency located on the Central Coast of California, dedicated to creating a "widespread and ever-increasing embrace of a restorative justice approach and practice in the San Luis Obispo Criminal Justice system" ("Vision and Values"). The organization's method is multi-faceted: they partner with victims, offenders, law enforcement agents, corrections officers, local non-profits and businesses, and faith-based communities in order to foster a community-driven approach to healing those who have been somehow impacted by crime. Since 2011, Restorative Partners has implemented a variety of programs in the San Luis Obispo County jails and in Juvenile Hall, many of which are managed by Cal Poly students.

I started volunteering in Juvenile Hall with Restorative Partners in December of 2014. I attended multiple programs and slowly built relationships with many of the youth. Through

attending the Book Club program, I had the opportunity to hear them discuss concepts like success, discrimination, and oppression, and I realized that these kids are much more intelligent than they're given credit for. The San Luis Obispo Probation Department list of values for adult and juvenile facilities include: "appreciating and valuing differences," "encouraging a variety of opinions and to provide a safe environment for them to be heard," "seeking to understand others," "being open-minded," and "being non-judgmental" ("Vision and Values"). My conversations with the youth, coupled with hearing of Juvenile Hall's desire to foster an empathetic, culturally sensitive environment informed my proposal for a Cultural Studies class, for which the youth could receive high school credit. I developed a ten-week curriculum, which consisted of discussion questions that were simply meant to provoke organic discussion. My intention in creating a Cultural Studies program was comprehensive: to get the youth thinking about issues of culture and diversity, to create an environment where "school" means open discussion rather than silently listening to a teacher, to help the youth improve their communicative competency and social skills, and to instill within them a confidence in their own intelligence and a deeper understanding of self.

What follows is an ethnographic account of my experience as a volunteer in Juvenile Hall, primarily from my time teaching the Cultural Studies class on East Unit. By writing through my personal experiences, I hope to contribute to the growing body of social justice-oriented research focused on the penal system and reform/rehabilitation efforts, and to provide a narrative that is representative of a number of systemic issues in the U.S. criminal justice system. Accounts from a personal journal I have kept since beginning the project are written in italics, to differentiate from the rest of the paper. After providing a review of current literature and a discussion on ethnographic methods, I will first describe my introduction into Juvenile Hall and

the process of coming to understand my role within the organization. Second, I consider concepts of identity and identity formation among incarcerated youth and how a discussion of identity with the youth revealed the workings of privilege and difference. Third, I address the mechanization of juvenile bodies and how bodily discipline in the facility can affect identity formation among youth. Fourth, I discuss popular stereotypes of juvenile and adult offenders and acknowledge how those stereotypes may shift my perceptions of the youth and my expectations of their ability to engage in discussion. Fifth, I build on the discussion of stereotypes and argue that our tendency to label juvenile offenders as "criminals" is misguided, as it fails to recognize the ways in which they are victims of systemic and cultural oppression. As it is a combination of theoretical concepts and personal experience, the paper culminates with my discussion of the relevance and importance of deeply personal, engaged communication scholarship. Pulling from Stephen John Hartnett's concept of "joyful commitment", I argue that the connection between scholarship and activism is a necessary space for academics, specifically those in the communication discipline, to begin addressing the numerous flaws in our criminal justice system.

Literature Review

A good deal of the research on the penal system I engage is based on Michel Foucault's foundational work of 1975, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. The basis of Foucault's work is the analysis of societal transition away from punishment as public spectacle to our current paradigm of punishment as an administrative, bureaucratic process. Criminal punishment was historically a ceremonial, public event; the spectacle of torture and public humiliation was thought to keep the masses fearful of committing crimes. However, the system

was incredibly inefficient, and people eventually lost interest in "the gloomy festival of punishment" (Foucault 8). Punishment then became more about locking people up than publically shaming them; it was no longer the "horrifying spectacle", but "the certainty of being punished", that discouraged crime (Foucault 9). Punishment is now based in the mechanization and manipulation of bodies and a removal of the prisoner's agency. This new system of punishment veils the treatment of criminals in bureaucratic secrecy, leaving the prison as an "autonomous sector" and a terrifying mystery to the general public (Foucault 10). Foucault's groundbreaking analysis charted the shift in the discipline paradigm and inspired research in sociology, criminology, cultural studies, psychology, philosophy, and more. His work is foundational in any discussion of power and politics, specifically those examining how power is subtly integrated into our everyday social practices.

The growth in the American prison population over the last forty years is unprecedented. The United States currently incarcerates 2.3 million people, more than any other nation in the world (Stevenson). The United States holds 5% of the world's population, but 25% of its prisoners ("Criminal Justice Fact Sheet"). We spend about $70 billion on corrections each year, and the prison system has been proven rather ineffective, as two-thirds of prisoners will reoffend at some point in their life ("Criminal Justice Fact Sheet"). The United States also leads the industrialized world in the rate of youth incarceration. In California, the cost to incarcerate a child for 9-12 months is $224,712 on average ("Richard Ross"). The practice of juvenile incarceration is not only horrifically expensive, but it doesn't seem to be very effective either: the 2012 California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation Outcome Evaluation Report showed that the three year recidivism rate for juveniles with 'higher level' offenses was 38.8% ("Outcome Evaluations"). Gladys Carrion, the Director for New York State Office of Children

and Family Services comments that we could "send [incarcerated youth] to Harvard" with what we pay to keep them locked up, and yet our current practices have not provided "very good outcomes" for said youth ("Sticker Shock").

The rise of the prison-industrial complex and unparalleled incarceration rates—both for youth and adults—has introduced bodies of research on the U.S. prison system, primarily in the fields of criminology, sociology, and psychology. Prison-related scholarship within the communication studies discipline is limited; the unprecedented expansion of the prison population in the last fifteen years has "taken place with little discussion and [. . . .] analysis" from communication scholars. The Prison Communication, Activism, Research, and Education Collective (PCARE), a group formed at the annual meeting of the National Communication Association in 2007, published an article calling communication scholars to attend to the prison-industrial complex from a variety of perspectives. The group called upon "scholars of interpersonal communication, health communication, rhetorical criticism, family communication, political communication, organizational communication, media studies, and cultural studies" to examine the ways in which their area of expertise is intertwined with the prison system, and could combine with activism to "abolish the prison-industrial complex" (PCARE 404). More broadly, PCARE called upon their colleagues in all disciplines to "reconsider what they research, how they do it, who they do it for, and who they do it with" and use scholarship as an inventional resource for the pursuit of social justice (PCARE 403).

Stephen John Hartnett, a member of PCARE, wrote specifically about this intersection between scholarship and social justice; calling upon researchers to pledge to what he calls "joyful commitment" (71). Hartnett and the members of PCARE follow in the footsteps of scholars such as Dwight Conquergood, who, in his research on gang members in Chicago, "lived

as a neighbor, teacher, and substitute father figure" (PCARE 410). The author defines "joyful

commitment" as a pledge to "work for social justice and for personal growth, to be both radical

in our demands and gentle in our demeanor, both outraged by inequality and oppression and

joyous in our commitments to end them" (Hartnett 71). Essentially, joyful commitment requires

the researcher to be present—physically, mentally, emotionally—with whatever oppressed

population they study, and to adopt a sense of responsibility toward pursuing their liberation. A

social justice orientation to scholarship is vitally important for prison research, as the subjects of

study are systematically silenced, and inaccessible to most people. To conduct meaningful

research on the prison system thus requires the researcher to physically enter into the space of

inquiry and to seek identification with the people s/he studies. Communication research with a

social justice orientation, if done correctly, "is done not only *about*, but *for* and *in the interests of*

the people with whom" the researcher studies (Frey et.al 115). This sort of research departs from

the more traditional separation between researcher and participant, enacting instead a collective,

co-creative partnership between researcher and participant. Instead of seeking a degree of

distance, social justice scholarship strays from traditional means and "does not even pretend to

be objective, neutral, or dispassionate" (Frey et.al 115).

Ethnography

Ethnography is a particularly well-suited methodology for social justice oriented

research, as it allows for prolonged interaction and relationships with participants in their local

context. Conquergood addresses the physical presence and participatory nature of the

ethnographer, stating that the method "privileges the body as a site of knowing"; with

ethnographers finding meaning in "sensual experience, bodily sensations, and the passions",

rather than in the more sedentary mental abstractions of other methodologies ("Rethinking Ethnography" 180). Hartnett, Wood, and McCann write about the power of the scholar's physical presence within their pedagogical research in prisons: "no matter the topic, and no matter what titles we bestow upon ourselves…we all learn together: prisoners, traditional students, professors, we all stand shoulder-to-shoulder…hoping to…make some meaningful connection" (Hartnett et.al 335). It is not so much the "thinking", but the " 'doing' of ethnography: speaking, listening, and acting together" that sets the method apart from others ("Rethinking Ethnography" 181). Through physical presence and participation in the fieldwork, ethnography and social justice oriented research can naturally become intensely personal to the researcher, as it did with Conquergood and Hartnett, Wood, and McCann. The interplay of personal experience and academic theories, then, is characteristic of ethnography and social justice scholarship; it is the process of writing stories that make academic, and often political contributions and simultaneously serve as personal narratives (Goodall 79).

While many academics "maintain that personal writing isn't scholarship", it is, in this view, illogical to eliminate personal writing from research that is often so deeply personal to the author. The very basis of my research, and the research of many ethnographers, is precisely about building relationships and being present in the lives of those we study. To use any other method would be to invalidate those relationships, and to ignore the torrent of reflection and extensive "grappl[ing] in isolation" that resulted through my being involved in the lives of incarcerated youth (Hertz 4). H.L. Goodall Jr. addresses the new ethnographer, who, like myself, often begins the process with no sense of direction, but some visceral need to write:

> When caught up in it or even long after, you don't know how things are
> going to turn out. Nor do you know exactly what you are supposed to do about it.

What you *do* know is that you are being pulled into something larger than yourself, and the pull of it against your soul is undeniable (Goodall 127).

> You have to trust the *process*. You have to believe that somewhere in the material of these two mysterious stories—the life story and the research literature story—you will find a clue that leads to a connection. You will locate a gap in the existing literature. You will come into a way of asking questions about it that leads to the creation of a storyline. You will, eventually, write *your* way out of *your* personal conundrum. But you have to *trust* the process (Goodall 51).

Upon deciding to understand my experience of working in Juvenile Hall through ethnography, I became more comfortable abandoning the idea that I needed a direction. I stopped looking for specific answers and started simply noticing what I noticed, trusting that it would all fall into place eventually. I also began to realize that I, in fact, *didn't* have to leave my emotions out of it. Through my research, I found a population of scholars who, along with Goodall and others, find emotional investment to be an asset to one's research, and not something to avoid. Emotions and scholarship are not mutually exclusive; it is arguably vital for a researcher to have a personal, relational investment in her or his object of study. The writer's self-examination has a place in scholarship, for in exposing one's own bias, prejudice, and position, the object of study is introduced through an alternative lens. This self-examination gives the writer an opportunity to confront their own biases, and to write through them. Rather than working to compartmentalize and tidy up the complexities of human existence, ethnography revels in the mess (Hertz 4). My introduction to ethnographic methods, then, began to loosen the grip that the 'introduction, three body paragraphs, conclusion' disease held on my curious, emotional mind since I first learned to write.

In the *Journal of Social Science and Medicine*, Didier Fassin writes that critical ethnography "associates the empirical evidence of fieldwork and the reflexive concern of writing," and that the method's overarching purpose is to *unsettle* (Fassin 125). In writing about my experiences in Juvenile Hall, I hope to bring the reader into a relatively unknown space, and to share the stories of its residents. In writing through my "personal conundrum", I hope to make readers aware of the importance that lies in interweaving social activism and scholarship, specifically in populations as systematically silenced as America's incarcerated youth.

As previously mentioned, bias is both inherent and acknowledged in more personal academic writing, such as ethnography. As someone who came into the experience uncomfortable with juvenile incarceration, I noticed different things than a researcher who supports incarceration might notice. I have an internal bent against authority, and I also knew I needed to have a finished piece of writing in a few months. This positioning cannot be ignored, for it helped dictate the observations I made, the observations I didn't make, and the overall narratives I constructed. For instance, as someone who primarily opposes juvenile incarceration, I naturally looked for ways to justify my opposition. As someone who wants to resist the stereotype of "criminal" that is thrust upon juvenile offenders, I naturally looked for the instances in which they broke them. Upon beginning the writing process, I edited which experiences to include and which to leave out. The level of personal involvement and direct participation in the youth's lives therefore left me feeling responsible for writing with their liberation in mind (Hertz 4). The following account is anything but an objective description of the facility and the incarcerated youth in San Luis Obispo; it is, instead, nothing more and nothing less than my interpretation and constructed narrative of my/an experience, purposed to

unsettle the reader to examine their prejudices against incarcerated youth and pay closer attention to the potentially damaging characteristics of the American criminal justice system.

The primary critique of ethnography is that it can bend towards the self-indulgence of the author, as the ethnographic personality is necessarily "entitled to have extraordinary experiences with which to author an epic life" (Goodall 68). However, through rhetorical choices, the writer has the ability to minimize herself in pursuit of the liberation of others. I thus hope to tell a compelling story with the goal of "making sense of the apparently senseless" and providing a "deeper understanding of the larger picture" (Fassin 121). The format of my exploration, then, will be a continual shift between personal anecdotes from my interactions in Juvenile Hall—again, written in italics—and a more academic narrative of applicable theories and concepts. Of note, the names of the youth in San Luis Obispo County Juvenile Hall have been changed to protect their privacy.

Being a Newcomer

Tonight was my first night as a volunteer. I went to the Tutoring program, and sat with two girls named Rebecca and Dina. They're roommates. They have to meet a certain standard of behavior before they can request to have a roommate. Rebecca and Dina have been friends for a few years, both inside the facility and 'on the outs'.

I introduced myself and asked what their names were. I told them it was my first time. They laughed.

"I know."

My head tilted. I asked how they knew.

"You keep looking around", they said. "You're sitting up all straight."

We all kept laughing at me for a while. I guess it was pretty obvious it was my first time. I was expecting to be nervous, but I wasn't. Just very clearly a rookie. I talked too loud, I didn't know when to stop talking, where to sit down, when to move, when to not move, what I was allowed to touch, what any of the words they used meant. It felt like learning a new language, a new way of being. It was so foreign. Somehow, though, I was fine with it.

Five weeks later: *Rebecca gets out tomorrow. We were making Valentine's Day cards today. I told her I didn't know what I would do without her there, because I'd (literally) never known Juvenile Hall without her.*

> *"Oh yeah! I remember your first time here. All jumpy. Me and Dina made fun of you so much. Honestly surprised you came back."*

Part of me always gets insecure around Rebecca because I realize that a 16 year old is funnier than me. She took her hair down and then threw it back up in a mess on top of her head. We laughed, as we did most weeks, about how we both sport the same hairstyle: a tousled excuse for a bun that slowly falls down until you have to throw it up again. I actually don't know what I'll do without her.

Michael E. Pacanowsky and Nick O'Donnell-Trujillo write about cultural newcomers in an organizational setting. Juvenile Hall has its own organizational culture, and getting to a place where I finally felt like I knew how to operate at ease took multiple weeks of getting acquainted. The most noticeable change in my comfort level was in my interactions with the kids, like the above conversations with Rebecca. We grew to have common ground, inside jokes, and plenty of things to talk about.

Pacanowsky and O'Donnell-Trujillo state that new members learn "the 'roles' and the 'ropes' " of an organizational culture through formal and informal cultural performances. Before volunteering, I went through a formal orientation, learned the regulations of the space, had a background check, and took a tour of the facility; I learned "the what, how, and why" of the organization (Pacanowsky and O'Donnell-Trujillo 144). Formal cultural performances like these are often required before the newcomer becomes an official member and participant in the organization. While introducing the newcomer to their 'role' within the organization, formal performances rarely provide any insight about the "true" culture, or on how to operate within it. These sort of "street smarts" come from informal performances with veteran members. The informal performances are the instances "by which the newcomers learn, sometimes all too clearly, that they are newcomers" (Pacanowsky and O'Donnell-Trujillo 144). Informal performances in Juvenile Hall included the playful harassment I got from Rebecca and Dina, who have been in and out of the facility for their entire adolescent lives; they know it well.

The only card game the kids are allowed to play is called "Kings' Corner". That or Go-Fish, which, thank god, they also think is pointless. My first time playing Kings' Corner was almost a month ago, and I've played it probably twenty times by now. I still have no idea what I'm doing. They explained it so fast, but I didn't want to hold them back from playing cards, so I just pretended I knew what was going on. I lose every time.

The most obvious mark of a new volunteer in Juvenile Hall is not knowing how to play Kings' Corner. My not knowing how to play the game was the primary way in which I was—and still am, more than six months later—constantly reminded that I am a newcomer. In this

situation, I am learning my role in the organization through formal and informal instruction from young teenagers. A newcomer learning their role in an organization can thus provide an interesting contradiction in positions of authority: despite the newcomer, like myself, being in a position of authority, I am required to look to veteran members of the organization, who are supposed to be "lesser" in terms of their standing vis-à-vis me, to learn how to adapt to the culture.

"Learning the ropes" of the organization is much more subtle than learning one's role. It is often through metacommunicative practice that newcomers can make sense of the organization and start to perform the cultural rituals themselves. As I was introduced to the culture of Juvenile Hall, I started to notice the subtleties of the space, and the various performances enacted by the different players. Perhaps more importantly, I started learning about myself in relation to the youth, and was consistently made aware of my own privilege through our interactions.

For the December Book Club, we read A Christmas Carol. *I didn't know what to expect for the discussion portion. I assumed that these kids were fairly insightful, many of them having experienced more adversity (abusive parents, addiction, homelessness, the foster care system, gang involvement, etc.) than some adults have experienced throughout their entire lives. However, I was also told that their reading comprehension level is often well below where they should normally be for their age, as many of them have not been in school consistently.*

Our discussion started in a fairly subdued fashion, mostly sticking with the questions on the page that someone had prepared ahead of time. I was partnered with a middle-aged high school English teacher, Lori. She's very timid. She made the cupcakes for this month's birthdays,

though, which were a total hit. They were the classic mom cupcakes. Perfectly baked and humbly frosted. Go Lori.

As we all got a little more comfortable, we started straying from the prepared questions and just started talking. Since it was only my second time interacting with them, there was so much basic knowledge about working with this population that I hadn't quite caught onto yet. We talked about Scrooge and how he doesn't show any emotion. Lori asked if they thought this was a bad thing. "Not really", they said. One of them mentioned how crying is a sign of weakness. Trying to be the compassionate, inspiring volunteer, I quickly corrected them. I told them that it is more than okay to cry, that crying is a good thing, and that showing emotion is what makes us human. I'm sure it sounded even worse than that. A few of them started going back and forth with each other: "I cried when I first came in here! Just that first time, though." "What are you talking about? Really? I've never cried, not in here".

What I didn't realize in the moment was that this was a perfect example of my own privilege and my status as a newcomer; I had/have the privilege of showing emotion, and I don't understand that it's a privilege, and why it is. It's okay for me *to cry. It's seen as a sign of compassion, that I'm a 'good person', or that I just feel deeply. For some of these kids, however, crying is equated with weakness. It could get them beat up. I've never thought of emotion as a privilege. What else is there? I need to be so conscious of this. Wow. Idiot.*

My entrance into this new organizational culture, specifically one with such stark markers of difference, required that I become acutely aware of differences in privilege in order to follow 'the ropes' of the organization and more deeply understand my role within it. This need was never explicitly stated in training, but was instead discovered through metacommunicative

practices and a (self)conscious examination of the relationships I formed in Juvenile Hall. As I continued working in the space, I encountered more and more privileges that I hold, more markers of the differences, and distance between the kids and myself.

Identity Formation + Privilege

My first week teaching Cultural Studies on East Unit, we talked about what culture is and how we define ourselves, and how those two things might be connected. We talked about how we're shaped by others' definitions of us and our own definitions of ourselves, and how identity is multifaceted. We started to think about our answers to the question: Who are you?

Each girl had a piece of paper with a stick figure in front of her, with eight lines attached to the stick figure. I asked everyone to think about the question "Who are you?", and to write eight things on the lines that they would use to describe themselves. Some examples I gave as my own answer to the question: white, student, 22, daughter, sister. They started working and some had trouble coming up with things. I walked around the room and tried to offer some more ideas.

"What about your personality?"

Bailey had finished hers and tried to help Marissa out.

"What did you put?," Marissa asked.

"I put addict."

"Oh, we can put that?"

"Well, it's part of who I am, isn't it?"

As mostly 14-17 year olds, the youth in Juvenile Hall are in the middle of adolescence, which is "an especially important developmental period for self-concept formation" (Khan). Pulling from Blanchard and Johnson, Khan states that our self-concept colors the way we see the world and the way we perceive ourselves. In their current situation, the youth are more than ever in the process of shaping their understanding of themselves, trying to answer the question: "Who am I?" The space that they find themselves in, then, undoubtedly has implications for their constantly forming self-concept and notions of identity.

In intercultural communication, the interpretive perspective on identity formation states that "identities are negotiated, co-created, reinforced, and challenged through communication with others" (Martin and Nakayama 174). This perspective played into our discussion about the dynamic nature of our identities, and how they are always changing based on our experiences and interactions with others. Through avowal and ascription, for example, our identities are co-created through our *own* perceptions of self along with those that others ascribe *to* us (Martin and Nakayama 174). As with many of our discussions in the Cultural Studies class, the kids started to understand the concepts more fully when they applied them to their current situation. They all agreed that while a state of incarceration might be a part of their identity now, it would not always be. Specifically for incarcerated youth, identity is in constant flux. While incarcerated, chaplains, volunteers, and officers might tell them they're good people, capable of making change in their lives and the lives of others. At the same time, their movements are closely controlled and monitored, and every minute of their day is scheduled for them. They have little to no agency over their own lives or activities. Which message are they supposed to believe? These conflicting messages serve to complicate adolescent identity formation, especially youth who are navigating their identity in the midst of incarceration.

Life 'on the outs' may complicate the situation even further. The critical perspective of identity formation "emphasizes the contextual and often conflictual elements of identity development" (Martin and Nakayama 175). *No Place for Kids: The Case for Reducing Juvenile Incarceration*, a 2011 report by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, states that juvenile incarceration greatly "damages young peoples' future success", and it is "clear that incarceration itself creates significant additional" burdens (12). Upon being released from the facility, youth are often subject to social forces—"history, economics, politics, and discourse"—that can constrain their ability to succeed, and thus, shift their identities (Martin and Nakayama 175). Many of the 100,000 American youth exiting formal custody each year are "discharged back to families struggling with domestic violence, substance abuse, unresolved mental health disabilities, and poverty" (Neills). The media, playing its role, says that juvenile delinquents are dangerous. School administrators treat them as criminals, and difficult home situations may convince them they're unwanted. On a large scale, there has been a systematic, national failure to provide services necessary for such youth to succeed, as youth recidivism rates range from 50%-70% "in some localities" [there is no national recidivism rate, as one in four states do not collect data on youth recidivism (Pew Research Center)] (Neills). If there are no outlets from the systemic disadvantages that incarcerated or formerly incarcerated youth face, it becomes clear that the implications of such a situation cannot *not* be detrimental to an adolescent's self concept. Through their inability to break out of the system, youth may begin to adopt 'criminal' as part of their identity and continue acting in ways that fulfill that identity.

> *"Addict."*
>
> *"It's part of who I am, isn't it?"*

During the identity activity, I found myself rather unsure of what the proper course of action was. On one hand, if the kids are still forming their self-concepts, and naming themselves "addicts", then shouldn't I intervene? On the other hand, would intervention mean *anything* coming from someone who's never experienced drug or alcohol addiction? And what does this say about privilege and power and domination?

Hearing 16 and 17 year olds define themselves as addicts will never be anything but heartbreaking. I thought about telling them to only put 'positive things', but caught myself before I said anything. I have no right to tell them who they are, and I have even less of a right to tell them who they're not. Being someone who's never had a drug addiction, how could I tell them that this part of their identity was invalid, or not right? I had no idea how to respond.

My impulsive desire to alter the kids' identity is an offshoot of the very culture of domination I had been trying to resist. This reaction implies that I am in the position to define their identities, because I hold the position of power. My immediate desire to define the oppressed group, even if I was trying to empower them, communicates that I have the power to tell them who they are and who they're not; that they're somehow not intelligent, experienced, or powerful enough to perceive, and to define, their identity for themselves.

If I want to have any sort of integrity in what I'm teaching, I need to be okay with letting them have their own interpretations. We were about to talk about how identity is dynamic, constructed not only by societal labels, but also through the self. I was confronted with the

difficulty in following the things I was 'teaching' them. You're going to tell them they can't

define themselves as an addict? Hold your tongue, idiot. Hold your privileged tongue.

Hours later, I'm back to thinking—"well, shit. Should I have said something?" This

never ends. Am I the right person to be talking about this? Does privileged, upper-middle class,

white girl from Southern California have anything worth saying to these kids? Maybe I'll just go

hold babies at an orphanage for a week and save Africa instead; it might be just as effective.

Bodies

"Movement procedure occurs when:

- You are moving to and from your room

- Crossing between units or to the yard

- Any time staff places you into "Movement"

During Movement you must have your hands behind your back and NO communicating

of any sort is allowed during movement procedure."

–*San Luis Obispo County Juvenile Hall Handbook*

The *Juvenile Hall Handbook* is given to all youth when they enter the facility. In the

handbook are: regulations of the facility, how to behave, and instructions on what is allowed and

not allowed. One of the everyday regulations is the "movement procedure". While the San Luis

Obispo County Juvenile Hall has many productive programs to improve the situation of the

youth—art class, books club, yoga, etc.—and is in a much better condition than many local and

state facilities across the nation, the ways in which the youth are required to move within the

space has potentially damaging rhetorical implications. Additionally, the movement and

positioning of bodies is a clear marker of difference and privilege between myself and other volunteers and the kids.

Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* outlines the foundational pieces of bodily discipline, specifically rooted in the modern penal system and punishment paradigm. He would describe the "Movement Procedure" as "another degree of precision in the breakdown of gestures and movements, another way of adjusting the body to temporal imperatives" (Foucault 151). The modern paradigm for punishment rests on stripping a criminal's agency through controlling their bodies and breaking down the ways that they are permitted to move. He continues: "this carefully measured combination of forces requires a precise system of command…the order does not need to be explained or formulated; it must trigger off the required behavior and that is enough" (Foucault 164). The majority of youth in Juvenile Hall have been in and out of the facility multiple times since their first arrest. "Movement Procedure" has thus become deeply engrained in them and does not need to be explained each time it is required. It is automatic. It is deeply *in* their bodies.

> *"East Unit, go into Movement."*
>
> *Each one faced forward, stopped talking, and folded their hands on the table.*

This precise control over simple gestures, movements, and normal ways of moving one's body serves to change one's conception of their body and of themselves—which is tantamount to being one and the same thing. "The individual body becomes an element that may be placed, moved, articulated on others. It's bravery or its strength are no longer the principal variables that define it; but the place it occupies, the interval it covers, the regularity, the good order according

to which it operates its movements" (Foucault 164). As their incarcerated bodies are mechanized and regulated, each body becomes identical to every other body and youth start to lose their sense of individuality.

In American detention facilities, all residents wear a uniform; in Juvenile Hall, girls wear maroon and boys wear green or brown. While requiring a uniform is efficient and helpful for organizational purposes, it is also true that this practice serves to remove one's own sense of agency. With controlled movements and a physical stripping of their own belongings, their body becomes defined through the place it occupies—a detention facility—and a lack of free movement. External markers of identity are erased, even as they are struggling with their internal sense of who and how they are.

> "All of your property will be taken from you and your clothing will be placed in a locker…You may not wear any of your own personal clothing, accessories, or jewelry while here at Juvenile Hall"
>
> *–San Luis Obispo County Juvenile Hall Handbook*

As illustrated by Foucault, a removal of agency cannot exist without implications, specifically for young adolescents who are in the middle of developing their conception of self. While in Juvenile Hall, the youth have very limited control over their own movements and actions. Their lives 'on the outs' may be quite out of their control already, and they are given even less control while incarcerated. Following Foucault, this lack of control can slowly seep its way into their self-concept.

Bailey's voice echoed in my head. "I put 'addict'."

It is reasonable to believe that through being physically controlled, the youth begin to develop an unconscious sense of lack-of-control in other areas of their lives, such as their addictions. This is the conflict between personal identity and external, systematic forces. The mental process may follow along these lines: "my body is controlled" — "my actions are controlled" — "I myself can't control anything" — "I am an addict" — "I can't control my addiction"… Again, if one is not allowed to control something as foundational as one's own body, how can one be expected to control an addiction? It is through this channel, repeated and reinforced so constantly and in so many ways, that such a self-concept stabilizes, becoming a self-fulfilling prophecy in which the person adopts and performs these behaviors as part of their identity (Khan).

"Well, it's part of who I am, isn't it?"

Stereotypes

When I tell people that I teach a class in Juvenile Hall, I'm often met with a grimace and a comment like "Oh… really? For what?" The overwhelmingly popular image/stereotype of juvenile offenders is that they are a menace to society, that they are dangerous, and that they are a hopeless case. "They'll just be in prison forever". Why do we give up that easy? Why are we so quick to give up on kids, and *let* them go to prison forever? These stereotypes occur and sink into our mindset for a number of reasons: the location of correctional facilities, media representations of criminals, and our refusal to confront difference.

Correctional facilities, including those in San Luis Obispo, are almost always located on the fringes of the city. They are placed away from the center of town, inconspicuously labeled, in a somewhat deserted area. For this reason, many people don't even realize that their community has a correctional facility. San Luis Obispo has the reputation for being a clean, happy, crime-free county. However, San Luis Obispo County is riddled with drug crime, gang activity, and homelessness. There are currently 6,912 people incarcerated in San Luis Obispo County (Center on Juvenile and Criminal Justice). The County Jails, Juvenile Hall, and the California Men's Colony are all pushed outside of, away from, the center of town. Since the facilities themselves are hidden, so are their inhabitants. In a community with such a strong reputation for being the "happiest city in the country", incarcerated youth are one of, if not the most, invisible populations. On a bigger scale, our society prefers to disconnect itself from the reality of mass incarceration. Since the issue, like those it affects, is easy to 'lock away' and push aside, the conditions of correctional facilities across the country remain at the bottom of our cultural priority list; functionally ignoring the 25 million Americans who have been directly impacted by crime in some capacity (California Sentencing Institute).

Kenneth Dowler, of the Department of Criminal Justice at California State University, Bakersfield, concludes that public perception of criminality is largely derived from the media (109). With little to no interaction with incarcerated populations in their community, the majority of the public will form their opinions of juvenile and adult offenders from newscasts, crime novels, and the onslaught of crime or prison related television shows, such as *Oz, Orange is the New Black, Prison Break, Criminal Minds,* and *CSI,* to name a few. The popular media representations of criminals thus create and perpetuate harmful stereotypes and keep incarcerated populations hidden from society. Incarcerated people are mostly portrayed as aggressive animals

that need to be locked up in order to keep 'us' safe from 'them' (Yousman 279). Our culture is committed to viewing criminality and incarceration as a spectacle purposed to entertain, thus dismissing, or ignoring, the massive flaws in our criminal justice system and the prison-industrial complex. The popular perception of criminals as only being devious and aggressive, which is perpetuated and exacerbated by mass media, therefore serves to justify the incarceration of 2.3 million people. As a society, we start to believe that fierce punishment is the only way to protect ourselves from these violent, aggressive, mentally insane people, whose only intent is to harm.

By perpetuating these stereotypes, we are also allowing juveniles to stay in the system; we're condoning their incarceration and not taking any productive action to reduce recidivism rates. Although the juvenile incarceration rate has decreased in the last decade, the United States still disproportionately incarcerates more youth than the rest of the world. As of 2010, there were 79,165 youth held in 2,259 facilities in the United States (Hockenberry). By leaving these facilities largely unnoticed and out of awareness, by placing them on the fringe of the community, and by failing to resist our media-based stereotypes, we implicitly give up on tens of thousands of disadvantaged youth. Upon re-entry, youth are villainized, avoided, and labeled as dangerous; indeed, without intervention, adolescents will start to adopt these stereotypes as part of their identity.

"Does anyone know what a stereotype is?" They all started giving examples: "blondes are dumb," "women are bad drivers," "black people are good at basketball," "Asians are good at math," etc. I asked if any of them had ever been stereotyped, or if anything about the way they look has affected someone's perception of who they are.

Matt brought up the ankle monitors. When they're on probation, they sometimes wear the thing on their ankle that makes sure they don't violate their probation. A couple kids started sharing examples of how their ankle monitors affected the ways that they were treated. Matt was at school, shortly after he had been released from Juvenile Hall, and he was wearing shorts. His principal called him into the office and told Matt that he would be suspended if he didn't cover up his ankle monitor and wear pants instead. It was "distracting to other students".

Becca was walking around downtown San Luis Obispo, and started going into stores and restaurants to ask if they were hiring. She wanted to get a job so she could support herself and stay out of trouble. While a few gave her an application, many clerks looked down at her ankle monitor and immediately said, "Oh, we're not hiring" after seeing it. She was followed around by store representatives while looking at clothes, as they assumed she was trying to shoplift. She decided to not move forward with any of the applications.

Antonio is on the football team at his high school. When he was released from Juvenile Hall last year, some of the parents saw the ankle monitor or knew about Antonio's situation, approached the coach, and asked that he be removed from the team; they didn't want their kids to be playing sports with someone so 'dangerous'. He clarified: "I'm not dangerous, I just sold some weed!"

Hearing them tell these stories with such ease was astounding. They're so accustomed to being mistreated that it's not maddening for them anymore, it's the norm.

My adolescence was marked by adults telling me how capable I was, pushing me to succeed and reach my full potential. I was applauded when I joined a sports team or applied for jobs. Sure, these kids have made some bad decisions, but why are we so quick to dismiss an entire person as an irredeemable criminal—especially a 15 year old?

Recent research on age stereotypes at the Yale Social and Behavioral Sciences program proves that stereotypes "can exert their influence along three tracks: psychological, behavioral, and physiological" (Levy 334). This research, conducted by Psychologist Becca Levy, resulted in the development of the Stereotype Embodiment Theory, which states that "stereotypes are embodied when their assimilation from the surrounding culture leads to self-definitions that, in turn", have consequences both for the individual and their interpersonal relationships (332). As kids enter into and move forward in the juvenile justice system, they come into contact with more reasons to recognize and internalize the stereotypes of juvenile delinquency. For instance, the mechanized control of their bodies built into things such as Movement procedures can lead them to internalize the notion that they are incapable of controlling their own behavior. As discussed earlier, the internalization of stereotypes can lead a person to accept their culturally ascribed and internally inscribed identity, and to behave in ways that then end up conforming to that supposedly true and seemingly inescapable identity construction. If this self-fulfilling prophecy develops, the stereotypes are reinforced not only for that individual, but also for others in their communicative environments. When people behave in ways that conform to their relative stigma, we, as the "good" members of our society, are more likely to accept those stereotypes at face value, and to then interact with them accordingly, as if the stereotype were true across the board.

Expectation Bias

Edward Hall, in his book *Beyond Culture*, states that, "culture makes the average bright, but may also dull the brilliant" (184). I found myself trying to keep this in mind, as I was continually forced to confront my implicit biases towards juvenile offenders. By labeling them as "very behind in school" and incapable of holding a conversation, we treat them differently than we would any other 14-17 year-old that is not incarcerated. We decide that they are somehow less bright than the typical teenager and treat them as such (Hall 184). The first time I taught the Cultural Studies class, many of the officers voiced their concerns to me:

"Just so you know, they probably won't get it."

"They've never heard of any of this before."

"They're going to have a hard time getting a lot of this at first."

"Even if only one thing sinks in for one kid, it'll be worth it."

As previously mentioned, these expectations can affect the youths' conception of self and what they believe, or expect, they're capable of, but can also have significant effects on how others interact with and think about them. Although the officers intended these comments to be either forewarnings or encouragements to me, the comments held damaging implications for how I would perceive and interact with the youth.

In Rosenthal's research, he has found that teachers' expectations of their students can have "potential long-lasting effects" on students' ability to enjoy school, receive constructive feedback, and perform well. The experiments "provide further evidence that one person's expectations of another's behavior may come to serve as a self-fulfilling prophecy" (Rosenthal

213). In other words, if we hold certain expectations of a given population, we will treat them as if those expectations are true, and those expectations will then affect the ways in which we interact. In an interview with Rosenthal and Carol Dweck on *This American Life,* Dweck states that these expectations hold true for all kinds of situations: "you may be standing farther away from someone you have lower expectations for. You may not be making as much eye contact…we're usually not aware of how we are conveying our expectations to other people. But it's there" (Qtd. in Glass). When we treat juvenile delinquents as irredeemable criminals, they further internalize this "truth" about themselves, and will continue to behave in the ways we expect them to, thus lessening the likelihood that we will move beyond our stereotypes.

Knowing this before beginning the Cultural Studies class, I did my best to be conscious of how I was treating the kids. I tried to take the warnings I received about their attention span, their intellectual capacity, and their lack of motivation with a grain of salt. I tried to treat them all in the same manner, and to not let these expectations affect how I treated them. I catered the curriculum to a level where kids who had never heard of the word *"ethnocentrism"* could understand it. But, I also didn't want to refrain from challenging them simply because I was told they weren't interested in being challenged. Despite my efforts, I found it nearly impossible to not let these expectations and cultural attitudes towards juvenile offenders affect the ways in which I interacted with them. Looking past cultural stereotypes became especially challenging when the kids had already internalized them, and met, or seemingly fulfilled, each stereotype I had been trying to resist.

I walked in tonight with the final lesson planned. I'd spent nine weeks on East Unit. We'd covered a lot. Kids came and went, but Brennan and Amy had been there almost the entire time.

Most had been there for at least a few weeks. The lesson I had planned was a wrap-up of everything we'd talked about. I wanted to see what stuck out to them the most; I wanted to share what had shocked me and made me think differently. I was really excited to see them.

We walked in and were told we'd be on West Unit tonight. My stomach dropped a bit. Really? When I had a review of the last ten weeks planned for East Unit, and now we have to make something up for the first time West Unit's ever heard of any of this? My mind was running all over the place. My first time teaching the Cultural Studies class, eleven weeks earlier, I was on West Unit. It was difficult to connect with those kids. So difficult, in fact, that I requested to be on East Unit for the next ten weeks, for the trial run of the program. It was easy to sit down and play cards with the kids on West, but it was seemingly impossible to get them to take anything educational seriously.

As older boys, who are more "sophisticated" in the system, they appeared much more jaded than the younger kids on East Unit. Many of them are about to turn 18; if they get arrested again, they'll go to County Jail. If they don't break out of the cycle of recidivism, they could end up in prison for the rest of their lives. They're aware of this, and many don't appear to care. They're much more into the 'delinquent' identity than the others on East Unit. The performance is palpable; I could feel their gaze on me, giving each other glances as I turned to write something on the board. I wished I owned looser fitting pants.

When the officers were walking the two new volunteers and me back to West Unit, I tried to formulate in my head what we were going to do. How were we supposed to fill an hour? How were we going to adapt the final lesson into the first lesson? I looked at my two friends with completely false enthusiasm: "build the plane as it flies, right?"

Then came the warning I already had in my head: "they're not going to do as well as East has

been doing with this program."

They're known for being somewhat disrespectful, disinterested, and jaded. I tried so hard

to look past every stereotypical characteristic of a kid on West Unit. But as some rolled their

eyes, tapped their wrist like they had a watch and I was a waste of time, and looked me up and

down as I turned around from the white board, I grew more and more disappointed. I'm

disappointed that they didn't break the stereotypes I've been conditioned to hold of them and am

actively trying to resist. I'm disappointed that I couldn't see past the front they had up. I'm

disappointed that the officers were no help in breaking these stereotypes either; they played into

the performance just as much as the kids did. Have I been too naïve about this whole thing? Are

these kids beyond repair like everyone says? Tonight was so discouraging.

Victims. Not Criminals.

As previously discussed, our deep-seated, culturally-derived attitudes about incarceration

prompt us to label any youth in a juvenile detention center as a "criminal". In doing this, we

ignore the myriad of societal structures that may lead to a child's incarceration:

> Many young children in America are imperiled by abuse, neglect, domestic and
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> community violence, and poverty. Without effective intervention and help, these
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> children suffer, struggle, and fall into despair and hopelessness. Some young teens
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> cannot manage the emotional, social, and psychological challenges of adolescence
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> and eventually engage in destructive and violent behavior. Sadly, many…have
>
> ignored the crisis and dysfunction that creates child delinquency. ("Children In
>
> Prison")

We talked about Nature vs. Nurture tonight, trying to answer the question: what makes us who we are? What role might our upbringing have in who we are? Are there parts of us that we can't control? We wrote down things that are 'nature' and things that are 'nurture'. I asked which one they think is most influential in determining our identities. They all agreed that it was nurture. I asked if there's anything in the 'nature' side that they thought was more important. I asked what about our personalities might be genetic, versus traits we learned from our families and upbringing.

Alexa said, "Well, alcoholism is genetic. Everyone in my family is an alcoholic."

The rest of them nodded their heads.

"Both of my parents and all twelve of my aunts and uncles. Everyone except my older sister."

They agreed that there are things about us that we can't control as easily. Some of us have a genetic bent toward addiction. They continually astound me; they understand so much. Despite being labeled nothing more than a 'bad kid,' there's some part of them, even if it's tiny, that trusts they're not. They know that there are parts of their lives that have kept them coming back to Juvenile Hall for all of their teenage years. They know that the odds are against them. And they can talk about it more intelligently than some of my friends. No wonder I like them so much.

When we decide that someone is a "criminal," we neglect the fact that they're also, in some cases more so, victims of situations that they cannot control. Children who have been abused or neglected are nine times more likely to be involved in criminal activity (Harlow). If a

child lives in a neighborhood where there are "high levels of poverty [or] crime," they are far

more likely to be involved in a serious crime at some point in their future (Shader 7). One out of

three black men between the age of 18 and 30 is in prison, in jail, on probation, or on parole

(Stevenson). Social, socioeconomic, and racial factors all have an effect on a child's risk for

delinquency. As Hartnett states, adolescents who "should be learning how to read, write, and

speak more clearly, are instead indoctrinated into a world of thuggish violence," through what

amounts to no fault of their own, "and then eventually they get busted and end up in the

slammer, wondering what the hell went so wrong" (Hartnett 69).

 Bryan Stevenson, founder of the Equal Justice Initiative, claims that, as a society, "we are

unwilling to commit ourselves to a process of truth and reconciliation," and really, fully,

honestly address the systemic injustices and risk factors that lead to incarceration (Stevenson).

By contrast, we are willing to meticulously examine the risk factors in other areas of society; for

instance, in medicine. The medical community has worked to understand the risk factors for

cancer and develop preventative measures. When one suffers from any medical condition, the

doctor will ask for the patient's medical history and work to identify any connections that may

have led to such a condition (Shader 1). The primary understanding is that there are risk factors,

often out of one's own control, that make one more susceptible to certain diseases. After

discovering these risk factors, we develop preventative measures to avoid disease.

 We have failed to apply this logical paradigm to the criminal justice system. The risk

factors are evident: people who have been abused, people from poor neighborhoods, and people

of color living in a historically, and currently, racist society; they of course have a higher risk of

being involved in criminal activity. Instead of taking preventative measures and intervening in

at-risk communities, it is much easier for members of the public to insulate themselves from the

issue at hand. Rather than considering the web of connections that lead up to one's incarceration, our current system places full culpability on the "criminal," without giving any consideration to how their prior victimization may have led to criminal activity. This practice is indicative of a system that prioritizes punishment over rehabilitation and prevention; again, a system that has proven to be quite ineffective.

Personal + Academic Writing

Historically, academic writing has been judged by standards of objectivity and formality, keeping a safe distance between observer and observed in order to prevent bias. However, a rich understanding of systems of oppression cannot come through "safe distance." The 2.3 million incarcerated people in the United States are arguably the most invisible population in the country. Indeed, it is surely no coincidence that correctional facilities are basically inaccessible to the average citizen. For this reason, social justice scholarship is vitally important for any productive resistance against the harmful practices in the criminal justice system. The "safe distance" between the community outside and the incarcerated populations inside is so drastic that it necessitates, I argue, the immediate, physical presence of the scholar. The "radical posture" of the ethnographer occurs when she or he "stops regarding the oppressed as an abstract category and sees them as persons," and chooses to fight "at their side" (Freire 49). To possess any depth or potency, social justice scholarship requires a commitment "to the present moment" and to "seeking solidarity and fulfillment with others" (Harnett 87).

The cultural notion that academic writing must be separate from personal writing also limits the possibility for academic writing to be used for political change. Scholarship and activism need not be separate. There is a saliency, a poignancy, an emotional immediacy, in

ethnographic accounts that cannot be achieved through other methods; and personal narratives

can move both the writer and the reader toward action. For prison-related research, scholarly

reflexivity illustrates that "prisoners are not numbers. They are living, breathing people with

personalities, characteristics, likes, and dislikes. In the current penal climate…this simple

observation is all too often forgotten" (Bosworth 251). Hartnett writes of relationships formed

through teaching in prison and the depth of understanding that follows:

> It [is] building community with students who have been raped and both mentally
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> and physically abused. And so teaching in prison takes you into a kaleidoscopic
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> world of difference and pain. Despite their hardships, students come to class eager
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> to learn and (sometimes) hopeful about their futures; encountering that kind of
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> tenacity means entering prisons to teach also entails walking into a world of
>
> wonder. (Hartnett 336)

As ethnographic accounts can open opportunities for "testimonials on the horrors of

incarceration and the possibilities of redemption", the physical presence of the researcher in the

prison, seeing eye-to-eye with their subjects of study, is vital (Hartnett, Wood, and McCann

332). Personal stories of incarceration allow the average citizen to see into a system that has been

largely veiled from the public eye. For the researcher, interpersonal interaction with 'subjects'

creates the "world of wonder" that transcends understanding *what is* into understanding *what*

could be.

Joyful Commitment

   To enter into *their* space, to meet them *where they're at*, and to, simply, *show up*: this is

what I hoped to accomplish through volunteering at Juvenile Hall. As I navigated the space, took

note of patterns, and discussed concepts in Cultural Studies with the kids, I adopted the role of a

"student among students" (Freire 75). My physical presence in the facility, and my relationships

with its residents, are what helped me to gain a wider understanding of the juvenile justice

system. I have been their student just as much as they have been mine. By being there, I am in no

way *saving* them; I am not giving without receiving. We are creating a meaningful space for

discussion *together*, "in part by humbly probing the question each week: Who are you? Why are

you here?" (Hartnett 336).

I try to tell them again and again that we're talking about things I'm learning in school,

that I don't have all the answers, that I'm learning just as much as they are, and that I'm no

more intelligent than they are. I ask a lot of questions and try not to talk so much. I realize that

I've grown increasingly attached to them; East Unit is a sacred space for me. Every week I come

home and write, I think about my friends: five minutes up the road, locked in a sterile, uninviting

room, walking around with their hands behind their backs. It all just seems like such a bad idea.

My intent in fostering a space for co-created discussion was to minimize myself as an

authority figure—they have enough of those already—and instead "stand shoulder-to-shoulder"

with them (Hartnett 335). Learning *together* created meaningful, empowering relationships,

which then became the gateway to Hartnett's concept of "joyful commitment."

Friday was my first time seeing one of my kids on the outs. I was walking downtown and

a car passed me. A girl stuck her head—half her body, really—out the window and yelled

"HEY!!!". I wasn't really paying attention, and just waved my arm and said something back,

expecting one of my friends. I looked up and it was Alexa. I felt everything swell inside me as I waved and yelled again, this time knowing who she was, and tried not to fall over. She waved back, laughing, and stuck her head back in the car and rolled up the window. Alexa just got out a couple of weeks ago. She's one that I was real bummed about (sadly and hopefully) not seeing again. I was struck that she recognized me from a car, and even more so that she wanted to say hi. It would have been easy to just keep driving; I would have never known. I tried to hold my shit together and keep walking. Mostly I couldn't. I was so happy for her. A big, dumb smile stretches across my face every time I think about it, but I can't get everything else out of my mind. Everything the kids had said about life on the outs started to flood back: difficulty in school, unhelpful friends, falling back into the same routines, difficult family situations. There's so much working against her. God, I hope she makes it.

I hope I've been doing this right. None of it feels like 'fieldwork.' I thought 'research' would feel more…researchy. I just sit down with kids I really like, pay attention, and try to write my way through understanding what the hell just happened. I look forward to it every week. Is this what it feels like to realize the magnitude of your nerd-ness for something? Like I'm getting away with something? I'm so new to nerding. This is starting to feel like a coming-of-age novel. How cliché and 22 years old of me.

Relationships are the cornerstone of working from a space of '"joyful commitment"; they allow the researcher to find joy and humor in the heaviness of the work she or he does. Joyful commitment to an area of scholarship and to social justice is a vehicle to transcend the hollow production of academic work that is often "irrelevant for genuinely important problems" (Taylor). For me, a fraction of the 2.3 million incarcerated people in the nation now have faces,

names, and personalities. Relationships with kids in San Luis Obispo County Juvenile Hall have given me a keen sense of responsibility to continue working to understand our criminal justice system. Personal stories will (hopefully) provoke an uneasiness in my reader and myself that reconstructs our awareness of what *is* and what *could be*. In knowing these stories, I, like Conquergood claims, have started to understand how I am "entangled within world systems of oppression and exploitation" and can make decisions to stand "against domination, but not outside, above, or beyond it" ("Between Rigor and Relevance" 85). An understanding of the ways one contributes to another's oppression creates the opportunity for productive action against it. The motivation to stand shoulder-to-shoulder with the oppressed, fighting in the trenches against domination, will only come from personal relationships.

Conclusion

This ethnographic account has explored a selection of concepts that came alive in my volunteering at the San Luis Obispo County Juvenile Hall. I have illustrated the cultural performances that allowed me to learn my role within the organization and the ways in which I would come to navigate the space. I have written through the complexity of identity formation among incarcerated youth and the ways in which teaching the Cultural Studies class exposed the stark realities of difference and privilege. Building from Foucault's foundational work on bodily discipline, I detailed the ways in which the mechanization of juvenile bodies is representative of our inherently damaging penal system. I then delved into discussion of the popular stereotypes of juvenile offenders, and how these are perpetuated through a lack of community interaction and harmful media representations. Rosenthal's research affirmed how receiving words of warning from officers led me to adopt debilitating expectations of the kids and unconsciously alter how I

treated them. Lastly, a discussion of the challenges that many juvenile offenders face proposed how "victim" may often be a more appropriate title than "criminal".

Weaving my personal experiences with theoretical concepts to understand a larger issue is characteristic of new ethnographic methods and part of the call—from scholars like Conquergood, Frey, Hartnett, and PCARE—for more engaged communication scholarship, brought to life through personal relationships and purposed with the pursuit of social justice. Through responding to an undeniable "pull of the soul," I wrote to make sense of the senseless— if only for myself—and to share the personal stories of incarcerated youth (Goodall 127). My work in Juvenile Hall has illuminated the necessity of Hartnett's joyful commitment in any social justice-oriented scholarship. Burnout is a very real danger for anyone working to eliminate systems of oppression; what protects such scholar-activists is the relationships built from prolonged interaction, as well as the "glimmers of redemption" that spur from standing and fighting alongside those they study (Hartnett).

San Luis Obispo County Juvenile Hall is rich with opportunity for more social justice-oriented communication scholarship, and it is but one small facility in a nation with 79,165 youth held in 2,259 facilities (Hockenberry). The juvenile justice system, and the United States penal system at large, is, for the most part, veiled from the public eye. These systems have gone largely unnoticed and unquestioned, and mass incarceration has occurred with minimal public discussion from the communication discipline. This deficiency is unfortunate, given the "potential contributions that communication knowledge can make" to exposing the flaws in the U.S. criminal justice system and collaborating with other disciplines and entities on potential solutions (Frey and Carragee 3). Given time constraints on this project, I am in no position for a conclusion. This personal conundrum still very much exists, and I expect it to continue until we,

as a society, start to question if there is a better way: if locking children behind bars might not be the best way to teach them right from wrong, if punishment might not be as effective as rehabilitation, and if confronting our cultural missteps might be more beneficial than keeping them hidden. The way is open; we need only walk into it.

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