ARE THE[SE] KIDS ALRIGHT?:
STATES OF INCARCERATION AND SUBORDINATION
IN THE LEARNING AND LIVED EXPERIENCES OF YOUTH
IN A JUVENILE DETENTION FACILITY

by

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the dynamics and implications of trans-spatial subordination in/across the lived experiences of six incarcerated participant youths in a secure custody facility for juveniles in Louisiana. Five male teenagers (four African American, one White) and one female teenager (African American) discuss the limitations, harassment, and confinement in various aspects of their lives and speak about the impact on their expectations for the future.

The author employs several methodologies in order to develop a multimedia, multifaceted representation of their lives. The narratives elicited through interviews provide the bulk of the data as the participants describe this perpetual subordination. The photographs, resulting from the implementation of a visual ethnographic methodology, provide images that serve as catalysts for introspection and analysis of significance in the mundane and routine, particularly as they apply to the carceral facilities, structures, and policies themselves. Film viewing and discussion offer an array of depictions of youth and criminality to which the youths responded, granting a simultaneous peek at how these marginalized youths viewed themselves and how mainstream media productions depict them.
After a particularly provoking viewing session of an animated film, the author expands the preliminary boundaries of the work beyond cells and the walls of the prison. The expanding focus examines subordinating elements in their lives with their families and in their neighbourhoods. The challenges, harassment, and obstacles experienced in their communities continued in their schools and during their encounters with law enforcement, the latter of which often led directly to imprisonment. Finally, the youths reflected on the confining subordination that existed in the facilities, the product of the combination of: their discomfort with the surveillant structure, their perceived arbitrariness of privilege, and the lack of any relevant education. They also identified opportunities for voicing their opinions and recognized the relative safety of this facility compared to others.

As the participants conceptualized their futures and articulated their relatively narrow and often ambiguous hopes, the sobering influence of such perpetual subordination is evident. The author closes with a discussion of the study’s importance to future research with marginalized youth in a society of increasing surveillance and security as well as implications for teacher education.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The first acknowledgments are for my participants: Katie, Jay, Rider, Fisher, Nemo, and Bambam. These six youths invested much in the power of their own narratives and their consistent pleas to be heard underscored the importance they saw in their stories and became a sort of chorus to the dissertation. That they trusted me with their stories and their words, after assigning so much significance to them, is a humbling compliment and a responsibility I was proud to have. I can only hope that I’ve done their stories, feelings, and fears some justice, something they’d experienced little of in their lives, at least those parts which they shared with me.

I would also like to thank the administration and staff at the Kakau Parish Juvenile Detention Center (KPJDC) for their willingness to open their doors to an outsider, allowing for a documented glimpse of a juvenile space that is not often available publicly. The site was generally accommodating from the initial proposal, partly the result of the facility’s attempts to distinguish itself as more progressive than the other, more traditional and maligned juvenile prisons in the state. I am perhaps most grateful that they allowed me to put cameras in the hands of these six youths so that they might chronicle, through their photographs, their lives in prison spaces. The resulting images add a dynamic to the research that would not have been possible otherwise.

My advisor, Dr. Karyn Cooper, has been an invaluable resource and staunch ally in all phases of my work. She has given of her time and self, even though she had much more significant responsibilities of her own to deal with. Unfailingly, she listened as I pitched one idea after another, balancing critique and caution with approbation and
encouragement. There were also those times when she became close friend and confidant when I struggled—conceptually and practically. I cannot express my thanks enough for all that she has done for and meant to me. I hope that she reads this manuscript with pride, and feels that she’s presided over success.

Thanks also to Dr. Henry Giroux who has been a mentor and sounding board for my thoughts, questions, and ideas. After meeting Henry in December of 2008, on the verge of my research, he has humored me with his time and his own thoughts as I struggled with articulating difficulties as my work grew increasingly sociological and cultural. There was no other academic whose work was more influential and inspiring to me than Henry and having the ability to tell him that in person as well as have him answer my questions is one of those precious, serendipitous opportunities that remain with people their entire lives.

The rest of my committee was likewise supportive. Dr. Peter Trifonas has proved to be a supporter from my early days at OISE/UT. Finding myself in Toronto after having left Louisiana on the morning Hurricane Katrina hit in 2005, I struggled with the coverage of the storm, the well-being of my family, and my own place with respect to it all. Peter’s course was a haven for me, my disgust and my doubts concerning media coverage that also gave me a deconstructive framework for working through those tensions. He was, and remains, a supportive colleague whom I admire and respect and to whom I am grateful for his continued advocacy for the work that I produce.

Thanks, as well, to Dr. Diane Conrad whose advice and career I respect tremendously. As the foremost authority in education working with incarcerated teens in Canada, I approached her early for any help, insight, or resources she might have to offer.
She is a pioneer in this field and I’m awed by her consistent accommodation of help when asked.

My family back in Louisiana (father Michael, mother Maxine, sister Michelle, brother Chris, and sister Tracy) has been consistently supportive, enduring our separation knowing that I am pursuing something personally important and to which I have been firmly committed. It’s been easy for none of us, especially with my mother’s increasingly debilitating dementia taking its toll. The frantic and at times merciless march to the dissertation was assuaged by the comfort and confidence in the sacrifices of my father and sister, Michelle, at home with my mother, caring for her and enabling me to focus my efforts on this work. The completion of this dissertation owes a tremendous debt to them both, one I am not sure I’ll ever be able to repay. My thanks are, I grant, poor. And my mother shaped me, morally, ethically, and educationally. I regret that she won’t fully understand how her influence has culminated in my work in the coming pages, but she knew what I intended when I started and I’ll satisfy myself with the pride I am certain she would have right now.

Finally, thanks to my wife, Martha. Our relationship has withstood cross-country moves, immigration departments in the United States and Canada, and now—a dissertation. Of these, I am not sure which has been most strenuous. But the last few years, working full time as I attended school full time, she supported me, in every way that word can be understood. The tempestuous completion of this dissertation has not always, or perhaps often, been easy. But her strength, commitment, and grace never failed and are absolutely things I could not have done without. Our relationship has only become stronger and the sacrifices she has made for this pursuit I will likely never fully
understand or appreciate. Once again, I find that my thanks are poor. And in the last two years, our family has grown by one. Our daughter, Cecily, has been a constant source of inspiration and joy. I am a better husband and father because of her. And I believe this dissertation is a better work because of the influence of all of the people that have been a part of my life during its conception and execution.

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DEDICATION

For the women in my life.

For my mother, Maxine, who taught and nurtured me,
For my wife, Martha, who supports and encourages me,
For my daughter, Cecily, who inspires and exhilarates me.
Just listen to what the kids say. Because we the future, ya feel me? We just need somebody to talk to and get our life stories out there.

- Jay, research participant and repeat offender

Critical reflection on practice is a requirement of the relationship between theory and practice. Otherwise theory becomes simply, “blah, blah, blah” and practice, pure activism.

- Paulo Friere (2001, p. 30)
Chapter 1: Introduction

Narrative Beginning(s)

The first time I visited the Kakau Parish Detention Center, it was as a guest of my mother, the junior high classroom teacher for the facility. We stood before a set of double doors, staring at our reflections in the single-way glass panels, as we waited for the permissive, tandem sounds of the security buzzer and door-lock granting us entrance. After being buzzed in, I was greeted by the sight of a high school-aged inmate, probably not much younger than I was at the time, cleaning up one of the recreation rooms, his back to me and a wall of reinforced security glass separating the two of us.

Now, time also separates me—more than a decade—from that first visit and my current work and research for this dissertation at the same detention facility.

In that time, I earned my Masters in Education from Louisiana State University and taught in both Louisiana and Texas, in junior high and high school classrooms. In those years, when I reflected on my own practice and pedagogy, I often thought about the stories and lessons my mother shared with me from her years working in a primary inner city school and then in this detention center. She’d tell us stories about these kids and their lives as we were growing up. She would weave their lives and hardships into her lectures any time we complained about food we didn’t care for, clothes that didn’t sport a brand name label, or a house that was smaller than those of our friends at school. As often as I’d hear about these students of hers, one might think I would’ve gained a bit of understanding about them and their lives. I’d always imagined that I did, too. What I

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1 A pseudonym for this juvenile detention facility, site of my research
realized, though, years later as I worked in the Center with these kids, as the research went on, was how little I understood and how much I’d assumed.

So, there I stood before the same reflective double doors years later. I was alone; my mother was forced to leave the classroom once her Alzheimer’s and accompanying dementia progressed to the stage where she was an educational liability in the eyes of the school district’s supervisors. Nevertheless, I felt as though I was there as her guest once more. It was her work at the Center and relationship with the administration and staff that helped me gain access to the facilities, something neither often nor easily done in the state of Louisiana. In some cases, it also helped my relationships with the incarcerated youths who were recidivists and remembered her in the preceding years, as they came and went, in and out of the facility.

Further, just as I still felt I was permitted on the site as guest of my mother, I likewise felt the pane of security glass, a metaphor for the distance I perceived between myself and the incarcerated youths and the Center’s staff and security. It was that feeling, that impression which had the most initial, visceral impact on me and shaped my intentions with this dissertation. I am neither social worker nor clinician; I have no diagnostic experience or authority. Throughout, I wrestled with my role as researcher, an issue I visit more explicitly in my methodology chapter and conclusion. During those, and other, struggles I realized that my work should be one that attempts an understanding. In order to affect that attempt at better understanding, I looked to David Smith’s (1999, 2010) work on hermeneutics as a theoretical foundation. In Pedagon, Smith cites the Hughes Brothers film, Menace II Society, as a vehicle for interpretation and understanding, contrasting his life in “a small, fairly isolated country town in southern
Alberta, Canada” with the “far away ghetto of Compton, Los Angeles” and can watch this unsettling film “in the comfort of my living room” concluding that what he teaches is not “somehow value-free or not connected to the structures and politics of power in my own society.” Further, we must be mindful to what extent such films can distort. Asante Jr. reminds us that such hood films “are supposed to capture and define what it means to be Black. Take, for example, the fictional film *Menace II Society* whose official tagline was ‘This is truth. This is what’s real,’ ” (2008, p. 25) but often reinforce stereotypes through their production. Media deconstruction can help ameliorate those stereotypes, through using cultural studies and interrogating the messages of power and hierarchy as a means to deconstruct.

I’ve also looked at the power that media possesses in forming attitudes and creating ideas and assumptions about others, using research on film, media, and cultural studies to further that theoretical framework. Methodologically, there were several approaches I employed to combat the “crisis of representation” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). In Chapter 5, I describe my methodology and examine how this struggle for understanding incorporates film viewing sessions with the juveniles and discussion of the films (e.g. Buckingham, 1993; Smith, 1999), the photographs of their incarcerated spaces taken by the participants (e.g. Pink, 2007), and narrative elicitation through formal interviews and informal observations and conversations. The ensuing Chapters (6 through 10) develop from the photographs, film, and interviews and offer a glimpse of the subordination and limited agency of my 6 participants.

**Organizational Overview**
Initially my dissertation was going to focus on media engagement and responses to juvenile criminalization with my participants in the physical context of the facility’s high school classroom. After hearing especially surprising and thought-provoking responses to viewing a cartoon, *Powerpuff Girls* (Castricone, 2002), by some of the juveniles, I realized that I would have to broaden the scope, context, and horizon of my work to more fully account for the subordinating aspect of these youths’ lives. As Giroux points out, “More and more working-class and middle-class youth and poor youth of colour either find themselves in a world . . . that dehumanizes and criminalizes their behavior in multiple sites, extending from the home and school to the criminal justice system” (2009, p.72); thus, my work needed to account for these “multiple sites.” During a discussion with Giroux, he expressed his belief for the importance of studying these marginalized youth, particularly the incarcerated, because there is an “absence of social responsibility” constituting a “crisis” (personal communication, March 10, 2011). Luttrell echoes this when she explains her purpose in *Pregnant Bodies, Fertile Minds*, “I am also writing against what I view as a vanishing sense of social responsibility and commitment to children’s entitlement to nurturance, including education” (2003, p. 176).

Reflecting on the jarring *Powerpuff Girls* session, I can think of no more fitting verb than “provoke” to describe the manner in which this animated film, despite its superficial innocuousness, provoked the participants’ comments. In turn, I was provoked. And the hope is that this dissertation, likewise, provokes. For as Smith (2010) says, invoking Gadamer, “Truth never reveals itself on its own terms, it has to be provoked” and this work is my attempt at a “careful orchestration” of that provocation. Bauman refers to this as “critical pedagogy . . . sharpening its critical edge” in order to
make “society feel guilty” and to start “stirring things up” (Bauman, 2005, p. 14) through “stirring human consciousness” (Giroux, 2009, p. 66). This discovery and transition in my work is more fully discussed in Chapter 4.

The remaining chapters up to the Conclusion examine the trans-spatial subordination in the participants’ lived experience in which they identified subordinating elements that they felt limited their agency, autonomy, freedom, and opportunity. In highlighting their narratives, however, I also had to resist the temptation and allure of focusing on the more sensationalistic passages and look “beyond the sensationalized aspects and pathologized discourse of incarcerated juvenile lives and [investigate] the way a host of societal factors contribute to their subordination” (Dimitriadis, 2008) and I adjusted my approach to more explicitly examine this “host of societal factors.” That approach begins in Chapter 6, as the participants discuss their families, communities, and neighbourhoods and the degree to which the difficulties here impacted their lives and contributed to their apparent delinquency. Each of the youths attended a public school in his/her neighbourhood; these schools were not exempt from the subordination the participants experienced in their communities and I discuss these in Chapter 7. Some of my participants had significant and harassing experiences on their school campuses with law enforcement, an increasing presence on school campuses (Giroux, 2009). These encounters serve as a transition from the subjugation experienced at school to that which was experienced with police officers, the focus of Chapter 8. Chapter 9 takes a closer look at the detention facility itself, a capitulation, in many ways, of the subordination these youths experienced at home, in school, and with cops. The facility serves as a microcontext of harassment, privilege, and opportunity for the larger macrocontext
examined in the preceding chapters. In Chapter 9, the discussion ranges from the facilities at large and the individual cells for the youths, the most symbolic and concrete (literally and figuratively) representation of their paths through the juvenile justice system. The subordination that these youths experienced and were subjected to was perpetual; it transcended the space of the detention facility or their individual cells. I would call this oppressive and recursive phenomena trans-spatial subordination. Rios, meanwhile, identified a similar transcendence with the youths in his study, calling it “multispatial criminalization” and describing it as such:

They experienced the effects of criminalization in other significant spaces: the street, school, business, and even their homes. They compared encounters with the police, probation officers, and prosecutors with interactions they had with school administrators and teachers who placed them in detention rooms . . . For the youth, their experience in each of these institutional settings had one thing in common: being treated as a criminal. (2007, p. 21)

The result of such recursive subordination contributed to the circumscription of hopes and aspirations, a topic addressed in Chapter 10 as I discuss goals and objectives, in near and far terms with the youths. Such subordination impacts their future prospects as “more and more working-class and middle-class youth and poor youth of colour . . . find themselves in a world with vastly diminishing opportunities” (Giroux, 2009, p. 72). The final chapter concludes the dissertation, as I reflect on both the work’s impact on me as well as implications for teachers, especially preservice educators, and the social contexts of their once and future classrooms.

**Topic Importance and Contemporary Relevance**

I am convinced of the importance and urgency of this type of work, with these (at times exponentially) marginalized kids and I situate this contribution to the research/field at the intersection of three areas of society, media, and education. In his latest work on
the politics of disposability, Henry Giroux (2009) turns his focus and criticism to the
prison institution and the impact on the nation’s youth, especially the minority and/or
poor. He advocates an urgency in the study of and advocacy for the lives of incarcerated
youth because “the carceral apparatuses of the twenty-first century may emerge in a
distinctive and perhaps even more ruthless form than its predecessors” (Giroux, 2009, p.
79) and that we are talking about more “than a politics of fear, discipline, and control: a
mode of governance is emerging that deprives many young people of a childhood and
forecloses for them the possibility of a meaningful future” (Giroux 2009, p. 80).
Additionally, the current work of Michelle Fine and her Polling for Justice initiative
seeks to examine the intersection of education and the law enforcement and criminal
justice systems; at a symposium delivered in Toronto she emphasized how important
work with incarcerated juveniles was becoming and urged for that work to begin
immediately in Canada (Fine, 2009). Professor Diane Conrad, of the University of
Alberta who has worked extensively with incarcerated youth, in an e-mail, told me that
“Indeed this work [in juvenile facilities] is much needed in Canada . . . be prepared for a
battle” (personal communication, February 9, 2009). By featuring the voices of the
incarcerated and their narratives, taking rhetorical queues from Macleod’s work with the
Hallway Hangers and the Brothers (2008) and Luttrell’s study on pregnant teens (2003), I
hope to expand the discursive horizons on the issue of juvenile confinement and how that
extends to lived spheres beyond and outside their individual cells.

Furthermore, Giroux asks, “What is the purpose of higher education and its
faculties in light of the current assaults on young people?” and answers the question by
asserting that “There are too few commentaries about how the media, schools, and other
educational sites in the culture provide the ideas, values, and ideologies that legitimate the conditions that enable young people to become either commodified, criminalized, or made disposable.” (2009, p. xii)

The voices of Giroux, Fine, and Conrad and other academics aren’t the only ones whose perspectives validate this study. The voices of the juveniles, themselves, also seek an audience. Each and every participant, in the course of our discussions, made specific reference to his/her wanting to be heard; the publication of their thoughts and words was the greatest incentive for their participation.

Listen . . .

As researchers and educators, we need to be critically aware of the worlds that shape our perspectives and the lives of our students. I agree with Giroux that we need to work together to explain “how a culture of domestic militarization, with its policies of containment and brutalization, has been able to develop and gain consent from so many people in the United States during the last three decades . . .” so that we might “rethink the possibility of a new mode of politics and empowering forms of education” (2009, p. 106).

An effective catalyst for this reconceptualization are the narratives and perspectives of the incarcerated youth. If there was a single, dominant refrain in the following narratives we kept returning to, it was their desire to be heard. Jay’s quote opening this dissertation is emblematic of a sentiment all of my participants shared, explicitly. The implication was that up to this point, their voices were ignored and they felt silenced, and the research to this point has largely exhibited this. Two other participants, Rider and Bambam, based their conception of privilege on whether or not a
staff member took the time to come to their cells to talk to them and listen. Nemo, meanwhile, wanted to participate in this study “to tell people this is not no place to come.” When I asked Fisher why he wanted to participate, without hesitation he said, “Because I feel like some people don’t really get to see how it is up in here and understand some of the stuff that we go through” and he wanted people to know. When asked what change she thought was most important in her experiences with law enforcement and trials, Katie emphatically pointed out that she thinks people need to ask the kids why they made their choice, to listen. Unfortunately, they “never say, ‘Hey, what’s the kid gotta say, you know?’ ” After this experience, I feel much like Tilley did, following her dissertation work with female inmates, when she confessed, “I am now able to question stereotypical images of female offenders from a more informed stance rather than from my initial place of ignorance” (1998, p. 26). And the most effective means of challenging that ignorance was simply following the advice of my participants: listen. It’s an invitation that Smith (1999) also extends:

From now on I have to be more open, more willing to listen. My self-understanding as a teacher has gone through a kind of identity crisis, and I realize that the crisis is not mine alone, not just a personal problem. It is a crisis I share with all people (p. 51-52).

This is, as Giroux and Conrad and Fine have stressed, a “crisis” and, like the crisis of Smith’s self-understanding, one that I share with all people. And from here, I share it with my readers.
Chapter 2: Abstract Contexts

Comment on the State of Juvenile Incarceration

I see no changes all I see is racist faces
misplaced hate makes disgrace to races
I wonder what it takes to make this
one better place, let's erase the wasted
Take the evil out the people they'll be acting right . . .
It ain't a secret don't conceal the fact
the penitentiary's packed, and it's filled with Blacks
- Tupac Shakur “Changes”

Three of my participants talked about the importance of music in their lives when we discussed media expression and response; two of them performed raps for me that they’d composed while being locked up; one of them specifically invoked the social consciousness of Tupac Shakur’s lyrics. Smith believes that “what you’re investigating holds an insight into how it should be investigated” (2010); thus, if I am to investigate/interrogate media and culture, then the use of media and cultural artifacts in the discussion follows. Hip hop lyrics, from rappers that the participants identified or from raps they performed for me themselves, will appear. The photographs also contribute to the media presence of my work. Discussions of cinematic representations abound throughout, in each chapter. In the song opening this chapter, “Changes,” Tupac notes the racial discrepancies that exist in incarceration rates between White prisoners and minority inmates in the United States (a similar analog with regard to aboriginal youth exists in Canada), a phenomenon that was apparent in the Kakau Parish Detention Facility where the Black youths far outnumbered the White.

In examining the literature on juvenile incarceration, racial disparities were magnified and echoed the perpetuated metonymical media representations and
association of minorities with crime (Giroux, 1997). These media representations are important considerations because these stereotypes are “important to understanding Whites’ reactions to minorities, particularly in the administration of criminal and juvenile justice” (Bridges & Steen, 1998, p. 555). If the young offenders are black and viewed along very stereotypical lines, they “are seen as more villainous and therefore as deserving of more severe penalties” (Peterson & Hagan, 1984, p. 67). Discouragingly, the numbers reflect just such a disturbing and racialized trend in the adjudication of these offenders, and this trend is not new; research that has taken place for the last forty years has revealed the manner in which Black youth are disproportionately disciplined and detained with respect to Whites (e.g. Aday 1986; Arnold 1971; Bishop and Frazier 1988; Bortner, 1982; Bortner and Reed 1985; Carter and Wilkins 1970; Fagan, Slaughter, and Hartstone, 1987; Foley, 2001; McCarthy and Smith, 1986; McFadden, Marsh, Price, and Hwang, 1992; Parent, Leiter, Kennedy, Livens, Wentworth, & Wilcox, S., 1994; Skiba, Michael, Nardo, & Peterson, 2002; Thornton and Trent, 1988; Wu, Pink, Crain, and Moles, 1982). In order to situate the context regionally I looked for studies that took place in Louisiana, the same state as my own work, and found one study that took place a quarter-century ago, providing some comparable context for my work in Kakau Parish. Even though the research is dated from the early 1980s, the results and findings coincide with contemporary observations about youths booked at the Detention Center. Clarence Thornton and William Trent examined the disciplinary actions (specifically, suspensions) of grades six through twelve students in East Baton Rouge Parish (note: parishes in Louisiana are comparable to counties in Canadian provinces and virtually all other states
in the U.S.) and discovered that black students received 73% of the suspensions despite the fact that they made up 45% of the surveyed student population (1988, p. 486).

The larger complexion of incarceration in the United States is likewise disproportionately sobering, with more than one in every 100 adults now confined in an American jail or prison. The United States also leads the globe in total incarceration numbers (2.3 million), higher than nations such as China (1.5 million) and Russia (890,000), nations that ranked second and third, respectively. The U.S. also tops the list of incarceration rates, relative to population, imprisoning its citizens with more frequency than any other country, much higher than other industrialized countries (e.g. eight times higher than Germany) (Warren, 2008, p. 5). And one out of every nine Black males, aged 20 to 34, is incarcerated while only one out of every 106 White males is behind bars (Warren, 2008, p. 6). And four of the five male participants (one White, three African American) in my study had been expelled from school or had dropped out and the prospects of their recidivism, as adults, rise: “By 2000, high school dropouts of either race were being locked up three times as often as they had been two decades before . . . [and] by the time they reach their mid-thirties, a full 60 percent of Black high school dropouts are now prisoners or ex-cons” (DeParle, 2007, section 2, para. 4).

Juvenile statistics are likewise discouraging. Each year, law enforcement officers make over 2 million juvenile arrests and more than one and a half million juvenile cases are adjudicated. The result is 400,000 youth cycled through detention centers and 100,000 confined in secure facilities on a given day (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2009). And of these 100,000 “delinquents held in public and private juvenile detention, correctional, and shelter facilities, 86.5% are young men from ethnic minorities” (Foley,
In a study conducted ten years prior that looked at years 1987 through to 1991, researchers found that the “proportion of minorities among confined juveniles rose from 53 to 63 percent, with the biggest increase among Blacks (37 percent to 44 percent)” (Parent, Leiter, Kennedy, Livens, Wentworth, & Wilcox, S., 1994, p. 10). In the most recent research on U.S. incarceration, the Bureau of Justice Statistics found that the rate of imprisonment (for prisoners with sentences of more than one year) was nearly seven times higher for African Americans, aged 18-19, when compared to Whites (relative to their own racial demographic) (Sabol & West, 2010) and one-third of African American males, age 20 – 29, are incarcerated, on probation, or on parole (Paige, 2004).

Even for drug offenses of comparable degrees, racial discrepancies persist:

White, Black and Hispanic teens are about equally likely to use drugs, but Black juveniles are twice as likely as their White peers to be arrested for drug offenses and more than five times as likely to be in secure residential placement [emphasis added] for drug offenses. (Childrens Defense Fund, 2008, p. 9).

And some incarcerated juveniles receive sentences that are far harsher than they deserve, as our youth are turned into criminals and, in some cases, commodified as part of a transactional exchange in which their incarceration becomes a profit for private juvenile incarceration facilities. Two judges in Lazerne County, Pennsylvania, Judge Mark A. Ciavarella, Jr. and Judge Michael T. Conahan, were both found guilty of accepting more than two and a half million dollars worth of kickbacks in exchange for sentencing juveniles to privately-run facilities (Urbina, 2009). The association with and assignation of dollar values to incarcerated youth also factors into public discourse in the cost analyses of imprisonment. During one of my visits to Louisiana for research, there
was a great deal of newsworthy, bureaucratic hand-wringing dominating headlines at the state level by Governor Bobby Jindal’s office because the state expenditure on incarcerated juveniles exceeded six figures, at $115,000 US per year, and this number was inciting the wrath of state taxpayers, many of whom were indignant that so much money was being “wasted” on kids in jail.

Even the status of “juvenile” is not without problems, since all 50 states have laws on the books that allow juvenile offenders to be tried as adults. An expansive study undertaken in the state of California examined the problems and frequency with which this transfer happens as well as the racial complexion to the crisis (Males & Macallair, 2000). Among the findings was the astounding discovery that “Hispanic, African American, and Asian/other youth accounted for 95% of the cases [emphasis added] where youth were found ‘unfit’ for juvenile court and transferred to adult court in 1996” (Males & Macallier, 2000, p. 5) which means that African American “juveniles” were 12 times more likely than White youth to be declared “unfit” for juvenile proceedings and transferred to the adult system. The authors examined whether or not the actual nature of the crimes contributed to the transfer, suggesting that perhaps the more violent the crime, the greater the risk for adult transfer and African American youth might be committing more violent crimes. Their research found that even along similar offenses, racial disparities continued and African American youth were more likely, even when committing the same offenses, to be adjudicated as adults than their White counterparts in Los Angeles. Statewide, Males and Macallier determined that:

Whites comprised 45%, Hispanics 35%, African Americans 8%, and Asians, Native Americans, and other races 12% of California’s population ages 10-17 in 1996-98. Compared to their proportion of the population and of juvenile offenders, minority youth are overrepresented at all stages of the juvenile justice
system. Further, White youth representation decreased at every stage of the system (arrests, transfers to adult court, sentencing, and imprisonment) while minority youth representation increased. (2000, pp. 8-9).

The problems are not just California’s and Louisiana’s. Similar studies, in other states in other areas of the U.S., have yielded the same results. A study in Florida found that the harshest disposition available was administered more often for minority youth than for White youth when all other considerations (e.g. age, gender, seriousness of offense and priors) were comparable (Bishop & Frazier, 1990). They determined that in Florida, “race is a far more pervasive influence in processing than much previous research has indicated. Blacks are more likely to be recommended for formal processing, referred to court, adjudicated delinquent, and given harsher dispositions than comparable White offenders” (Bishop & Frazier, 1988, p. 258). Hamparian and Leiber’s (1997) authoritative research found that these trends existed elsewhere in the United States; in Ohio, for example, minority youth accounted for 14.3% of the general population but constituted 30% and 43% of juvenile arrests and imprisonment respectively, while in Texas minorities comprised 50% of the population but 80% of those in “secured corrections” including an alarming 100% of juveniles held in adult facilities.

While it is clear that the discipline and juvenile incarceration is “disproportionately experienced by black males, among students who misbehave” (McCord, Widom, & Crowell, 2001, p. 86), the reasons and factors for the disparity is not always clear, overt, or simple. In New York, for example, there are parts of the city described as “a police state for young men, women and children who happen to be Black or Hispanic” where “they are routinely stopped, searched, harassed, intimidated, humiliated and, in many cases, arrested for no good reason” (Hebert, 2007a), a
harassment “for no good reason” that each of my participants felt in some encounters with law enforcement officers. Unfortunately, these experiences reflected the research; these youth live in a time when “punitive crime control measures have drastically increased, [and] youth of colour experience this hypercriminalization not only from criminal justice institutions but also from non-criminal justice structures traditionally intended to nurture: the school, the family, and the community center . . .” (Giroux, 2009, p. 62) resulting in a network that “has formed to manage, control, and incapacitate Black and Latino youth.”

Many of the studies address the numbers but too few investigate the matter on a more qualitative basis, exploring small-scale, individual cases through narrative. One study did analyze and deconstruct narratives, but those were the reports of the probation officers (Bridges & Steen, 1998) and not from the youths; in Canada, meanwhile, Conrad communicated that “there’s next to no work being done” (personal communication, February 9, 2009).

While the numbers in the United States are troubling, so are the incarceration rates in Canada. Prior to the Youth Criminal Justice Act in 2003, Canada’s “youth incarceration rate [was] higher in Canada than other western countries, including the U.S.” and the “youth incarceration rate [was] higher than the adult incarceration rate in Canada” (Statistics Canada, 2000). Despite regional and contextual differences, there are studies that look at the American and Canadian trends, together. Two such articles discussed the United States and Canada jointly but there was no real distinction made between the two and references to Canada were little more than cursory in their specificity (Hoge, 2002; Schwalbe, Fraser, Day, & Cooley, 2006). Also, Latimer and Foss examined the
representation of aboriginal youths in Canadian juvenile incarceration systems and found that there was significant over-representation of these youths (2005). They determined that race/ethnicity did play a part in their sentencing as aboriginal youths received stiffer disciplinary penalties than Whites who committed the same level of transgressions (Latimer & Foss, 2005). Statistics Canada determined that “aboriginal youth continue to be highly represented in corrections” representing only 6% of the youth in the general population but in 2008-09, they represented “27% of youth remanded, 36% of youth admitted to sentenced custody, and 24% of youth admitted to probation” (Statistics Canada, 2010). Evidence also reveals that other minorities as well endure racial discrimination in the juvenile penal system despite the Young Offenders Act, which was created to provide a framework for equal treatment under the law. A thorough study by Schissel (1993) found that race played a role in the unfair decisions surrounding a juvenile’s arrest, plea, adjudication, and sentencing.

Without interrogation, criticism, and analysis of these practices we risk the perpetuation of a “youth control complex . . . an ecology of interlinked institutional arrangements that manages and controls the everyday lives of inner-city youth of colour” which has “a devastating grip on the lives of many impoverished male youth of colour” and continues to promote the “hypercriminalization of Black and Latino youth” (Rios, 2007, p.30). Further, the voices of these youth aren’t as present in the literature as they should be, their perspectives as important as those of judges (e.g. Gahr, 2001) and parole officers (e.g. Ruhren, 1992). The youth themselves sense the same silencing, prompting one youth to tell me, quite frankly, as we were out in the “yard” one day: “Don’t nobody give a shit about us. The POs [parole officers] don’t give a shit; all they care about is a
fucking paycheck. And nobody else cares or gives a shit what we think—ain’t nobody askin’ us shit.”

This dissertation is me (perhaps awkwardly at times) attempting to give a shit. These youth are experiencing growing incarceration rates as well as other intrusive, criminalizing measures such as “drug tests, surveillance cameras, invasive monitoring, home visits by probation officers, security forces in schools, and a host of other . . . monitoring practices” (Giroux, 2009, p. 89) and these intrusions are legitimated, at least in part, through media representations and coverage and whose perpetuation leads to social acceptance and permissiveness of these practices.

**Media Representations and Attitudinal Impact**

[Mis]conceptions of these kids in today’s media-saturated environment are troubling; it’s critical that we begin to investigate the manner in which media informs us and, vice versa, how we inform those stereotypes through our complicity in the perpetuation of these stereotypes in mainstream forms (e.g. nightly broadcast news, cinematic depictions, mass marketed/big label hip hop), thereby contributing to such representation of these youth. Fuller recognized that “for some people, particularly those who have not had direct contact with a particular group, media portrayals can provide their only socialization; it does not matter if the portrayals are misleading or distorted” (2005, p. 267). There’s little incentive to transcend this lack of contact because this “distance affords spectators a space in which they need not do many things, including engage the complexities, contradictions, and tragic qualities of punishment nor reflect upon their own role in its formation” (Brown, 2009, p. 193). Gilliam, Valentino, and Beckmann concluded that “in modern society the media are perhaps the most pervasive
of [impersonal influences]” and “are likely to play a significant role in the development of racial attitudes” (2002, p. 757) despite the fact that this “fausse consciousness in Sartre’s sense, that television produces, which results in attitudes toward the real world that are unrealistic, illusionary, and even harmful” (Esslin, 1982, p. 72). Addressing this influential pervasiveness contributed to my selection of a visual ethnographic method as part of an attempt to change the questions and assumptions about judgment into questions of interest about these youths. After all, “the art of ethnography [is] taking something that is perceived as ‘strange’ and making it ‘familiar’ to audiences who might otherwise cast aspersions on groups unlike themselves” (Luttrell, 2003, p. 6).

Television depictions of carceral settings contribute not only to a viewer’s association with or understanding of prisons, but also an acceptance with their existence and the practices within. Gina Dent writes that

The history of visuality linked to the prison is also a main reinforcement of the institution of the prison as a naturalized part of our social landscape. The history of film has always been wedded to the representation of incarceration. Thomas Edison’s first films (dating back to the 1901 reenactment presented as newsreel, Execution of Czolgosz with Panorama of Auburn Prison) included footage of the darkest recesses of the prison. Thus, the prison is wedded to our experience of visuality, creating also a sense of its permanence as an institution. (qtd. in Davis, 2003, p. 17-18).

The result constitutes, according to Dent, a “genre” with identifiable traits the product of a “deeply structured cinematic legacy with specific tendencies, long-standing conventions and its own cinematic vocabulary” (Brown, 2009, p. 58). Angela Davis believes that this media-mediated familiarity goes even further, claiming that mainstream examples within this prison genre (citing, for example, the popular HBO series Oz) manages “to persuade many viewers that they know exactly what goes on in male maximum-security prisons” (2003, p. 18). Michelle Brown described the popular culture influences on attitudes
towards and conceptions of prisons: “In American culture, citizens are much more likely to screen the prison rather than visit it. They are consequently familiar with imprisonment not through its institutional practice but its cultural representation”. (2009, p. 56) Such impressions lead to and validate ideologies informed by the marketed idea that prisons are necessary for combating criminality and crucial to our democracy.

Angela Davis expounds on this evolution:

[The prison in] U.S. society has evolved into that of a default solution to the major social problems of our times . . . [I]mprisonment is the punitive solution to a whole range of social problems that are not being addressed by those social institutions that might help people lead better, more satisfying lives. This is the logic of what has been called the imprisonment binge: Instead of building housing, throw the homeless in prison. Instead of developing the educational system, throw the illiterate in prison. (2005, pp. 40-41).

Even the increasingly popular documentary-style television programs, which seemingly portray truth, contribute to this social dystopia because “these programs privilege the notion of a normalized, empirical reality, often beginning with the stark statistics of prison demographics and expansion” (Brown, 2009, p. 74).

The phenomenon is not restricted, however, to fictional portrayals of crime and prison. In nightly news reports on crime, Whites are statistically and significantly more likely to appear as officers or role models while Blacks are more likely to appear as perpetrators and criminals (Chiricos & Eschholz, 2002) and the result is another association of Blacks as criminals, contributing to the distortion of “viewers’ perceptions of Blacks as being dangerous in our society” (Dixon & Linz, 2000). On television reports and movie screens an atmosphere of danger is perpetuated. And this “new mood in political and social life in the United States [is] a mood articulated in suburban fear of encirclement by difference . . . The dangerous inner city and the world ‘outside’ are
brought into the suburban home through television” (McCarthy, Rodriguez, Meecham, David, Wilson-Brown, Godina, Supryia, & Buendia, 1997, p. 232-333). The result of such influences is seen in representation and policy:

In the era of racially targeted “law-and-order” policies and their sociological pendant, racially skewed mass imprisonment, the reigning public image of the criminal is not just that of “a monstruum—a being whose features are inherently different from ours,” but that of a Black monster, as young African American men from the “inner city” have come to personify the explosive mix of moral degeneracy and mayhem. The conflation of Blackness and crime in collective representation and government policy (the other side of this equation being the conflation of Blackness and welfare) thus re-activates “race” by giving a legitimate outlet to the expression of anti-Black animus in the form of the public vituperation of criminals and prisoners. (Wacquant, 2002)

Because of the ubiquity of these metonymical associations, viewers cannot be expected to “to manifest empathy and altruism after exposure to media portrayals of African Americans” (Rada, 2000, p. 707).

When the subject of criminality generally intersects with that of youth offenders specifically, the same attitudes persist:

Black and Latino youth appear metonymically in the discourse of problems . . . You watch network evening news and you can predict when Black and Brown bodies will enter and when they will exit. The overwhelming metaphor of crime and violence saturates the dominant gaze on the inner city . . . (McCarthy et al, 1997, p. 236-237).

This “gaze” needs adjustment; we need to “[problematize] the notion of a one-way interaction between the subject and the purported object of the fantasy or gaze” as well as “[problematize] various fantasies of White (feminist or non-feminist) avowed identification (and implicit dis-identification) with ‘racial’ or ‘subaltern others’ ” (Jay, 1993, p. 272). If there is no re-adjustment, society risks perpetuating the inequities on depictions, associations, and policies because:
There is no question that sophomoric presentations on the overrepresentation of African American and Latino populations in secure correctional facilities have resulted in dangerous public policy that builds on the perception that people of colour perpetuate most crimes. In 1996, most of the individuals arrested for a violent criminal act were White (54.6 percent), but African American juveniles accounted for virtually all increases in the rate of detention between 1985 and 1994. (Williams & Sapp-Grant, 2007, p. 329)

As a result of these media depictions of criminality in such films as Dangerous Minds (Bruckheimer & Simpson, 1995), Freedom Writers (DeVito, Shamberg & Sher, 2007), and Menace II Society (Moreton, 1993), research indicates that public opinion of urban youth of colour is, generally, not favorable. Ginwright and Cammarota note that much of the public has been “led to believe that young people create more problems than possibilities” which leads to “public policy that tends to view them as delinquents, criminals, and the cause of general civic problems.” Offenders, “particularly urban youth of colour, are a menace to society and therefore need to be controlled and contained” (2002, p. 82) and, in the case of my participants, detained, because “the manner in which juvenile crime has been handled by the media displays the sharp contrast between how White youth and youth of colour are perceived by the American public” (Williams & Sapp-Grant, 2007, p. 331).

As a result, how do these juveniles view themselves in light of these media representations? How do their experiences inform their ideas about what they see on television? How might their perspectives complicate our conceptions about mainstream media representations? My research highlights an attitudinal impact that these depictions have on outsiders, but how do the juveniles themselves engage with and respond/react to that media? In order to both ascertain the influence the media has and generate tools with which the effects of media can be combated or embraced accordingly, these youths need
to have their voices acknowledged, re-visiting the critical calls to action and advocacy of Giroux, Fine, and Conrad.

Viewers of such media portrayals are at risk of being made to “wear glasses that force [them] to see the world divided up in certain ways [into] groups that can be mobilized, and that mobilization makes it possible for them to convince everyone else that they exist” (Bourdieu, 2001, p. 249). Distinctions drawn across such broad, uninformed cultural lines leads to Whites feeling “more distant from Blacks as a group” (Gilliam et al, 2002, p. 755) a distance that is due to media influences because “when exposed to negative racial stereotypes in the news, White respondents living in overwhelmingly White neighbourhoods expressed more negative stereotypic evaluations of Blacks, felt less close to Blacks as a group” (Gilliam et al, 2002, p. 771).

The cumulative impact of criminal and penal iconography results from the multiplicity of messages and media forms that contribute to social knowledge for those people whose only familiarity with crime and penal punishment is mediated through secondary sources.

**Media, Truth, and Reality**

The pervasive power of the media also has moralistic implications as it defines boundaries of acceptance/intolerance for the rest of society: “Under the rule of monopolistic media--themselves the mere instruments of economic and political power--a mentality is created for which right and wrong, true and false are predefined wherever they affect the vital interests of the society.” (Marcuse, 1965) The productive aspects of media create the impression of truth, a “truthness.” Once images are accompanied by utterance, “television attains meaning” (Corner, 1999, p. 41) and claims are concurrently
verified. The process of production, since it happens behind the scenes and often doesn’t factor into the opinions of the viewers. Nevertheless, this step is a judgment on the part of editors and producers even though viewers are not aware. Stuart Hall notes that the broadcast media produces “representations and images of the social world, provide and selectively construct social knowledge, and order a complex world by making it seem natural or by distilling complex meanings” (Hall qtd in Fuller, 2005, p. 280). Such a dichotomous outlook “abolishes the complexity of human acts, it gives them the simplicity of essences . . . it organizes a world which is without contradictions because it is without depth, a world wide open and wallowing in the evident, it establishes a blissful clarity” (Barthes, 1973, p. 156). This distillation robs the event of its viscerality and it becomes not truth, but commentary disguised as truth; the objective, then, becomes quite subjective. Simply put, the broadcast news media cannot be counted on to accurately depict actuality; the best we can seem to hope for is what Baudrillard called the “reality effect” (Baudrillard, 1983/1981, p. 3). Viewers need to be aware of the productive aspect of media portrayals and “should understand how this is done or made, how it is fabricated, who has the power, who chooses, what are the relations of forces, etc” (Derrida & Steigler, 2002, p. 137-38).

Another manner in which media portrayals achieve “truthness” is through the declaration of an event as “based on a true story” or the reporting of “live” events. What media consumers need to recognize is that “this ‘live’ is not an absolute “live,” but only a live effect [un effet de direct], an allegation of ‘live.’ ” This “allegation” is once more a result of conscious production:

Whatever the apparent immediacy of the transmission or broadcast, it negotiates with choices, with framing, with selectivity. In a fraction of a second, CNN, for
example, intervenes to select, censor, frame, filter the so-called “live” or “direct” image. To say nothing of programming decisions, whether with regard to what is “shown” or who “shows” or manipulates it. What is “transmitted” “live” on a television channel is produced before being transmitted. The “image” is not a faithful and integral reproduction of what it is thought to reproduce. (Derrida & Steigler, 2002, p. 40)

And yet, this image becomes part of the “public transcript” (Scott, 1990). The disconnect here between the “image” and the actual (akin to Macleod’s micro and macro, Smith’s explicit and implicit, Reissman’s general and particular, and Scott’s hidden and public transcripts) can be subsumed under Denzin’s (2003) qualitative umbrella term: “crisis of representation.” This impression of “truth” in representation in mainstream media sources appealed to two of my participants, Jay and Bambam, as they discussed how important a factor “based on a true story” or “live” footage, on channels such as truTV (whose slogan is “Not Reality: Actuality!”) was for them in evaluating media that they wanted to watch and/or felt represented their lives (discussed further in later chapters).

The importance for media deconstruction for cultural “criticalists” (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1997) grows in importance as the daily consumption of media increases. The call for “television criticism” (Esslin, 1982, p. 112), then, is imperative if society is to move beyond an unquestioning acceptance of depictions they see in film and on television. But that’s certainly not an easy task, because this consumption takes place within a framework that has been meticulously designed and becomes similar to Baudrillard’s code (1988), a collection of signs or social ideals that attain significance or meaning through practice. We are not meant to be aware of these, for

The ultimate aim of news production [is] to erase the mechanistic construction and to make the ‘Real’ appear as if it reveals itself. Thus, not only is the perceived and symbolic “reality” of the “world in news” sacrificed to the mechanistic artificiality of the news production process . . . but that very process
is then magically dissolved in the transmission of that event. (Hemmingway, 2004, p. 418)

The “real” as it pertains to lower-class, Black neighbourhoods is not actually real but rather an embodiment of Baudrillard’s hyperreal or “hyperreel” because it does not “distinguish between imitation and reality” resulting in a “ghetto then, as most experience it through mass media, [that] doesn’t exist either. It, too, is reel. Wrenched out of its sociopolitical and racial injustice context, it is transformed into an urban playground” (Asante Jr., 2008, p. 27).

**Media and the Redemptive Fantasy**

There are also other media depictions such as *Dangerous Minds* and the more recent *Freedom Writers*, both of which were “based on a true story” and suggested to me by the staff and administration at the detention center for one of my viewing sessions because they were “films of empowerment.” The justification for these recommendations, as I was told, was in their attempt to represent student minority youth and education in a more favorable light, but even these films can create more problems than they solve because of their redemptive fantasy nature. While these films:

Seem to be “about” the histories of oppressed groups, reposition Christian-born Whites as the stars of the show. In good-White narratives, the political struggles of oppressed groups serve as a dramatic backdrop to the central moral action in which the good White guy battles both the bad White guys and his own conscience . . . Even if the racialized Other is doomed, at least we know that the White guy tried—and that he became a better person in the process. (Thompson, 2003, p. 17)

Both of the suggested films fit this genre and followed the redemptive prescription, a genre not limited to “teacher films,” incidentally, but also includes such mainstream films, with big budgets and A-list celebrities, as Kevin Costner’s 7-Oscar-winning *Dances with Wolves* (Costner, Ebert, & Wilson, 1990); Steven Speilberg’s
Award-winning and critically acclaimed *Amistad* (Allen, Spielberg, & Wilson, 1997); Nicolas Cage’s opus dedicated to the Navajo code-talkers in WW2, *Windtalkers* (Chang, Graham-Rice, Rosenzweig, & Woo, 2002); and Tom Cruise’s portrayal of Nathan Algren, fictional drunk-Confederate-soldier-turned-Samurai-hero in *The Last Samurai* (Cruise, Engelman, Herskovitz, Kroopf, Wagner, & Zwick, 2003), a film ostensibly “Inspired by [the] True Events” of the Satsuma Rebellion in Japan’s 19th century. This genre also complicates and implicates my own position within this study, and the reason my sustained, though periodic in this dissertation, self-interrogation is so important (a strand throughout this dissertation, detailed in Chapter 11). I felt, throughout my research, as Conrad did with her Aboriginal participants, a “white researcher/outsider” (2006a, p. 441), seeking to study these incarcerated students and investigate ways in which they can achieve some degree of agency. I asked myself how I am any different, given that I do not stand outside the dominant culture? I don’t know enough at this point to ascertain that I am or am not, I confess. But I think the investigation and reflection have been a challenging and enlightening process and perhaps might provide an example for other teachers, including preservice (with implications for teacher education), from the dominant culture to study their own perceptions. Across the country most preservice teachers “come from Caucasian, middle- to upper-class backgrounds and attended private schools” and, as a result, need to “reflect in schooling situations that may differ substantially from their own schooling experiences, calling into question the moral and ethical perspectives in their role as teacher” (Samaras & Wilson, 1998, p. 20). Further, not only do we need to change the way in which we view these youth, but as Whites, we need to “decenter Whiteness from programs for social change.” (Thompson, 2003, p. 17).
Such conceptual change requires the same degree of interrogation and criticality as media analysis and deconstruction.

I am also not advocating, however, a romanticized, uncritical view of these youths; my intent is to explore more than it is to circumscribe, fitting these students into my own preconceived categories. We do, however, need to “illuminate the situation of contemporary youth [with] a critical theory of youth that articulates positive, negative, and ambiguous aspects in their current situation. The situation of youth is analyzed in terms of both hopes and prospects and problems and challenges” (Kellner, 2008, p. 62). This work articulates the positive and negative of my participants, addressing White’s tough question regarding youth offenders: to what extent are they “victims” and/or “villains” (2000, p. 174) and to what extent is this a “continuous” (Smith, 2010) relationship? The victimization or vilification of these incarcerated students introduces a dynamic aspect to the perception of convicted youth and to distinguish between the two is not easily done as my participants admitted their guilt in crimes ranging from petty to serious, misdemeanor to felonious. But the scope of this work stretches beyond their victimization and vilification, buttressing the discussion with the “hopes and prospects” the youth shared with me in Chapter 10.

**Cultural Studies**

The participant narratives were an invitation to dialogue; their experiences held a great deal of potential for complicating the stereotypical images of class, race, and juvenile “delinquency.”. Within the larger scope of media analysis and study in this postmodern age, focus on cultural studies has evolved into an important component in understanding the influences on students, preservice teachers, teachers and society. I
believe, as does Kellner, that cultural studies is “an interdisciplinary, transdisciplinary, and counterdisciplinary approach that can be used to address a wide range of cultural phenomena from advertising to political narratives” (2008, p. 10), answering an urgent need “for media literacy and critique, learning to read newspapers, TV news, advertisements, TV shows, and the like – just as one learns to read books” (2008, p. 10). The saturation and varied forms of media requires a literacy as our students “experience the cornucopia of 100-plus channels in living colour transmitted by cable and satellite television, a wealth of videocassettes, remote control and wireless devices, massively multiplayer video games, DVDs, BitTorrent, MySpace, and YouTube” (Kellner, 2008, p. 72). This contemporary and “potent mass media concoction of pop music, film, television, and digital content” now serve as the “the primary transmitters of values and culture . . . produced and disseminated through a small handful of multinational corporations (Asante, Jr., 2008, p. 18)

The work of cultural studies theorists examines the sociocultural implications of media ubiquity and prevalence. Stuart Hall (1980), for example, traces the evolution of a mass communication criticalism that focuses on what he calls an “ideological power” which is, as he defines it, “the power to signify events in a particular way” (Hall, 1982, p. 69). Broadcast media, in particular, plays a most influential role in the way that images are conveyed and truth is mediated, but is not understood properly. Viewers of this visual discourse need to understand that the medium is “naturalized” and not “naturalistic” (Hall, 1982, p. 75). This distinction is absolutely key; even though it might appear as a “discourse of fact, statement, and description,” the depictions have had an intervention of “coding, selection, [and] arrangement” (Hall, 1982, p. 75-76). Critical
media literacy and cultural studies can provide a means and a language for moving beyond the appearance of fact, the naturalistic, and into the production of fact, the naturalization. Such analysis is important because “the discourse of the public transcript is a decidedly lopsided discussion . . . a highly partisan and partial narrative. It is designed to be impressive, to affirm and naturalize the power of dominant elites” (Scott, 1990, p. 18) and media deconstruction can begin to reveal what Scott refers to as the “hidden transcript” which is a “subordinate discourse in the presence of the dominant is a public transcript . . . that takes place ‘offstage’ ” (1990, p. 4) and the interviews with my participant youth speaks to such a discourse, though it cannot quite be considered thoroughly “offstage.” Rather, I use the term to refer to the interviews and photographs as a “site for nonhegemonic, contrapuntal, dissident, subversive discourse” (Scott, 1990, p. 25).

Some cultural (particularly deterministic) theories, however, have some shortcomings in examining the fluidity of what Smith calls a “symbiotic, continuous and highly political” (Smith, 2010) relationship between the micro (lives of these marginalized youth in my study) and the macro (their larger environments and experiences as well as the larger society, generally). Ethnographic methods can help researchers navigate this fluidity and examine this continuous nature, since it is a “social art form, a way of moving back and forth between art and science, spontaneity and discipline, aesthetic and social awareness” (Luttrell, 2003, p. 165). Jay Macleod also provides a model for this approach in *Ain’t No Makin’ It: Aspirations and Attainment in a Low Income Neighbourhood*. He points to the inability of cultural studies to situate the micro “processes” within the macro “forces:”
Class-based institutional mechanisms set limits on mobility, thereby ensuring social reproduction, while cultural innovations can be at once both functional and dysfunctional for social reproduction – fits the ethnographic data. By ignoring the cultural level of analysis, determinist theories cannot account for the distinctive cultural practices and attitudes of lower-class individuals; nor can these theories explain how such practices can contribute to and threaten social reproduction. Culturalist theories seldom manage to connect the micro processes they document to the macro forces that constrain working class individuals. (Macleod, 2008, p. 152)

This dissertation attempts to make that “connection” for these participants more transparent and accessible, eliciting those “microprocesses” and situating them within the impact of the “macroforces” that contribute to a perpetual, recurring subordination in the lives of my participant youth.

Theoretical Context and Framework

In order to explore such a fluidly continuous connection, I worked through the design of the interviews and the methodology as well as the identification of themes in the transcription process, relying on the work of David Smith, whose recent interview (2010) focused on the hermeneutic relationship between the explicit and implicit of what is said and what can also be understood (or attempted to be understood) as well as emphasizing the relationship between the macro and the micro. In the course of this dissertation, the various iterations and impacts of subordination—what Dimitriadis (2008) calls the “host of societal factors” that contribute to “subordination”—has become a focus for exploring the relationships of the juvenile’s micronarratives as I situate them within a larger spectrum of the other participants’ micronarratives, creating a more macronarrative.

Even the nature of the explicit and implicit has a superior/subordinating relationship, underscoring the subordinating treatment that these youths routinely
experienced and explained in their narratives. Smith believes that “the relationship between the implicate and the explicate is not just continuous, but it’s also highly political. In a sense the explicate order is always subordinate to the implicate order” (2010). The narratives that make up the core of this dissertation, then, become a catalyst for analysis and understanding; their personal stories need to be examined dynamically across one another’s, as well as socially situated within the larger macronarrative, interpreting “between the specific and the general, the micro and the macro” (Smith, 1999, p. 30). As social scientists, after all, our “ultimate goals” are “to learn about substance, make theoretical claims through method, and learn about the general from the particular” (Reissman, 1993, p. 70).

Ultimately though, I firmly and optimistically believe that there is a chance, if it can be seized, to develop a culture of reception, which might lead to another way of formulating the question of the cultural exception. The real problem here is to rethink or think otherwise about what Hollywood and broadcast news has up to this point done in the domain of the culture industry, to which cinema and television belong. For what it has done, it has done in accordance with a “reifying schema, and by opposing production to consumption, that is to say: by putting analysis on one side (production) and synthesis on the other (consumption). Technology is giving us the chance to modify this relation” (Derrida & Steigler, 2002, p. 162-163). I would include within that technological referent, photographic technology, in the hands of my participants, as just such a means for “modifying this relation.”

The critically pedagogical, as Giroux describes, informed both my conceptualization of the work as well as my methodological considerations, as I
attempted to work with the youth and examine how they question authority while “[providing] them with the tools to make judgments freed from ‘the hierarchies of [official] knowledge . . .’ Such pedagogical tools are necessary for what Jacques Ranciere calls taking up a critical position that challenges the dogma of common sense.” (2009, p. 128). Such “pedagogical tools” inform the aspects of cultural studies most relevant to the research I have conducted and framed as well as the aspect of media culture that has the most influential bearing on my work, wrestling with representations of incarcerated or troubled/troubling youth focuses on television and film. My work extends this theoretical perspective through its multimedia methodology and qualitative approach in a socioeducational context.

Giroux speaks to this elevation of hidden dialogues to academic discourse by citing Said’s concept of worldliness urging “academics and students to accept the demands of ‘worldliness,’ which include ‘lifting complex ideas into the public space.’” (Said, 2000, p. 106) Giroux continues, stating that “worldliness suggests that we must not be afraid of controversy and that we must make connections that are otherwise hidden.” (Giroux, 2009, p. 139) The connection that Giroux identifies is precisely the same type of critical connection that I seek to make in this dissertation, connecting the photographs and lived experiences of these marginalized, incarcerated youth to the larger society and contextualizing their experience with social realities and with one another. Such contextualization is achievable through what Ortner calls “documentary ethnography” in which the ethnographer seeks to find connections and explore the relationships between the “relatively small life-worlds” of participants and how “large-scale forces work themselves out in everyday life” (Ortner, 1993, pp. 412-413). Such a
connection between the small and individualized and large and more societal evokes Scott’s “hidden and public transcripts,” Smith’s “implicit and explicit,” “general and specific,” and Smith and Macleod’s “micro and macro” while addressing Derrida’s disconnect between representation and lived reality (of incarcerated juveniles, in this instance).

**Research Issues and Questions**

Stated explicitly, my topics and questions are:

- The narrative, personal histories of the incarcerated juveniles (How do they view themselves? How do they feel they were administered by the system? How often and in what forms do they experience subordination? Where do they identify personal choice, agency, and hope? How do their experiences relate to one another and what larger commentary might it imply?)

- The dominant narrative perpetuated by cultural artifacts of media production (How does media define these youth? What are the potential stereotypes driving knowledge of them?)

- The autobiographical (How do I situate myself as a working-class White male, a product of the dominant culture? How is it any different from the typical redemptive fantasy, if at all?)

- Possibilities for teacher education (What can my research and methodologies contribute to the preservice dialogue? Echoing the sentiments of Friere that opened this proposal, how can my work provide a mode of pedagogical consideration between theory and practice and what are the implications for teacher education?)
Chapter 3: Concrete Contexts

In organizing and discussing the narratives and establishing the methodologies for this study, I was mindful of Richardson’s “Five Criteria” for qualitative research. In this chapter, on the physical descriptions of the facilities in which my research took place and my participants lived while incarcerated, I considered Richardson’s concept of “aesthetic merit” in an effort to make my work satisfying and complex while avoiding boredom for the reader (2000). I believe establishing a detailed context of this site, which had become so familiar to me and to my participants, contributes to two other important criteria for Richardson: impact and the expression of reality (2000). Thus, I describe each major area of the facility so that a more easily conceivable context as a setting for the interviews, themes, and discussions in the following chapters are more dynamic, working toward a “story-truth” (O’Brien, 1998, p. 179) with my participants in a way that “makes the stomach believe.”

As part of my project, I employed a visual ethnographic methodology and gave each participant a camera and asked him/her to photograph different parts of the facility. Some of the images elicited a great deal of discussion, while others did not. The more evocative images are featured throughout the dissertation, in various chapters. From the images that the students did not identify quite as significant or discuss at length, I selected some to add to this chapter’s description of the physical setting in an attempt to provide a context that isn’t merely informed by my own words and observations, but also by those places the students photographed as well.
Kakau Parish Juvenile Detention Facilities

"A squat grey building of only thirty-four stories."
- Aldous Huxley, Brave New World

While the opening lines of Huxley's hyper-surveilled futuristic dystopia might seem an easy reference, these were, nevertheless, the lines that came into my head the first time I pulled off the two-lane road onto the path marked “Private Property” that led to the detention facilities complex. Huxley distinguishes the “CENTRAL LONDON HATCHERY AND CONDITIONING CENTRE” (Huxley, [1932] 1998, p. 3) from the rest of the towering buildings through its squatness in much the same way that this detention center’s squatness separates it from its own surroundings; but rather than being dwarfed by the skyscrapers of tomorrow, the center’s squatness is highlighted in relief by trees and forest along its entire north side.

A scant half mile from large shopping centers featuring a Wal-Mart, a Toys R Us, and a Home Depot sits a large plot of parish-owned rurality in Louisiana. On this property sits the Kakau Parish Juvenile Detention Center (hereafter referred to KPJDC), temporary home to thirty detained minors, male and female. The complex is a series of connected single-level buildings circumscribed by an abandoned lot to the west, forest to the north, an open field to the east and the road to the south. For the rest of this dissertation, there will be references to people, places, and procedures in this facility; this chapter serves as an introduction to and map for the Center.

**Lobby.** The first room to greet visitors to the Center is the lobby. Below is an excerpt from my field notes as I waited in the lobby on my first day as a capital-R “Researcher:”
The lobby has a few rows of seats, three seats per row, each row arranged perpendicularly from the doors. The décor is sparse and utilitarian, but there is a warm mural painted on the wall around the quote: “100 years from now nobody will care how much you made . . . but that you mattered in the life of a child.” In one corner sits a receptionist cocooned in a protective cubicle. At the front of the lobby is a long wall; the bottom half is wooden panels and the top half is frosted glass with a horizontal shelf separating the two as you might see in a bank. Next to this wall, there is a display of brochures. Two from the US Air Force. Three from state universities. One from the Marines. Two from The Career Game. Grabbed a couple copies of the Career Game brochures—ostensibly a tool to help students decide, after a series of questions, which “colour” they were and which careers associated with said colour they might consider.

The presence of Armed Forces materials was evident in other areas of the facility, as well as in the minds of the youths when we discussed their options and futures. Behind that wall facing visitors as they enter, is a series of interconnected offices and cubicles for the administrative staff of the facility. In order to access these offices, visitors have to be cleared and buzzed in; after going through the doorway, there’s a small labyrinth of walls and cubicles that lead toward the back of the Center, where the secure facilities, housing the youth, are located. There’s another security door leading to the detention area, a buzz and click from the control room’s operator grants access. Immediately beyond this door is a smaller reception area, meant for the detention center’s secure section (as opposed to the lobby which acts as a reception area for the larger premises).

This waiting area also has direct outside access through two secure double doors, enabling visitors to bypass the front lobby area altogether. The north end of the room is the control room, encased in walls and glass, with a window allowing for communication with staff and the signing/remitting of papers for visitors. As one faces the tinted panels, there is a nurse’s office to the left and a supervisor’s office on the right. Two doors flank either side of the control room, allowing access to the recreation rooms: Rec One and Rec Two.
**Control room.** This small, darkened room warmed by the whirring and buzzing of computer equipment is the surveillance and procedural heart of the facilities. The room is not much bigger, if any, than the juveniles’ cells—approximately ten feet by ten feet—and is ensconced with one-sided security glass, allowing the staff to monitor the recreation rooms, dining area, and see down each wing of the facility housing cells.

Inside the control room, there are computers, filing cabinets, filing cubbies, paperwork, the security locking system, and two large monitors to which are fed images from all over the facilities from security cameras. The room is not large but is often the center of activity; there must always be staff monitoring the Center through the video feeds at all times and this is where security staff congregates. Periodically the room’s silence is broken by a juvenile buzzing from his/her cells to be heard, and discussions between staff—from formal to conversational, serious to jocular—are common. On the backs of two doors, each leading to the east and west wings of cells, respectively, are whiteboards with the names and status of all the rooms and their occupants.

These whiteboards display a host of names and initials, in shorthand and in various colours. When asked about the coding and colours, Karen took the time to decode the dry erase hieroglyphs. Of all the staff, Karen, a White middle-aged mother of two who had worked at the facility for years and knew my mother well, was the most helpful and supportive of my work. She fielded my questions patiently and shared stories about the kids often and enthusiastically. This time she explained that a name in green indicates a juvenile charged but not convicted; blue meant the youth has been charged and convicted and in the custody of the parish while black meant the youth has been charged and convicted but was in the custody of the state; and red were youth under
Family In Crisis (FIC) status. FIC juveniles might not be held under any criminal charges at all, but are in a situation at home that is considered a risk for the youth. Karen then explains that “Q15” next to a name means that the youth needs to be checked, visually through his/her cell window, every 15 minutes, usually because he/she is considered a self-harm risk. Youths who are participating in the site’s New Leash on Life program (described in more detail later in this chapter) have the word “Dogs” scrawled next to their name. “No Comb” designates those youths who are forbidden from having a comb in their cell (because, for example, they have turned their combs into shanks). A simple “C” is for those juveniles who are not at the facility because they have a court case. Small magnetic labels for “Lock Down” and “Cool Down” are next to a couple of names. Juveniles on lockdown are not allowed out of their cells at all for a period of time except for physical education (required by the state), the punishment resulting from any number of transgressions as decided by staff and administration. Cooldown is a less severe punishment; the youth is allowed out of the room for certain, specific things. Both of these punitive designations range can last up to a few days.

These two whiteboards display much information, at a quick glance, for the detained youth and become practiced “power of writing” and “administrative documentation” which has been “constituted as an essential part in the mechanics of discipline” (Foucault, 1995/1973, p. 189). And all of the various notes and abbreviations come to establish a procedure through which the juvenile is “described, judged, measured, compared with others” individually, so that he/she can “be trained or corrected, classified, normalized, excluded” (Foucault, 1995/1973, p. 191). According to one administrator, Mr. Carradine, the Center can house nearly forty inmates but that
number is high and they rarely see that many, but the numbers can fluctuate from one
night to the next. After a particularly active week during one visit, the enrollment had
risen from 22 to 32; such a rise can put a strain on the Center’s resources. In the time that
I was there, five trips from Toronto to Louisiana during the data collection phase over a
period of 16 months, the facility averaged between 25 and 30 inmates.

Looking out of the front of the control room, through the tinted glass, one can see
Recreation Room One to the left and Recreation Room Two to the right, separated by a
cinderblock wall, each room a mirror image of the other. Either can be reached from one
of the control room doors. Looking through the windows on the left wall of the control
room allows staff to see down the west wing while looking through the windows on the
right allows staff to see down the east wing.

**Recreation rooms.** The recreation rooms (see Figure 1) are multipurpose in
nature and are relatively large, approximately thirty feet by thirty feet. In both rooms,
there is a line of cafeteria tables where the youths eat their breakfast, lunch, and dinner
and the space does not look altogether unlike any other school cafeteria. There are also a
couple of sofas that sit before a locked cabinet which houses a Nintendo Wii video game
console system, which the juveniles have access to during their recreation periods in the
evening. There are also small, wooden tables at which sit two wooden chairs that are
most commonly used when the juveniles meet with counselors, lawyers, or parole
officers.
There are a few differences between the two rooms. At the far north end of Rec 1 is the Computer Lab, home to the Lab Kids, a designation reserved for the students who are no longer served by the school district for any reason (e.g. dropout, expulsion, GED preparation). Visual access to the room is permitted by the lab windows so it can be monitored from the control room directly, through Rec 1. Against the shared wall sits a set of shelves (see Figure 2), upon which are organized a number of different art projects in various stages of painting: masks, bird houses, small crafts, the products of the youth’s sessions with an art teacher.
Meanwhile, in Rec 2 at the north end of the room (where Rec 1’s Computer Lab was located) is an opening covered with bars, behind which is the facility’s kitchen where the juveniles’ meals are prepared each day (see Figure 3).

The rooms are largely unadorned, except for the many puzzles (see Figure 4) that have been glued and hung at the tops of the walls around the room. These puzzles, put together by the juveniles over the years, display images such as landscapes, flowers, pastoral images, and Darth Vader.
Figure 3. The cafeteria area in Rec 2. In the picture’s background is the caged window behind which is the kitchen area and through which they are served. The mural along the wall reads: “I look forward to new challenges. I am not affected by negative attitudes of others.” (Photo credit: Rider)

Each of the Recreation Rooms leads to a wing of cells; the west end of Rec 1 leads to the west wing of cells while the east side of Rec 2 leads to the east wing of cells. At the north end of Rec 2, opposite the shared wall, there’s a doorway that leads outside

Figure 4. Puzzles that can be found around the top of Rec 2. Below is Rec 2’s television which Rider points out later can be viewed from his room in O.R. (Photo credit: Fisher)
to a short, covered breezeway flanked by fencing, topped with barbed wire. Most days, for most juveniles, this covered forty foot path represents their only time spent outside, as they travel from the cell area to the gym and classroom area.

After exiting Rec 2 through the door and walking down the hall, there are two options. A turn to the left leads to the yard; continuing straight leads to two sets of security doors and the gymnasium and classrooms.

The yard and gym. The yard is a large, grassy, fenced-in area outside that I could not measure but appears to be roughly 120 yards long and 80 yards wide. The fence is at least 20 feet high, with smaller chicken wire along the bottom few feet in addition to the regular fencing (See Figure 5). During one discussion, Bambam told me that they added the chicken wire following a successful escape attempt; the smaller holes made it tougher to get a foothold on the way to an ascent to the top. At the top of the fence lining the yard was barbed wire.

Figure 5. Fencing surrounding the yard. The fence is topped with barbed wire and the bottom reinforced with smaller-holed fencing. (Photo credit: Katie)
On the eastern side of the yard are the dog kennels which house the rescued dogs which the juveniles work with as part of the New Leash on Life program. The program is used at other facilities in the United States and is described by one state department as a program that allows minimum and medium custody state prisons to partner with local animal shelters, animal welfare agencies, and/or private non-profit agencies to train dogs in preparation for their adoption. In turn, the inmates are given a chance to serve the community by training dogs to be well-behaved pets. (North Carolina Department of Corrections, 2009)

The dogs are kept in fenced, covered kennels on a concrete slab (See Figure 6), the product of a grant that provided the funding for the facility’s participation. Further details about the program will be discussed later in this dissertation.

Figure 6. The New Leash on Life kennels on the eastern side of the yard. All three dogs, Sadie, Crystal, and Chris (L-R), can be seen in this photo. (Photo credit: Fisher)

In the time that I spent at the facility, the yard was only ever used for training the animals and never for any sort of physical activity or time for the juveniles. For most of
my participants, this was a point of contention between them and the staff; they felt that they weren’t allowed to go outside as much as they’d like and resented the fact that the decision was left up to the whim of the supervisors on duty—some staff seemed more willing to allow it than others. I am not sure how often they are able to use the yard generally, but it seemed relatively infrequently. Instead, the indoor gymnasium was used for physical education.

After passing through the second security door from the breezeway, juveniles find themselves in the gymnasium. The gym (See Figure 7) is usually split at halfcourt with a retractable wall, with the north half used for basketball and the south half used for volleyball. The entire room is covered with an industrial blue carpet and the juveniles are usually split into two groups, one on the volleyball side and one on the basketball side, for the physical education component of their day. The activities were often juvenile-directed, while staff monitored and occasionally participated, and ranged from competitive four-on-four pickup games to volleyball matches to informal games of Horse or Around the World, to sitting around and casually talking. Security cameras are attached to the walls of the gymnasium, perched like gargoyles, with their gaze on the courts feeding their images back to the control room in real time.
On the west side of the basketball court is a doorway that leads to the junior high classroom and on the east side of the court is one for the high school classroom.

**The classrooms.** After my first visit to the site’s two classrooms, I jotted down the following field notes:

> Between the two classes, I counted 21 students. Seven were White, 14 African American. All but two were males. I didn’t see all of the students—there are 31 enrolled at the moment. The classroom is made up of three rectangular plastic tables, each probably 10 feet long. At each table are four or five chairs. At the front of the room is a single whiteboard. Along the right wall, after you enter, are five new-ish Dell desktops. The program that appears on the screen is SuccessMaker. Not sure what it is—none of the students used it while I was there. Mr. Trent’s (high school classroom teacher) desk is at the rear of the room, next to him near the shared door that leads to the junior high classroom is Ms. Dearborn’s (teacher aide) desk. The bookshelves are lined with district-approved texts. The cinder block walls are—for the most part—bare.

Each of the classrooms looks the same (See Figure 8); both are about twenty-five feet wide and twenty feet deep and are arranged similarly, with the students’ tables arranged
in rows with students’ chairs facing the whiteboard. There is only one window in each room, which is a single pane of security glass, with blinds, on the cinderblock wall that adjoins the two rooms. There is no window that offers a view of outside and the room is lit entirely by fluorescent lighting. The shelves are lined with mammoth-sized teacher’s editions of district textbooks and anthologies and a television with a combination DVD/VCR player sits in the front of each room.

The computers sat mostly unused in the times that I observed. The television, meanwhile, saw a fair amount of use as the students watched several DVDs during my visits. Security staff were always present in the room and there were usually two staff
members in each room, in addition to the teacher. Again, cameras on the wall were used to monitor the rooms from the control room, and occasionally administrative calls and reminders that they were being watched and recorded were made. A Martin Luther King Jr. quote appears on one wall, the only outward, physical reference to a Black leader or figure.

![Figure 9](image.png)

*Figure 9. Posters of Martin Luther King, Jr. and an inspirational message located on the adjoining window on the high school classroom’s side. In a photograph taken immediately after this, Katie walked closer to the bottom poster with the inspirational saying eliciting comments in the interview explored in a later chapter. (Photo Credit: Katie)*

The high school classroom was where I spent most of my time observing and working. I felt more comfortable in this classroom than the junior high classroom because most of my teaching experience was at the secondary level and my familiarity with the curricular
content was greater. But this classroom was much different than the one I was used to teaching in. This classroom was often much quieter than my own, with students more disengaged with the materials and activities. When a subject was being taught, the level of discussion was generally minimal and picked up when the discussions became about non-educational topics or when a student was correcting Mr. Trent; the animosity between teacher and students is more fully developed in Chapters 7 and 9.

**Cells.** The juveniles’ cells were located in two wings that stretched out, east and west, from the control room in the Center. The wings were hallways of about fifty feet in length, with a cinderblock wall that ran down the center. Locked, solid, steel doors with a single pane of glass, about a foot square, offered the only glimpse from inside the cell to the hallway, but the intervening cinderblock wall kept the juveniles from seeing the cells directly across from them.

Each side of the hall had about five cells (maximum of two per room) for a total of ten per wing (See Figure 10). The first time I walked down the north side of the west hall, juvenile faces filled the small door windows, peering at me. I felt conspicuous and strange and most of them appeared at least interested in a new and different adult face in the halls. In one window, there was only a single face whose company was a small, origami toilet paper crane that he had made. This youth was unable to have a roommate because of harm and self-harm reasons and was designated Q15 status; to pass the time he engaged in various activities, like origami. The staff member with me explained that the crane, which reminded me of the story of the Japanese girl who made 1,000 paper cranes in part of her battle against cancer (Coerr, 1977), could be considered “contraband” (a term that encompasses many things, discussed in further detail in
Chapter 9) but they allow him to make and keep the cranes because it keeps him occupied and apparently content.

![Figure 10](image.jpg)

*Figure 10.* Jay’s photograph of the north side of the west wing. To the right are the doors of the juveniles’ cells and to the left is the cinderblock wall separates the south and north halves of the West wing. (Photo credit: Jay)

Inside, the rooms are, as expected, cramped. Each is about eight feet wide and ten feet deep, with a single toilet and sink on a front wall. The only privacy offered in the entire room is a short, cinderblock wall about five feet long and three feet high that partially blocks the toilet. There is one “slab” in most rooms: a dais raised about three feet off the floor, of a size to accommodate a single mattress. The other mattress is often lying on the floor. The mattresses are thin, plastic-covered pieces of worn foam that the youths claim offer little to combat the hardness of the slab or floor. A pane of security glass on the back wall of each cell allows ambient outside light into the room. In each room, mattresses/beds appeared to be made and there are few personal effects in sight, typically books. The walls appear to have seen a number of coats of pale blue paint and
some of my participants said they’d helped add a coat when needed to cover up the graffiti and engravings on the wall.

At the end of the West Wing are the “bar rooms,” the only rooms in the facility that have bars inside, reminiscent of the stereotypical image of jails with an older, creaking, age-worn set of bars that could swing open and shut and were locked with an older, heavier key than those for the other doors. All of my participants spoke about the bar room and showed an interest in the bar room because, for them, it was the culmination of incarceration, a place where they could be sent if they were on cooldown or lockdown. There was no “hole” at this facility but Jay described this room as the closest KPJDC got to having a “hole.” These steel bars, when closed and locked, separate the juveniles from the toilet and sink in the room. I saw the inside of a bar room, personally, for the first time when I accompanied one of the supervisors, Stacy, to visit the youth who was in the room. I was warned by Stacy not to be fooled by the youth’s innocent look and diminutive size because “he could steal your socks off your feet, with your shoes on, and you’d never even know” because he was “a born hustler.” She tells me this as we walk down the hall and she unlocks the solid steel door. From my field notes:

When the door opens, he’s standing on top of his bed, a child caught jumping on his bed and facing reprimand. As you open the steel door with a small window in the door, to your left is the sink and next to the sink is a metal stainless steel toilet. On the other side of the toilet is a steel grate wall separating the bathroom area from the sleeping area. The sleeping area is comprised of a raised wooden box built into the wall. As she talks to him about the punishment he faces now and how important it is for him to avoid trouble, I look more closely around the cell. To my right is the steel toilet and sink. The mattress is on our side of the bars so, on the other side of the bars, all he has to sit or lie on is the raised wooden platform. On the bars are scratched a lot of names - some of the names I see repeated more than once. There are also names of neighbourhoods from the city. Devonport. Riverside. Hollandsville. Even “Canefield” has been written on the
9-foot ceiling, with a thick black marker, by what must have been one particularly determined and industrious juvenile. There are dates and years scratched into the bars as well.

**Figure 11.** The bars in one of the bar rooms. On the near side of the door are the sink and bathroom and on the other side is the “slab” on which a blanket and, sometimes, a mattress are. Names and images have been scrawled up and down the thicker bars. (Photo credit: Fisher)

In each cell, a video camera is attached to the wall so that one staff member can observe the juveniles; the juveniles feel watched at all times even though they can’t be sure they are at any given moment. Such is the effect of this digitized version of the panopticon (Foucault, 1995/1973), an effect explored in Chapter 9.
The only room that is a part of the juvenile’s routinized day that I’ve not discussed in any detail is the computer lab, which houses the Lab Kids. The description of this room opens up Chapter 4, as I discuss a turning point in my project that took place in this room, with these so-called Lab Kids.

What remains before moving to that reflective chapter on the provocation is a discussion of the nature of the facility and its policies, generally regarded as a much more progressive carceral site in Louisiana compared to the others.

Facility Administration and Relative Progressivity

The facility’s administrators with whom I worked the most were Mr. Bowers and Mr. Carradine. Mr. Bowers is the head of the entire KPJDC, which included the detention area as well as the annexed area where the probation officers and other support staff worked. Mr. Carradine, meanwhile, is considered the second-highest ranking administrator on site, but is primarily in charge of the detention areas of the complex. Both of these administrators were communicative and open in many of their discussions with me. The pride that both of these men have in their positions and the facility was evident in most conversations, as was the impetus to change KPJDC into a more progressive facility, distinguishing itself from the other, more notorious youth lockdown complexes in the state.

As a result, they have implemented programs and participated in initiatives designed to move from the more traditional modes of incarceration to more progressive. Such relative autonomy for implementation comes as a result of the decreasing accountability this site has to the state of Louisiana for its funding. Under Mr. Bowers’s direction, the site has continued to decrease its financial reliance on the state and now
receives only a small fraction of its funding from the state. Most of the funding comes from the redesignation of the site as a parish facility, receiving funds from Kakau Parish taxation rather than state funds. There is still accountability to the state and the facility does administer juveniles under state custody, but they are able to pursue other initiatives without clearance from the state because of the decreased role of the state when it comes to facility funding.

Such latitude is evident from the initial booking procedures: there is an assessment process and screening tool used during intake that provides a preliminary evaluation and the results could lead to the facility’s refusal to book a youth into their custody. Mr. Bowers explained (excerpt from field notes):

*The screening process is not something many facilities have; unlike other detention centers, this one is able to control who comes in and who leaves. We do not have to accept everyone and that’s a key advantage we have over other state juvenile detention facilities. Some of these recent additions had fooled the screening process on the front end and were not actually fits for this detention center and there needed to be another option for them.*

These other options include GPS tracking for ankle bracelets and voice identification. I never saw either of these used; none of my participants were monitored in such a way during my data collection period.

Both administrators, each in separate interviews, mentioned two prominent youth advocacy organizations as groups with whom they have participated and from whom they have received support and grants: the Annie E. Casey Foundation (whose 2009 *Kids Count Essay 2008: A Road Map for Juvenile Justice Reform* was cited earlier in this paper) and the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation (whose program includes “community and economic development; housing, with a focus on the preservation of affordable rental housing; juvenile justice reform; education, with an emerging interest in
digital media and learning; and policy research and analysis”). The role of foundations such as these are integral in what Mr. Carradine called “their goal” which was to be “a model for working with detained kids.”

In discussions with Mr. Bowers, he also explained that KPJDC had partnered with the University of Massachusetts and agreed to be a pilot site for their Structured Assessment of Violence Risk in Youth research program. As a pilot SAVRY site, the facility administered a questionnaire to booked youth and the topics included questions on historical risk factors, social/contextual risk factors, and individual risk factors. He also mentioned the relationship that the site had with local mental health and substance abuse facilities to help support those incarcerated youth in need. The art therapy program and New Leash on Life were other relatively new initiatives he’d secured grants for that he considered more progressive than programs found at other state detention centers.

The most significant initiative, however, was one he called the Disproportionate Minority Committee (DMC) which came about as the recognition of the disparity between minority percentages in the general and incarcerated populations. He said that something is wrong with the system when “60% of our juveniles in here are Black, but only represent 20% of the total population. Why?” Seeking an answer to that “why?” in all its complexity was the catalyst behind the formation of this group which included people from “all decision points,” from the arresting cop or school discipline decision makers to the court system to the lockdown facility. Bishop and Frazier found, similarly, that these disparities were found at every stage of the juvenile justice system. In addition, follow-up discussions with juvenile justice “decision-makers” revealed that most believed that race was a factor in decision making (1990). They wanted to “look
individually at what level does the imbalance with regard to colour comes in.” They also pointed out a concern for the girls in his facility, who made up 25-30% of the detained population. Mr. Carradine made the same point, as taken from my field notes:

The DMC is a place where stakeholders would be meeting to look at this issue of race discrepancy. Parole officers, prosecutors, judges, faith-based community organizers and others would be taking part in the discussion. I expect it to be difficult but it’s where the rubber meets the road. People have expectations and attitudes predicated on stereotypes that they may not even be aware of.

They acknowledged both the difficulty and importance in such attitudinally analytical work because they realize that without such “deep analysis,” in Mr. Carradine’s words, wide scale change isn’t possible.

For their part, KPJDC participates in evaluations themselves, such as the Casey Foundation’s Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative (JDAI). Mr. Carradine spoke about the “330ish” standards which comprise an evaluation tool to assess the efficiency and progressiveness of the site and the first time through they achieved 75% which was higher than he expected. There still remained, however, about 50 items which they fell short on and they have included them in their goals and objectives for facility improvement.

I feel I should mention, though, that the notion of “progressive” is a relative one and I provide these examples of participation because they inform certain practices and procedures that will be discussed later in the paper. The facility is certainly still in a transition phase as they work at separating themselves from the other state facilities; I know that since my work there they have created a dance program, complete with recital, as well as expanded the use of home monitoring as an alternative to being locked down in the facility. There remain, however, some troubling aspects of incarceration that the
youth shared with me and their input was one of the reasons the administration agreed to allow me to conduct my research and to pass along the opinions of the incarcerated youths. Thus, this section should not be taken as approbation of this facility and all of its practices. Rather, the intent is to place this facility on the spectrum of facilities that fall under the “juvenile detention” designation.

Initially my plans were to focus on the classroom specifically with comments on the facility generally. Instead, the scope was necessarily expanded to discuss the facility within a larger spectrum of subordinating experiences in the lives of my participants. That broadening took place after a particular moving movie session, watching the children’s animated feature-length film, *Powerpuff Girls* with the Lab Kids. The provocation resulting from this single encounter changed the landscape of my research, an encounter worthy of its own chapter.
Chapter 4: A Powerpuffed Provocation

The Lab

The “lab”—an abbreviated reference for computer lab—refers to the room at the north end of Rec 1, separated by a locked door and five tall panes of security glass. On my first day working with these youths, I noted the following in my field notes:

The lab itself is lined with computers separated by partitions that give each computer and student a semi-private workspace. The computers look to be serviceable Dell systems only a few years old. In the southwest corner of the room is a teacher’s desk with a computer on it, but no teacher behind it. Instead there is an older, White man who appears to be doing paperwork independent of what’s going on in the room with the kids, never speaking to or interacting with the juveniles and enters and leaves without saying so much as a word and I’m not sure who he is or what his role is; the only other adult is a security staff member.

On the west wall, behind the desk, is a chalkboard running the length of the wall with a bulletin board above it, prominently featuring the faces of a member of each of the Armed Forces: Army, Navy, Air Force, and Marines. And below these images sit six incarcerated juveniles, seated in a circle, just talking when I go in for the first time.

Today there are two females (one White and one Black) and four males (two White and two Black). According to the students and some of the staff I spoke with, “the kids don’t do anything in here.” During my observations of the high school and junior high school classrooms, some of the students expressed their envy of the Lab Kids because “all they do is talk and watch movies.” I take a seat near the door, receive a couple of polite greetings, but the discussion generally carries on without interruption.

No students are sitting at the computers and there is no instructor, no staff except for a single security guard and the older gentleman in the corner at the desk. The kids tell me that they’re supposed to be using a program on the computers called “SuccessMaker,”
which is supposed to prepare them for their GED, but the computers sit, unused; instead they sit in chairs arranged in a circle surrounded by the square of dormant computers. Further, there is no direction for them to use the computers, from the staff member or the man behind the desk. I’m not sure if he has any instructional authority. If so, it’s never exercised that I can see.

The conversation moves from topics such as the relationship between Jay-Z, a famous rapper, and Beyonce, his famous R&B singer girlfriend before moving to the topic of how some of them have learned more about drugs since coming to KPJDC than they ever did before. Another security staff member walks in with no movie, despite earlier promises of bringing one, so the youths are forced to choose from a stack of movies already in the room. Then it becomes a matter of choosing the movie and I list the options for the students, asking them to vote on which of the available films they’d like to watch. Some of the VHS tapes aren’t labeled and of those that are, I list off the titles for them and assume I know which film they’d choose: *Transformers*, since it was the most action-packed title. I had guessed the selection would be near unanimous, and it was. Only it wasn’t the live-action, big-budget, computer-generated, Hollywood megahit that received all votes but one (from a female inmate who elected to abstain); instead, the mighty *Transformers* fell to the three young, doe-eyed, diminutive heroines of *The Powerpuff Girls* movie. I was surprised but quickly found out that their selection was just the first of several surprises surrounding the movie these Lab Kids had for me.

**These "Lab Kids"**

During my first few visits to the facility, I worked primarily in the high school classroom, observing the practices and student responses and engagement, talking with
and helping the students when I could. One day, while having a discussion with Karen, she made a suggestion that changed the scope and focus of my research project: “You should talk to the Lab Kids; it’s a bit more lax than this classroom and freer of an environment.” First, the assignation of these kids as “Lab Kids” struck me as strange, heavy with experimental implications because I didn’t know what “lab” they were referring to. And, up to this point, I didn’t know that these kids existed (for lack of a better word) and that night, when writing up my field notes, I jotted down the following reminder: “I didn’t realize that these kids ‘existed’—the Lab Kids, as a designation. That there was a separate lab for these kids. Possible avenue for investigation in the next couple of days.” And the next day was the first day in the lab described in the previous section.

During that first visit, I asked Bambam what this room was for and how these kids came to be assigned to this room. He answered by telling me what the lab was and who the Lab Kids are and how “they are not allowed in the classroom because they’ve dropped out or were dismissed out of school and can’t be taught by the school board any longer.” Later one of the staff informed me, further, that this room is for kids who are not enrolled in school for one reason or another. Some have dropped out. Some have been expelled from the Parish and cannot be serviced in the facility classrooms. Some are preparing to go to the Youth Challenge Program (YCP) which is a boot camp for kids. In the classroom, some of the students are also supposed to be preparing for the GED, through such software as SuccessMaker, the last option for a diploma for some of these juveniles.
These youths were about as marginalized as any other I encountered in my time at the facility. They had been abandoned by or left the school district and ended up behind bars. And even behind bars, they were relegated to this computer lab, excommunicated from the facility’s classrooms because of district policies dictating enrollment. The atmosphere in this room was a lively contrast to the site’s classrooms; there was much more discussion, even on topics that were forbidden by the administration (e.g. drugs, criminal activity). When asked about their place in KPJDC and the school district, the responses ranged from unapologetic embraces to regret that they’d been kicked out of school. But even for those along the latter end of that spectrum, most agreed that spending a day as a Lab Kid beat spending the day in the detention center’s classrooms. When asked why, one of the first reasons was the chance to watch movies (although, from what I saw in the high school classrooms, there was a fair amount of cinematic consumption) and today, they had settled on *The Powerpuff Girls*.

**The Powerpuff Experience**

The near unanimity of the decision to watch this cartoon surprised me, but I quickly found out that their selection was just the first of several surprises these students had for me. Their decision for that film, when other titles were also available, intrigued me. But I became further intrigued by the audio track the juveniles provided as we watched the film, offering opinions on such issues as gender roles, wrongful arrest, police brutality, racism, and education, a poignant reflection on a society in crisis.

Comments were made throughout the film as the students made remarks or had quick discussions about what they were seeing. Over the course of my research and across all my participant interviews, I quickly realized that like the dropouts in Michelle
Fine’s *Framing Dropouts*, these students were quick to “identify injustice in their social lives and schools” (1991) but here they were also identifying such injustice in an animated film whose benignity I had assumed. There were a few scenes of particular interest vis à vis themes of socioeducational injustice and it was clear that the commentary surrounding each scene drew from the students’ experiences within the educational, law enforcement, and carceral practices.

I should also note that their comments as we watched *Powerpuff Girls*—as I reflected on the interviews and later transcribed them—pointed to instances from the stories of my participants. Each comment from the movie related to something later discovered in their autobiographical record. This chapter and discussion serves as a microrepresentation, an introduction, of sorts, to the social injustice that became thematic across interviews later in the process.

The first comment that oriented me to the critical and insightful perspective these juveniles possessed happened in the opening scene of the film. It opens in a professor’s chemical lab, as Professor Utonium experiments with a couple of different ingredients in beakers: Sugar, Spice, Everything Nice, and (accidentally) Chemical X whose chemical combination results in the genesis of three small, kindergarten-aged, doe-eyed girls each sporting a pastel heroine’s outfit that coordinates with her eyes, an identifiable character trait that separates her from her test tube sisters and a buoyant or floral nickname. Blossom sports a pink outfit and is the mature, intelligent, responsible leader of the trio. Bubbles prefers light blue and is the most immature of the group, demonstrating a neediness toward her sisters or her creator/father but is also the most combustible and potentially aggressive and physically strongest. Finally, sporting a light green, is
Buttercup, the tomboy of the group, complete with the shortest haircut, a mean streak, lack of patience and a toughness not exceeded by any of her sisters. The archnemesis of the Powerpuff Girls makes an appearance in the movie shortly after it begins, a character with an overtly Caribbean cultural reference in his name, Mojo Jojo who happens to be a black chimpanzee with an enlarged cranium that houses his intellectually advanced brain; an unintended experimental consequence, he harbors ill will toward the Girls.

Mojo Jojo’s appearance elicits the first comment, from one youth (who was not a participant in my study), a 17-year-old Black male who mutters, “You know it’s gotta be a black monkey” to which another juvenile, a 16-year-old White female, dismisses him with an inaudible comment and a quick “tsk” causing a third student to laugh out loud. This was my first time watching a film with the Lab Kids and I didn’t want to interrupt their viewing or upset the dynamic this group had in the lab until I knew them a bit better, and they me. I didn’t ask anything hoping that he would elaborate but the comment and laughter silenced him for the rest of the scene. The exchange, despite its brevity, did alert me to the fact that watching this cartoon with these youths wasn’t going to be the passive experience I’d expected. In following scenes, the commentary became more developed and tied to the biographies of these kids as I learned about and spoke with them further. As the scene closed, the Powerpuff Girls began to discover their powers, sonic speed being one, prompting Bambam to remark, “I wish I had that kinda speed to run from the cops.” And the class laughed.

Bambam’s envy of the Powerpuff Girls’s speed, so that he could run from the cops, attains more significance as I learn that he had to run a number of times in his life. In one of the most gravely delivered responses in all of his interviews, Bambam simply
and soberly responded, “I’d run, brah” after I asked him what he’d do if he felt he was going to be sent to another, more dangerous state facility.

He wasn’t the only one of my participants who had history of running from law enforcement officers. Both Katie, a 16-year-old Black female, and Jay, a 16-year-old Black male, had records of running. In fact, Jay had so many running-related charges that one of the security staff members who had come to know him and his case well referred to him as a “runner.” Katie, meanwhile, also had a history of running and in a discussion with her parole officer, I was told that Katie’s proclivity to running was among the most defining characteristics of her criminality; she would run and could be hard to find. Behind Bambam’s amusing comment is a significance that I wasn’t aware of at the time he made it but, looking back, I can more appreciate the importance of speed helping some of these kids run from law enforcement.

Shortly after that scene, Professor Utonium enrolls the girls in an elementary school in nearby, generically-named Townsville. When one of the students speaks, he has a deep raspy voice that upon hearing prompts Jay to say, “Man, that dude been huffing something to talk like that, some glue or something” which leads to a discussion of the various drugs or methods of doing them, such as the inhalation of Freon, which could lead to such changes in voice. The topic of drugs is one I heard often in the lab as the kids talked even though they aren’t supposed to be discussing illegal or illicit behaviours. For Jay, though, the drug trade was a way of life and had been since he was young. He shared with me his start in “the game” and the impact that drug trafficking had on his own life as well as those around him, leading to his arrest and confinement on more than one occasion.
While the youths are discussing various drugs and their effects on one’s voice and ability to talk, in the background the Powerpuff Girls are enjoying school; they are cute, unfailingly compliant, cooperative, deferent, and willing to please; in some ways, they provided a compelling contrast to the Lab Kids around me. When recess time comes, the kids play tag and when the girls are made “it” they think they are infected with some contagion and everyone has to stay away. They don’t understand the game and think that the other kids are avoiding them because there’s something wrong with them. This playground scene prompts a discussion on the speculation of a sexually transmitted disease that one of the female inmates allegedly has. The rumour is that one of the detained youths has herpes—one of the girls—and a comment is made about that infection and the game of tag on the television screen with the kindergarteners becomes a discussion of the game of keep away from the youth with the STD, and the juveniles laugh at the reference and association. Once again, the scene playing out on the television screen had a disturbing parallel playing out in the juveniles’ discussion. Meanwhile, after the girls understand how the game works, they begin a game and their chase tears up the school—as a result of their super powers—and spreads all over town, destroying everything in their playful path.

Following the rampant destruction, the citizens, mayor, and news reporters are calling for justice and arrests; something must be done, and quickly! An investigation leads back to Professor Utonium; the police show up at the professor’s house and arrest him. They handcuff him despite his pleas of innocence and toss him harshly into the back of the patrol car. This scene evokes the biggest response thus far. One juvenile comments, “That shit ain’t fair” to which another says, “That’s how it goes, get locked up
when someone else was guilty.” The cops are overly forceful throwing the professor in the back of the patrol car and the thump elicits a chorus of groans and objections. “Why cops gotta act like that?” asks Jay, who believes it’s not right that a “buncha White girls mess stuff up and they bring that dude in. It’s not fair them little girls get off.” I wasn’t sure what to make of Jay’s comment. He points out the colour of the girls but doesn’t seem to take into account that Professor Utonium is also White. He also refers to their gender, “little White girls” but doesn’t address which he thinks is more responsible for the lack of punishment, their colour or gender.

These comments around the issue of who gets arrested and why reminded me of an episode that took place a couple of days before in one of the recreation rooms as the youths watched the five o’clock news, the first time that day (in the classroom and rec room) that they paid such attention to the television. The news broadcast led with stories of local arrests and when they showed the mugshot of the accused, the room got instantly quiet. The domino game became secondary. A chess match was forgotten. All eyes were fixed on the television set. The story was about a White female in her early 20s who was arrested on charges of abusing her child, and she had been arrested before on similar charges. One of the students wondered aloud, “How come she wasn’t in here with us then?” A casual comment but one that underscored the degree to which many of these youth impugned what they perceived as the system’s inequality in the dispensation of justice and punishment.

The issues featured prominently in the discussions and interviews with my participants and, as a result, they could identify with Professor Utonium, innocent of the charges and still unfairly harassed by the cops. When asked about cops and the nature of
what he perceived as harassment, Fisher, a 15-year-old African-American, says that it’s happened to him in his neighbourhood “so many times.” He recounted stories of harassment at home and at school, each time leading to an appearance before a judge and a cell at KPJDC. Nemo, a 15-year-old African-American first offender, had, despite a relatively clean record experienced both harassment from police and wrongful arrest, which led to his expulsion from school and his presence in the lab. There was no participant in the study who was more harassed than Jay, however. In the course of his interactions with police, there was one instance of harassment that bothered him more than any other, where he felt more wronged than any other time. It started, he believes, over nothing more a T-shirt he was wearing that featured the images of President Obama and Martin Luther King, Jr. side by side that ended with the shirt in the trash can, and then him being tased and dumped, as unceremoniously as Professor Utonium, in the back seat of a patrol car.

When I was in the lab with the Lab Kids, watching Powerpuff Girls, listening to their commentary I had no idea to what extent their lives informed their dialogue. I had recently arrived at the facilities and barely knew these kids, but as I reflected back on my time at KPJDC there weren’t many, if any, instances of media viewing and sharing that I felt were more personally jarring. My initial surprise at their nearly unanimous selection of a cartoon was a surprise sustained over the course of our viewing of the movie and, later on, in the course of the interviews. When I asked the juveniles why they wanted to watch this film instead of others, they weren’t able to articulate much of a response. They explained that it was a movie that they had seen before, a movie that they were
familiar with, and a movie that they enjoyed. Whatever reasons existed beyond that, they
didn’t share with me at that time, whether through conscious choice or otherwise.

Nevertheless, the event had initiated a challenge to my preconceptions about these
youths and a change to my planned research. I decided that these Lab Kids, who were
more vocal and available, offered much to the project and had demonstrated an ability to
articulate that I had not previously witnessed in the high school classroom (more an
indictment of the authoritarian classroom atmosphere than youth ability). I also knew
that the scope of my research had just broadened and my methodology changed to
accommodate it, a testament to Smith’s (2010) sentiment that “method cannot be fully
predetermined” and “the question presses itself upon us” which allows for a
“fundamental question” of interest rather than method. This encounter pressed new
questions as a means of exploration, a single event upon which my focus had turned.

Challenges to Personal Preconceptions

Growing up as a White kid sharing a lower, working-class neighbourhood in the
middle of town, with many Black families, I felt I understood better than some of my
friends and relatives what challenges poor and minority youth faced. Playing basketball
on the courts of a nearby park, sometimes as the only White kid around, granted me, I
felt, some degree of insight and cultural contexts that were unknown by others. As the
son of a mother who was eventually the only White teacher, I thought, some perspective
on the educational plights in these communities and on the physical and curricular
disrepair of these campuses.

The summer before my freshman year at high school, my parents bought a lot
behind a shopping center in a nicer part of town so that I would be zoned to a better high
school, one with higher test scores and a school where my mother felt I wouldn’t be
harassed for being White as much as at the other school. In the years following—high
school, undergraduate work, and graduate school—I believe, to some extent, I’d become
Style*:

One reason that propaganda often works better on the educated than on the
uneducated is that educated people read more, so they receive more propaganda.
Another is that they have jobs in management, media, and academia and therefore
work in some capacity as agents of the propaganda system—and they believe
what the system expects them to believe. By and large, they're part of the
privileged elite, and share the interests and perceptions of those in power.

“Privileged elite” is, for me, perhaps a more relative term than for Chomsky; while I
never felt that my privilege was remotely “elite” I now believe that my position as a
university student simultaneously removed me further from the neighbourhood where I
grew up and provided me with an opportunity to uncritically consume media
representations of criminality.

Now, I might offer a rebuttal that while we might receive more messages (perhaps
of a greater degree, type, and frequency than when Chomsky wrote this over 20 years
ago), the assumption shouldn’t be that it is done so without analysis and deconstruction
and reflection. I consider this dissertation, for example, as one item along a spectrum of
media literacy and cultural studies discourses that counter those perpetuated stereotypes.
The forms and content of these media misrepresentations need to be challenged; this
dissertation and the research that drives it is but a small step.

Though, I am inclined to agree with Felix Okoye, founder of the African and
Afro-American Studies department at SUNY Brockport, when said, “It would be better
not to know so many things than to know so many things that are not so” (Asante Jr.,
While this might seem a sentiment shared by Chomsky, I think, instead, that it provides both an awareness and an opportunity. The awareness lies in the acknowledgment that to know more isn’t necessarily to know better and that there are risks to be mindful of when in the pursuit of knowledge. The opportunity, then, arises from the implication in his statement that, despite these risks, to know many/more things that are so is best. After watching the *Powerpuff Girls* cartoon with these detained youths, I realized that while I felt comfortable knowing relatively many things, that what I knew was not so. (I feel I should note here that this isn’t to be construed as a claim that things discussed in this dissertation are so; I do, however, try to maintain a transparency following from my methodology so that my conclusions are framed within a context apparent to the reader.)

When considered retrospectively, such a realization should not have surprised me as much as it did. There had been, after all, other indications that my preconceived notions about youth’s intersection with criminality were more stereotypical than I’d imagined.

On my second day at the facilities, I was working in the high school classroom when Mr. Trent asked me to work with two students who had become unruly and inattentive. Rather than deal with them, he asked me if there was anything I could “do with those two.” I told him that I could; I just wondered to myself what that would be. I asked the two juveniles, both high school-aged Black males booked on charges related to armed robbery, if there was anything they were interested in working on that related to reading and writing. One of them spoke up and said that he’d written a letter to his attorney that he wanted admitted into evidence on his next court date and wondered if I
could help him with it. The second youth said he’d like to write a letter asking for an autograph, something he’d only done once before and it had worked; he’d like to try it again.

I asked whose autograph he’d gotten before and thought to myself that it’s probably a famous athlete, a basketball or football player. Or maybe an actor. Or perhaps a singer or rapper. Probably someone Black.

“Fred Whitfield.”

My mind started scrambling as I tried to think of an athlete or rapper or actor named Fred Whitfield and I was furiously drawing blanks and didn’t want to admit that I didn’t know who Fred Whitfield was, this one person whose autograph this young man had received. The only person I could come up with was a friend of NBA Hall of Famer Michael Jordan and an NBA front office executive but I didn’t think it could be him. Finally, I confessed I didn’t know who he was. There was no hesitation in the response.

“He’s the seven-time calf roping world champion.”

A rodeo star? I was surprised, never thinking that a Black kid locked up on some pretty serious charges would idolize a White rodeo star.

Wrong again. Fred Whitfield is Black. My assumptions were taking a beating and I was fast discovering that many of the things that I felt I knew or that I believed were simply not so.

At that point, I realized that these juveniles were like the female prisoners in Faith’s 1993 study, cited by Tilley (1998), and that “an essential” juvenile “prisoner does not exist, but stereotypical images of such” juveniles “do” and that these incarcerated youths were an “ordinary range of” youth” (p. 193). It is something different to assume
this stereotype to be so than to acknowledge that “for some, the situation of youth today is marked by dissolution of the family; growing child abuse and domestic conflict; drug and alcohol abuse; sexually transmitted diseases; poor education and crumbling schools; and escalating criminalization, imprisonment” (Kellner, 2008, p. 61). Recognizing these realities resulted from my interaction with these youths and the poignancy of their comments and observations of a cartoon. Every single socially subordinating criterion that Kellner identifies impacted the lives of my participants. Using their stories and images to convey the impact and role of this subordination is an acknowledgment that transcends the stereotypical. Their experiences serve as a sobering validation of Kellner’s comment and presses the urgency with which the lives of these incarcerated, marginalized, hypersubordinated youths need attention.

**Implications for Self and Search**

I found that one of the most effective ways of discovering the importance of these issues to these youths was by listening. They told me, indirectly through their interactivity with the animated film, what was important and what was significant. That realization impacted my future work at KPJDC and I believe it has significance for preservice educators, attuning them to the social and cultural contexts of their students. As Jay pleaded in the statement that opens my dissertation: “Just listen to what the kids say. Because we the future, ya feel me? We just need somebody to talk to and get our life stories out there.” While watching the film, I just listened to what these kids had to say as they identified troubling subtexts on issues of gender and race in a cartoon intended for children, a place I didn’t expect and likely contributed to the surprise. They also reacted to instances they perceived as police brutality and wrongful arrest in the
cartoon and they were attuned to the depiction of the “bad part of town” in the
protagonists’ nearby city. In the midst of the discussion, I was also reminded once again
that we need to look “beyond the sensationalized aspects and pathologized discourse of
incarcerated juvenile lives and [investigate] the way a host of societal factors contribute
to their subordination” (Dimitriadis, 2008) and that my research must explore, with a
broader perspective than initially planned, that “host of societal factors.”

All of these juveniles had done wrong in their lives and admitted to at least some
wrongdoing; I found them to be forthright about their drug habits, their theft, their
participation in drug trafficking, their violence and predisposition to violence. Although
these kids generally considered themselves good kids, they recognized when and where
they ran afoul of the law. But that does not mean that they always felt fairly dealt with;
in many ways and in many places, they experienced a trans-spatial subordination that
closely resemble the participants in Rios’s study (2007):

Beyond the criminal justice system and its bureaucrats, they experienced the
effects of criminalization in other significant spaces: the street, the school,
businesses, and even their homes. They compared encounters with police
officers, probation officers, and prosecutors with interactions they had with school
administrators and teachers who placed them in detention rooms, community
centers that attempt to exorcise their criminality, and even parents who felt
ashamed or dishonored and relinquished their relationship with their own children
altogether. For the youth, their experience in each of these institutional settings
had one thing in common: being treated as a criminal. (p. 21)

And this cartoon was my first introduction, albeit an unexpected one and the resulting
awareness of the potential pervasiveness of subordination will cause me to constantly re-
evaluate, reconsider, and rediscover my own context and conceptions. The role
academics and educators play, as Giroux points out (2009), ought to be a considerable
one, positioned as we are within and across various institutions and contexts ourselves.
Chapter 5: Methodology

Theoretical Support

Narrative inquiry and interviewing. My primary methodology in terms of data collection was narratively driven as I sought to: highlight the life stories and experiences of the participant youth, introducing to the field a missing narrative of their lives; showcase the responses to and interactions with those media artifacts that establish the stereotypical, social macronarrative through which these students are conceived/defined by many; reflect on my own experience and practice in the autobiographical components of the dissertation; and hopefully provide one model or consideration for cultural interrogation for preservice teachers. In order to work through these issues, I utilized narrative-supporting methods (interviews, cultural studies, autobiography/autoethnography, visual ethnography) in the spirit of the bricoleurs (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Kincheloe 2001), who “recognize the limitations of a single method, the discursive strictures of one disciplinary approach” (Kincheloe, 2001, p. 681). Ultimately, “the point of the interaction is not standardized agreement as to some reductionistic notion of the proper interdisciplinary method but awareness of the diverse tools in the researcher’s toolbox.” (Kincheloe, 2001, p. 685).

While working on the various contributing methodologies for my dissertation, I felt much like the documentary-maker in this postmodern era, working in the period of research termed the “preproduction phase” as I considered strategies of both the filmmaker and the qualitative researcher: “interviewing, observation, participant observation, document analysis, member checking and so on” (Barone, 2003, p. 210).
The most helpful approach for wrestling with this “crisis of representation” I found in the work of Laurel Richardson’s “criteria” for qualitative research, specifically her definitions around “impact,” “substantive contribution,” and “reflexivity” (2000, p. 937) and kept in mind those directives in the preproductive, research, and writing phases in the hopes that they would contribute to a compelling culmination. Researchers are called, after all, to develop methods of narrative inquiry that suit their needs within a field that is constantly developing (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990).

Impact. A pedagogically ethnographic component helps create a work that addresses Richardson’s “impact” questions: “Does this affect me? Emotionally? Does it move me to action?” (2000, p. 937). Narrative researchers use the methodology to create a compelling read for the readers, not for “their own private consumption” (Polkinghorne, 2007, p. 476). By reading an evocative story, “audiences whose members occupy social locations different from the narrator’s might be moved through empathetic listening to think and act in ways that benefit the narrator or what he or she advocates” (Madison, 1998, p. 279-282). And such a movement from one strata of society to another, Chase believes (citing Frank and Gamson) that a more authentic narrative can help one see from another’s perspective and lead to social change even though they might occupy different social locations; even the mere act of narration can “facilitate positive change” (Chase, 2005, p. 667).

Ultimately, though, the impact on the reader is another area to be determined. What I’ve endeavored to do in the writing of this dissertation is diversify the perspectives and methods as much as I can so that the multivocal product is adequately descriptive,
with my position as researcher handled as honestly and transparently as I can communicate.

**Substantive contribution.** Richardson poses the following questions: “Does this piece contribute to our understanding of social life? Does the writer demonstrate a deeply grounded social scientific perspective?” (2000, p. 937). What Polkinghorne calls “narrative analysis” is the methodology chosen (1995) to satisfy these qualitative, contributive concerns. As the son of a Cajun (Acadian) father, oral history was a very important part of my growing up. Just as Petra Munro Hendry claims to “have always loved stories [and] never tired of listening to the stories my mother told of her homeland, Germany” (Munro Hendry, 2007, p. 487) so have I never tired of listening to the stories my father has told of his growing up in southern Louisiana; accordingly, I feel drawn to this methodology because of the insight I gained with regard to my own culture and self. I also felt drawn to the interviews to elicit these narratives as I work to provide an opportunity for a “neglected, but significant area of the human realm” (Polkinghorne, 2007, p. 482). These interviews for such a neglected, but significant group of youth are not intended to give them a voice because “we cannot give voice, but we do hear voices that we record and interpret” (Reissman, 1993, p. 8) and these voices need to be heard.

Of course, there are also risks in undertaking such a project; theorists caution against generating research that is more a product of our “interview society,” fixated on the stories of the individual that idealize the individual to the point that he or she becomes a static stereotype, precisely that which the researcher endeavors to operate against (e.g. Atkinson & Silverman, 1997; Blumenreich, 2004; Clough 2000; Gubrium & Holstein 2002). A “thick description” (Geertz, 1973) of these children’s lives, as elicited through
interview can “challenge the dominant discourses” (specifically those created and perpetuated by the media as discussed earlier) but I realize that I must also “resist the urge always to depict the children in as sympathetic a light as possible” and “romanticizing these children’s struggles” (Clough, 2000, p. 287). At the same time I must refrain from focusing on the more sensationalistic aspects (Dimitriadis, 2008) of the lives of these incarcerated youth.

**Reflexivity.** Under this consideration Richardson asks: Is the author cognizant of the epistemology of postmodernism? How has the author’s subjectivity been both a producer and product of this text? Does the author hold himself accountable to the standards of knowing and telling of the people he or she has studied? Cultural studies, postmodernist/poststructuralist lenses, visual methodologies, multiple perspectives, and autoethnography can work together to generate as authentic and complex, reflexive work as possible.

Cultural studies, after all, is not a static, monolithic approach but rather “it conceptualizes culture as interwoven with all social practices” (Hall, 1980, p. 63) and as a “network of embedded practices and representations (texts, images, talk, codes of behavior, and the narrative structures organizing these) that shapes every aspect of social life” (Frow & Morris, 2000, p. 316). Such complex layers and filters for analysis create a field that is also rife with debate; just as qualitative research, generally, wrestles with the crisis of representation, cultural studies, specifically, struggles with its own “representation wars” which are occurring “between and across societies, in part because new communications technologies are enabling more people to receive and compare differing local, regional, national and ‘global’ representations of their own and others’
lives” (Frow & Morris, 2000, p. 323). Because of the difficulty in “seeing” through so many technoproductive lenses, Kellner posits a “multiperspectival cultural studies” (1995) as an approach to complicating the media messages and deconstructing the cultural artifacts. The visually ethnographic photographs and media interactions/responses in my study added another level of media criticism and opened up another media lens, this time created by the participants themselves, to counter the dominant stereotypical images that are so socially pervasive.

These visual media compete for the attention of much of the population, often garnering more attention than written forms (Marcus & Fisher, 1999). While this may not surprise cultural studies scholars, Barone asks, “What would it mean for narrativists in the field of education to take this observation seriously?” (2007, p. 462) This is why Giroux (2001) urges for better communication across the disciplinary boundaries of education and cultural studies. Stereotypical representations, for example, contain images that become “part of a public educational imaginary . . . about schools and school people in North America. The imaginary supports a master narrative, a grand, total, smooth, meta-story designed to give final meaning to cultural (here, educational) phenomena . . . Supported by mass media” (Barone, 2003, p. 203), a meta- and macrostory that a postmodernist educator ought to interrogate.

The postmodernist/poststructuralist rejection of the metanarrative situates the individual as a focal point, as one who leads a storied life as an individual (Clandinin and Connelly, 2004) but postmodernist inquirers still must position these narratives “within wider sociohistorical contexts,” (Blumenreich, 2004, p. 88) informed by images and both implicit and explicit mediated cultural messages, thus the narrative inquiry methodology
assumes more importance. Blumenreich’s demand for a contextual situating of these narratives is reminiscent of Macleod’s micro and macro, Smith’s explicit and implicit, Scott’s hidden and public transcripts, and Derrida’s image and actual. Kemmis and McTaggart suggest that this methodology can transcend these dominant stereotypes and “help people recover and release themselves from the constraints embedded in the social media” (2000, p. 598). In order to do that, though, the researcher should also, simultaneously, become a cultural critic (Giroux, 2001) because “as a cultural critic, the researcher speaks from an informed moral and ethical position” (Denzin, 2003, p. 250); this implies a social responsibility, the absence of which Giroux terms a “crisis” (personal communication, March 10, 2011).

**Visual Ethnography**

The use of photographic methods with vulnerable populations (particularly youth) is growing (Luttrell, 2010) and has delivered some promising results with discursive, illuminating potential. Elsewhere, Giroux (1997) discusses Jonathan Stack’s film, *Harlem Diary*, in which nine young Black men and women in Harlem are given video cameras to document their lives in one of the United States’ struggling neighbourhoods. The film provides the participants with an opportunity to feature their own voices in a participatory cinematic production, one of few such films in a landscape that features stereotypes and a dominant discourse in which these youths are routinely shut out. Brown also writes about the importance and place of the image within these social discussions and debates. She believes that images, particularly those that contradict the ubiquitous penal iconography, can be a “tool for social reform” as “an aspect of
representation that takes on heightened salience in the context of penal iconography against the backdrop of a violent and volatile late modernity” (Brown, 2009, p. 83).

Unable to film, I turned to photography as a possibility after reading some examples and seeing, cinematically, the power that a camera possesses in the hands of marginalized youth in the documentary *Born into Brothels*, as a group of prostitutes’ sons and daughters chronicled their lives on the streets of Calcutta in such an impressionistic manner. Having photolanguage (Bessell, Deese, & Medina, 2007) recommended by my advisor, I realized what a powerful postmodernist tool (Kincheloe, 2001) was at my disposal. The technique involves giving participants a camera so that they can capture the images of their daily life, enriching the otherwise textual descriptions of their three-dimensional lived space. Poststructuralists refer to this methodology as a “photo-essay” (Cameron & Gibson, 2005) because the photographs are overlaid with phrases and text generated by the students. The health and medical field has used a similar strategy but called it “photovoice” (Wang, Morrel-Samuels, Hutchison, Bell & Pestrón, 2004) as researchers asked participants to photograph their surroundings so that they might understand and then communicate urgent health needs more evocatively. Both of these can be subsumed under the “photolanguage” heading and have been used in studies that focused on improving the lives of minority, urban youth (e.g. Griffith, Ober Allen, Zimmerman, Morrel-Samuels, Reischl, Cohen, & Campbell, 2008; Wang, Morrel-Samuels, Hutchison, Bell, & Pestrón, 2004; Downing, Sonenstein, & Davis, 2006).

By using photovoice or photolanguage in the study, I sought to develop a more complex discussion and analysis of the way these students view themselves and the manner in which they view the detention center and world around them. Such images
allow participants to “represent and then articulate embodied and material experiences that they do not usually recall in verbal interviewing . . . Visual explorations produce useful data for understanding how people experience their social and material environments” (Pink, 2007, p. 28). One such study by Radley, Hodgetts, & Cullen (2005) had homeless people taking photographs of their environment and used the pictures as catalysts for conversation and interviews. As Radley did, I sought to give the youths cameras and then use these images as part of the narrative and dissertation as I seek to create a multimedia, multivocal, multiperspectival discussion and analysis. I’ve attempted to describe the photographic process and highlight their words and responses in order to address the justifiable concern that this developing methodology does not “always make explicit” the manner in which “the ‘voices’ of the subjugated/marginalized populations are produced, whose voices are being represented, under what specific circumstances and towards what end” (Luttrell, 2010, p. 224). Barthes “shows (as does Kuhn, 1995) how photographs might be used in nonrealist ways to provoke and problematize the subject in autoethnography” (Gannon, 2006, p. 484). These images can help move an interview beyond mere “photo elicitation” (Harper, 2002). Before I could implement these methodologies, from the interviews to the visually ethnographic, there was a fair amount of negotiation with the facility, beginning with my access and the circumscription of my relative freedom within the facility to conduct the research. The practical considerations and implications as well as the complexion of my intended methodologies are discussed in the upcoming sections of this chapter. It begins, however, with the access.

**Navigation and Negotiation**
**Gaining access.** Because these places are not often easy to enter, I anticipated problems regarding my access to the youths and the facility. There were a few aspects about KPJDC, though, that kept my work and presence in the facility from being quite as problematic as initially feared. One was the relative progressive nature of the facility and the administration’s receptivity to my work, eliciting data that could be of use to them and their protocols and procedures. Another was the fact that my mother worked there for a number of years as the junior high teacher and was very well-liked and whose work and dedication for the youth was respected; her intentions were never questioned and I benefited from her reputation. There was not much initial hesitation on the part of the administration from the proposal, but there were clearances that had to be secured, and in short order, before I would be able to have access to the facilities and to the kids.

I secured a records check from the local Sheriff’s Office and presented it to Mr. Bowers. I was classified as a “Volunteer” at the site which helped expedite the work, since I wasn’t considered personnel doing any sort of instructional or clinical/diagnostic analysis. My first official visit to the facilities was in the fall of 2008 but these initial visits were strictly with the administration and I did not start working with any youth until the paperwork had been completed and the permission for my status of “Volunteer” had been verified; my data collection, thus, didn’t begin until the Spring of 2009.

The first meeting I had with Mr. Bowers, in his office, was a relatively informal affair. I proposed the general outline of what I was hoping to do, to work with the juveniles and gather information, primarily through interviews, about their experiences and engagement with media representations of criminal youth and to what degree this reflected or informed their notions of self-identity. Most of his comments were related to
the work he had done in trying to separate KPJDC from the state—in terms of reputation as well as funding—as they sought to become more autonomous in their process and decision-making, targeting past problems like racial discrepancies that had persisted under the state’s direction. He, along with Mr. Carradine, seemed enthusiastic about my presence at the facility and eager about hearing what my research yielded. They were each, independently, satisfied with the amount of research that I’d already conducted as well as the plans I had for my research. They were most reluctant about putting cameras in the hands of the participants and having them photograph the inside of the facilities; while Mr. Carradine noted that they had nothing to hide, he acknowledged that boundaries would probably have to be set in the name of security of the facility as well as protection of the youth. I expressed my willingness to discuss compromises with any of the methodologies that I was considering and both Mr. Bowers and Mr. Carradine granted my permission to work. These initial meetings, however, represented the first in a series of ongoing negotiations and discussions about my intentions, resources, and methodologies.

**Negotiations with administration.** When I first broached the topic of interrogating media messages, Mr. Carradine agreed that we needed to interrogate the stereotypes and the media messages that dominated depictions of criminalized youth. I noted in my field notes, after one discussion with him, the following:

*He once again brought up the topic about media. He expressed its importance in this study because it’s important in the lives of these kids. He said he listens to rap, watches MTV and BET. Not necessarily because he likes it but because it’s the vernacular; these are the sites where culture and messages are traded. Suggests I talk to them about the media they consume and then begin to consume it myself so that I can understand where they are coming from.*
The point was well-taken; I left initially encouraged about the value he placed on investigating media with these kids. When the discussions became more specific about the selection of films for viewing, he continued to see value in the method. We talked about the best way that this could happen, possibilities including one-on-one sessions with me and the student, with pairs of participants, and with small groups, and he indicated that he was willing to accommodate as best he could. He also referred me to Larry Thames, the onsite guidance counselor, to further discuss the logistics surrounding title selection and the dynamics of viewing sessions. When I met with Larry, he was very direct in his questioning and quite demanding of my selected methodologies, requiring more in the way of methodological specifics than anyone else had at the facilities to this point and asked to see my ethics review from the University of Toronto. After handing it over, we discussed primarily the media viewing and the participant photography and what this might look like practically and I was granted conditional permission to speak with the security staff and the juveniles about the possible logistics.

I had decided that I wanted to have the input of the juveniles as often as possible, so one day while I was working in the high school classroom during the facility’s Spring Break (coinciding with the school district’s break), I solicited recommendations for possible films and wrote down the titles. The list of movies that received more than a couple of votes included: *Friday*, *Friday after Next*, *Family Reunion*, *House Party 3*, *Lockdown*, *American Gangster*, *Zodiac*, *Obsession*, *Ali*, *Hancock*, *Great Debaters*, *Never Back Down*, *Freedom Writers*, *Lean on Me*, *How High*, *Eastside High*, *Coach Carter*, *He Got Game*, *Poetic Justice*, and *Boondock Saints*. Of these 20 movies, 17 feature African Americans in primary roles, a point that was brought up by a white male in the discussion.
of the list, to which Katie responded, “Look around you. What colour faces you see in here?”

The security staff members in the room make the following suggestions: Dangerous Minds, The Goonies, and Glory. The first is a redemptive fantasy film, the second is dismissed by the kids as being irrelevant and old (a movie about a group of white kids in the Pacific Northwest in the search of pirate treasure), and the third, an award-winning film about the United States’s first all-Black volunteer company in the Civil War.

Armed with this list, I then meet with Mr. Carradine to discuss which films might be appropriate for viewing. At this point, he informs me that there are to be no Rated R films, which surprised me. Discussions with these kids revealed content that would have garnered an R-rating by the Motion Picture Association of America had the lives of these youths been made into movies. Such a restriction eliminated a number of possible movies. That criterion was followed by another: the movies should have an uplifting and encouraging message or, at the very least, “educational.” Specifically, Dangerous Minds and Freedom Writers were mentioned as the types of movies that I should look at. When I returned to the classrooms with the edited list, one youth expressed his dismay at the exclusion of R-rated material saying, “We cuss more than that.”

I realized, then, that my expectations should be tempered with the reality that some of the proposed processes for data collection would meet with some administrative circumscription. Thus, I spoke with Mr. Carradine about my intentions regarding the photography with more specificity, and how I’d like to give the students cameras to keep for at least a day or two. They would then photograph their day but that they would be
told that they could not photograph another juvenile and in the event that one was
developed, it would be destroyed. But I felt it was important that the youths have the
cameras with them during the various parts of their day, in the various parts of the
facility.

He said, though, that giving the youths cameras and allowing them to keep them
in their rooms would violate the rules regarding contraband and that they would not be
allowed to do so. They would, instead, have to be kept in the juvenile’s lockers or in the
control room if the youths were to have the cameras for longer than a single day or more
than one session outside of their cells. I would have to work this out with the security
staff since, logistically, they are the ones whose routines and schedules would have to be
changed to accommodate the handling of the cameras (checking them in and out, storing
them, etc).

I also realized that there was a security issue since the cameras were disposable
and film-based rather than digital; I would not be the only party to see these images.
They would have to be handed over to a third party for developing and since juvenile
identity protection is a priority, it would be prudent to have the participants monitored
while they photographed so that they are not taking pictures of any other youths in the
facility. This also meant the participation of the security staff since I was not authorized
to be the sole adult with these youth. It was becoming an increasingly frustrating and
complicated consideration, influencing the practical exercise of photography discussed
later in the chapter.

**Conducting the research.** The research was conducted over a few months in a
series of visits to the facility. The preliminary discussions with facility administration
and the initiation of the paperwork and security clearance began in the fall of 2008. The observations and work at the facility, with the juveniles, took place in the spring and summer of 2009. During these months, I made four more visits to the facility; three of these visits comprised my data collection and the fourth was a brief follow up with some staff and administration. During my first visit to Louisiana, I spent a week (February 7 to February 14) at KPJDC getting to know the youth and identifying prospective participants and trying to establish some rapport with the juveniles while working out the methodological details of my research with the staff and administration. I then returned to Toronto for about six weeks to meet with my advisor and discuss the proposal and what changes should be made while establishing a protocol for the interviews and photography session in upcoming visits. The next visit took place from April 4 to April 19 and during these two weeks at the facility, I made the bulk of my field notes and observations and conducted the interviews and photography sessions with the first three of my six participants. I visited the youth for the last time in my data collection phase from May 9 to May 16 when I worked with three other youth and followed up with one participant from the previous visit who was still incarcerated. The next visit took place late in the summer of 2009 but this visit was primarily to meet with the staff and get any updates on the juveniles since then, at least as far as the staff was aware of. There was one other such visit in August of 2010, again with some of the staff members for update purposes.

Field notes. One of the most influential resources for my research was Jay Macleod’s (2008) *Ain’t No Makin’ It: Aspirations and Attainment in a Low-Income Neighbourhood*. In the discussion of his methodology, Macleod writes:
Field notes, a record of informal discussions, and transcripts of taped, semistructured interviews with each boy (individually and, on occasion, in groups) make up the main body of the data. In the few instances where interviews were not taped, the dialogue is not verbatim. Rather, it is my best rendering of what was said, which was recorded as soon after the discussion as possible. (2008, p. 9)

Similarly, the field notes and transcriptions constitute the majority of my research and those notes were recorded either in a large, spiral notebook or a small, pocket tablet (the latter was always with me). Initially, I had only the larger notebook but realized, quickly, that it was too cumbersome at times to carry around or too inconvenient to pull out, and so I picked up a small tablet that I could keep in my pocket and take out much more easily to jot down notes and reminders. These observations were then used when I would complete the day’s observations, recording my own thoughts and reflections as soon after the discussion as possible. Most often, this meant spending the day at KPJDC before returning to my work space during these visits and spending a few hours recounting the day’s events with as much detail as I could recall. These notes would be handwritten into the large notebook; I felt much more comfortable hand writing these recollections down than typing them, which would later provide a review of the events once the data collection phase ended and the data entry and analysis phases began.

I use the term “field notes” to describe the short, informal reminders recorded in the small notebook, the more detailed and sustained description of the day’s events, the observations and commentary from the film viewing sessions, impressions about and arising from the interviews, and the two photography sessions at the facility. I also kept a private journal with some of the more reflective moments about the process and data collection, as I considered such topics as my role as researcher, my relative position of
privilege and freedom to enter and leave the facility, my whiteness, and my relationship with administration, staff and incarcerated youth.

After the data collection period was finished, I typed all of the handwritten pages into a single document, consolidating the field notes from the different sources. The final document was about 150 pages and 40,000 words worth of observations and comments (this is not including the interview transcriptions).

**Establishing rapport.** One of the toughest challenges was establishing a rapport with these juveniles because their day is so structured and access to them can be limited. The incarcerated juvenile population can be a highly transitory one, with youth being booked for a time period that neither they nor the staff members are aware of. Some days, a youth might have his/her time at court and isn’t available. Or he/she might’ve broken one of the facility’s policies and been placed on lock down or cool down. Or there might be a meeting with a lawyer or a counselor or with the family. Students also enter and exit the facilities suddenly and unexpectedly at times. Tilley found the same volatility regarding the prison population when she discovered that “provincial prisoners move in and out of the prison daily; sometimes early releases are given without the women themselves knowing until the last minute” (1998, p. 25). Ideally, I would have had more frequent and sustained contact with the juveniles and time spent in the facility, so I asked Diane Conrad if I should consider a location closer. Her advice was to take advantage of the relative opportunity being presented by the administration and staff at the facility in Louisiana because gaining access to a center here in Canada might take a time measured in months.
During the first week of visitation, I went to the facilities early in the morning, usually signing in between 7:30 and 8:00 a.m. so that I could head to the classrooms with the youth and work with them and the teachers, establishing a relationship with as many people on staff as possible, including custodial, educational, security, medical, administrative, and support staff. Some days I stayed while the juveniles had their lunch in the Rec Rooms and on the days when I left the site for lunch, I’d return for the afternoon classes, physical education sessions, and recreation time. I also came to the facilities a couple of evenings per week, after dinner, to observe the New Leash on Life programs or the Second Tuesday guest speaker sessions in the gymnasium. I spent as much time there as possible that first week so that I was well prepared for the participant selection and data collection for future visits.

Such preparation even included wardrobe considerations. During one of the meetings with some of the facility administration, I was dressed casually and both Larry Thames and Mr. Carradine suggested that I dress just as I was then when working with the kids. I certainly should not wear clothes resembling the security staff’s uniforms (slacks and a pullover polo-styled shirt). And I also shouldn’t dress as formally as the teachers or the administration. Rather, dress casually. What followed was an analysis of my outfit by both Mr. Carradine and Mr. Thames, as noted in my field notes:

They also told me to dress like I was in his office at that moment—cargo shorts, tennis shoes, t-shirt, Adidas jacket, New Orleans Saints hat. Mr. Carradine said that he could spot three things kids would ask/comment about my dress and how it might lead to talking points in helping with establishing rapport:
1. My shoes—the vivid triangle-tessalation blue Nikes with the yellow swoosh. This was a definite attention grabber—both said the kids would notice my shoes first and probably comment on or ask me about them
2. New Orleans Saints hat—kids would respond and say they liked or hated the Saints because sports were a popular pastime for many of these kids. They would
probably feel free to tell me who they like and root for or talk about other sports they like.

3. Adidas jacket—the kids would look at the trademarked three stripes for Adidas and comment, saying something like “Nike is better” or “Adidas sucks.” commented on the brand awareness of apparel among these kids.

And they were right on all counts; the shoes were often noticed first and the students inquired about where I’d gotten them, how they never saw that pair before, or what size I wore because they looked big (I wear a 15 or 16 depending on the brand, and this response usually elicited an “ooh” or “aah”). One youth even said that my shoes were “tight” and that I probably had a little “swag” but everything else I was wearing didn’t match the shoes and he recommended an outfit to complement the shoes more appropriately. The Saints hat led to a discussion with a particularly withdrawn female youth about her time in New Orleans and another discussion, with Bambam, about his time on the high school football team, as player and trainer. My Mexican soccer jacket, though, elicited the fewest comments.

Generally speaking, I found that the rapport with the juveniles was a bit easier to establish than with the security staff. There were a few reasons that I felt might have accounted for this. First, and primarily, was my teaching experience with this age group. As a high school teacher, I spent six years teaching students the same age as these incarcerated youth across four different schools (an inner city high school, two suburban high schools, and a rural middle school) and I felt comfortable with this age group.

Immediately, the fact that I was not Mr. Trent also helped. He was neither well respected nor well liked by the juveniles and the first questions I was asked on the first morning I spent working in the high school classroom were, “Are you here to replace him?” and “Are you our new teacher?” This response complicated my relationship with Mr. Trent
in some ways, but helped ease the establishment of a relationship with the students in this
classroom. I told them that although I was a teacher, I was not there to replace anyone.
The follow up questions asked if I was a security staff member in training. I told them
that I wasn’t there in a security role, either. I explained that I was there to help out and
talk to them and maybe put some of their thoughts into a book to explain their points of
view to people who might not otherwise have access to their thoughts, perspectives, and
ideas. The fact that I was neither teacher nor security staff coupled with the writing of a
book focusing on their lives appeared to grant legitimacy to my presence, in their eyes.
From the first day, I found that a number of them were not shy about answering
questions, asking questions, and voicing their opinions—across a wide number of issues.

And they were keen on asking me to participate in activities when possible. We
watched films together. I helped with some of the New Leash on Life responsibilities of
cleaning and training. I shared lunch with them. But, in those initial days, basketball was
probably the connection that meant the most in their day to day routine. My height (6’6”)
begged questions about whether or not I played basketball (yes, I told them, I played for
about 12 years from elementary through high school and tried out for a university team
before being shamed into intramurals) and engaged in a few games while I was there,
feeling much like Macleod (2008) playing basketball with the Hallway Hangers and the
Brothers. I had to be careful since policy discouraged staff from participating in some
athletic activities with the youth, so my participation was mainly restricted to shooting
games like Horse and Around the World. Whatever status I might’ve had as a result of
age or education meant little when my first shot from the corner, behind the three-point
line drew neither net nor iron and I missed completely. The thud of the ball bouncing on
the floor after the airball was answered by a chorus of the youth shouting “VIP can’t
shoot!” The embarrassment was tempered by the realization that perhaps the rapport that
I had grown so anxious over was perhaps not as difficult to establish as I’d initially
feared.

That was a pleasant surprise and I felt less anxious about working with these kids.
However, it was much tougher feeling comfortable with the security staff at times.
Initially, there were some staff members who were very open with me simply because
they had known my mom so well, worked with her for so long, and regarded her work
and intentions so highly. I spent a couple of days on these relationships, trying to get to
know them and their procedures better, but in the middle of the week the schedules
shifted. The staff members would work a few days of twelve-hour shifts and then be off
for a few days. So after a couple of days spent getting to know the staff, a completely
new crew with a new supervisor showed up. I found myself back at square one in a lot of
ways and while I was galvanizing relationships with the youth, I felt as if my work with
the staff had taken a couple of steps back. And the night crew was yet a different crew
entirely, so on Tuesday evening of my first week at KPJDC, I was starting anew with the
night shift.

Aside from the shift schedule, there was the matter of fraternity that existed with
the security staff. They spend twelve hours together, each day, in a relatively small
facility, with some time spent huddled together in a crowded control room, talking,
laughing, and joking. Many of my personal journal entries and reflections read like my
high school journal entries. Reflections on the difficulties of fitting in. Doubting my
abilities and authority with people whose authority and hierarchy was well-established.
Strategies about how I might better adapt. Ruminations on what, exactly, was my place in this space predicated on rigidity, routine, and order. And these staff members were, in many important ways, more immediate and influential to my work and what I could actually accomplish methodologically. It was a state of constant internal interrogation and external negotiations. Some shift supervisors were very open and asked me to help them process paperwork so that I could learn some of the protocols or conscripted my help to escort a secured juvenile who had just caused a “Code Red” (violence on the premises involving a juvenile) while others spoke to me little and were less supportive or flexible in allowing me the space or room or manpower to conduct various parts of the research. None were resistant or demonstrated any outright contempt for my work or presence; rather, the willingness to help facilitate some of the necessary aspects (because I lacked the authority) varied considerably. But the anxiety over fitting in, nevertheless, was featured prominently in my reflections on my role and work at KPJDC.

**Researcher’s reflection on role.** One of my earliest journal entries recounts this angst:

*The day did help build a relationship with Mr. Carradine and some of the security staff – but I remain intimidated by them and feel very much like an outsider. Which I am. To both kids and staff. It’s awkward trying to fit in.*

And I don’t know that I ever felt completely comfortable with the administration and staff because I still perceived a distance because I was an “outsider” coming in to do work in a space that is normally removed from the public discourse, excepting those stereotypical depictions of criminal and incarcerated youth.

Thus, many of the limitations that I wrestled with prior to and during (and now after, as I write about) my work at the facility involved the crisis of representation
(Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Cooper & White, 2009) and I kept a research journal to document my own reflections around being a working-class, white male—a product, in many ways, of the dominant culture—seeking to bring to prominence the voices of the criminally detained urban youth, just as Weis and Fine did as they discussed being white, female, and Jewish while working with people of colour (Fine & Weis, 1996) and problematizing my own narrative within the genre of the “redemptive fantasy” discussed earlier. Like Reissman, my work “raised questions that have forced me to confront difficult issues, including my positions as a privileged, white, Western [man] studying” (1993, p. 11) these incarcerated, and mostly minority, youth. She also writes, as she reflects on a beach scene, that her position is “coloured” by that context and “like all social actors, I seek to persuade myself and others that I am a good person. My narrative is inevitably a self representation (Goffman, 1959)” (Reissman, 1993, p. 11). How do I reconcile that desire to do good with my criticism of those redemptive fantasies, what Thompson calls “good-white narratives” (2003, p. 17)?

In these reflective moments as I dealt with this complication (and possible contradiction), I explored questions such as how I’ve come to know about these students and where my own preconceptions come from and what the impact is on my understanding, as Gadamer (1975, p. 358) discusses. It is in such reflection “where researchers also turn the analytic lens on themselves and their actions with others, but here researchers write, interpret, and/or perform their own narratives about culturally significant experiences” (Chase, 2005, p. 660). Pinar’s currere (Pinar & Grumet, 1976) outlines an approach to self-analysis that is rigorous, a necessity in an era where “curriculum theorists now depend on autobiography to provide new understandings in the
curriculum, emphasizing the lived experience of teachers and students” (Pinar & Pautz, 1998, p. 72). Ultimately, I recognized how imperative it is that I, as a researcher, “maintain an awareness of how different elements of [my identity become] significant during research . . . ethnicity, class, and race are important to how researchers are situated and situate themselves” (Pink, 2005, p. 24).

In the writing of this dissertation, my intentions are to be transparent in the philosophies and intentions underlying the research as well as the decisions I made in every aspect of the conduction of this work. During the data collection phases, I attempted to be flexible, giving the youth choice wherever possible. But I never could completely shake the conspicuous feelings I had. As an outsider. As a researcher. As a white guy. As privileged (the days of my working-class upbringing were long behind me). This feeling culminated while watching the comedy *Life* with the youths in the high school classroom one day.

*Life*, a movie that one of the security staff members had brought (and was, incidentally, a rated-R film) stars Black comedians Eddie Murphy and Martin Lawrence as two petty criminals from New York City who find themselves in the Deep South, accused of a murder they didn’t commit. Both are sentenced to life in prison after a Prohibition-era trial and serve over sixty years behind bars. The film recounts, comedically, their lives as prisoners and what they experienced as inmates in a southern penitentiary. Both become prominent figures in the prison and eventually take under their protection and guidance a slow-witted but athletic prisoner nicknamed “Can’t Get Right.” After seeing his prowess on the baseball field, the pair believe that he might be their ticket out of prison so they arrange for a Negro League scout to come and watch
Can’t Get Right play baseball, thinking that if he is good enough, the scout can arrange some sort of release for him and, by proxy, them since they are Can’t Get Right’s agents and protectors. The scout, played by Noah Emmerich, pulls up in his car amidst the excitement and out steps a lanky, white, male figure who shuts the car door behind him, and leans against the side of it. From his vantage point, this figure watches the game, making notes in the small tablet he’d pulled out of his pocket. There he stands, outside the fence, watching the Black prisoners play baseball, inside the fence, as he takes notes on what he observes.

At that moment, I sat in the back of the classroom. A tall, white, lanky outsider with a tablet in his hand, recording notes. I waited, half-expecting the heads in front of me to turn from the television to face me, and hold up their fingers with an accusatory recognition of art imitating life—their lives—at that very moment. I suppose the simulacra of this tableau escaped them or perhaps didn’t mean as much to them, because they never bothered to stop watching the film. But I never felt more conspicuous or exploitative as I did at that moment. What separated me, after all, from this baseball scout, positioned as he was, annotating as he was? Neither did I want to be Thompson’s redemptive fantasy figure nor Emmerich’s scout capitalizing on incarcerated populations.

Though the youth, that day, didn’t view the scout scene with the personal gravity I did, they did identify differences between them myself and had formed ideas about who I was and where I came from. During one physical education session in the gym, I was talking with a group of three females who often preferred conversations to basketball. They asked what high school I went to. I told them that I was initially zoned to Hampton High School, an inner city school whose population was over 90% Black and primarily
participated in the free- or reduced-lunch program. My parents, however, decided to move the year before I was to enter high school into a neighbourhood zoned to Southlake High School, which was a higher achieving public school with a number of wealthy students. Katie remarked, “You’d fit in better at Hampton than Southlake.” I asked her why, because, after all I was White. And there were more White kids at Southlake than Hampton. She replied that it was because I wasn’t “preppy and rich like the kids at Southlake.” The ensuing discussion among the three girls, led by Katie, then focused on which high school they thought I belonged at most, concluding that Boone High School would be the best fit, a somewhat more rural high school that was mostly White but “not preppy and rich like Southlake.” I was not preppy and rich, but Katie was certainly aware of my Whiteness.

In a later interview, Katie revisited this issue of how she saw me and what she assumed about my background, so different from hers. When I asked her what movie she would like to see, she immediately suggested *Lockdown*, a drama about a Black college-bound athlete whose life is turned around after he’s arrested for a murder he didn’t commit. The primary character, Avery, has a very tough time adjusting to life in prison and the movie recounts these difficulties. When I ask Katie if I should see *Lockdown* she says, “no,” and laughs, adding, “not for you.” When I ask her why not she replied: “Nah, I study people. And you’d probably be like, ‘Oh my god, that’s really terrible. That’s bad,’ but like, you know some people be like, ‘That’s messed up’ but you like, [said in her White voice] ‘Oh, that’s terrible, that’s bad’ ”

After this exchange, I realized that Katie perceived a distance between the two of us and made some assumptions about how I’d interact with and react to a film depicting a
wrongly-imprisoned youth. I concede that I don’t know about much of that because it hasn’t been a part of my life but asked her what made her think that about me. Always candid, she explained further: “I mean . . . it’s not your outer appearance. If you sit down and listen to what people say, you know what I’m sayin’? I listen to what you say, how you grew up, you know what I’m sayin’—in the middle of town, like by the railroad tracks [a predominately lower class, Black neighbourhood], you know? I listen to everything. I observe.”

She reasoned that I might understand a part of what happened in the movie but rather than really understand what was going on and what the incarceration meant to Avery in the film, I would probably merely comment on the unfairness of the decision or perhaps even resist its inclusion despite the fact that “stuff like that happens sometimes in day to day life” to people.

None of my reflections featured any resolutions to these dilemmas of place and perception. It did, however, return me to Jay’s words that I should just “listen to what the kids gotta say” and to be as transparent and accessible in the writing and dissertation as possible. The recognition and conspicuous nature of difference between me and my participants was an issue that comes up throughout this paper and I think it’s appropriate as we talk about the relational communication between, among, and across the narratives of my participants, situating them within the larger social spheres and contexts of their experience.

**Participant Selection and Profiles**

My selection of participants was based on a number of considerations. While working in the classrooms and around the facility, there were some youths who were
more likely to participate in discussions and their comments were articulate and insightful. These students were often the ones most likely to join in conversations with me or offer opinions when a staff member, teacher, or I posed questions or discussion topics to the larger group. Because of the abbreviated nature of my visits, I didn’t have the time it took to build a relationship with some of the more withdrawn youth, though I tried to engage as many youths as I could in casual conversation or discussions. Certainly, there are possibly youth who did not participate who would have been just as articulate and insightful as those more vocal, but I didn’t have much opportunity in the limited time and interaction I had with them in their structured day to assess how they might contribute to the project.

I also spoke with Mr. Carradine, eliciting his opinion on which juveniles might make strong participants and who would be reliable and dependable photographers, those who would approach the project with appropriate seriousness and give “their all.” When I went to him the first time, I had seven names. He immediately dismissed one name from the list, saying that the charges in this particular case were serious and that there would likely be consent issues with the youth’s mother. Although this particular juvenile could be quite talkative (and had been with me), there were too many complications regarding his upcoming trial. He also suspected that access to this youth would become an issue. I was now down to six. A second name was eliminated from the list, the youth who had earlier said that “don’t nobody give a shit about us.” This particular youth, Mr. Carradine explained, was extremely immature and he doubted how much he could offer and wouldn’t trust him entirely to contribute meaningfully to the process. This didn’t eliminate him from consideration on my part, but when I was told his release was
imminent, probably in the next day or two, I realized that my list had shrunk to five. It
wasn’t long before the list became four after we placed a call to Baton Rouge, the state
capital, regarding one youth. This particular repeat offender would be a tremendous asset
to the study, according to Mr. Carradine; this youth had lived a rough life and probably
still had a very tough road ahead of him. But he could be, in many ways, a model kid and
had garnered the respect of most of the youths and staff in the facility. He was under
state custody, however, which meant that my access to him was blocked by state
bureaucracy rather than the consent of his parents or guardians. Mr. Carradine, however,
didn’t anticipate a problem. I sat in his office on a conference call to one of his
colleagues at the state level to secure verbal consent, a mere formality, he figured.
Unfortunately, he had figured incorrectly; permission was denied. If I wanted access to
this youth, then I would have to drive to Baton Rouge and file paperwork with the State
explaining my case and intent as well as providing my credentials and security clearance.
The state would then take the request under review and get back to me. The process
would take weeks at least and would likely end up in ultimate denial anyway. We were
both discouraged and scratched a third name off of my list.

The four prospective participants with which I was left were quality kids,
opinionated, articulate, and observant, Mr. Carradine explained. Of those four, only three
had parents grant consent: Bambam, Jay, and Katie. These were my first participants.

**Bambam.** Bambam is a 16-year-old White male tenth grader who is considered a
repeat offender. He comes from a lower-class neighbourhood, a trailer park, in a
somewhat rural area north of town. He has a twin brother with whom he does not often
get along and at the time of my first research trip, both are incarcerated. It’s not the first
time they’ve done time concurrently. His home life is not easy; his mother battled substance abuse and works a part-time job and their relationship has been, at times, contentious. He has a history of trouble at school and has been kicked out; thus his status at the facility is “Lab Kid.” The first sustained conversation I had with Bambam took place in the lab as we watched *The Powerpuff Girls* and he explained his past encounters with campus security at his high school and some of his priors that led to his incarceration. In the course of this conversation, I found Bambam to be quite open and talkative, providing a keen view of the facilities because he’d been locked up several times and was familiar with the site and its procedures, administration, structure, and staff. Of all the youth I worked with early in the project, Bambam struck me as the most willing to participate.

When I asked Bambam if he wanted to participate, he didn’t hesitate. He didn’t offer an explanation as to why he wanted to or what his motivations were, but he said he did have a lot to say and could answer most questions I asked. He wasn’t lying; I conducted more interviews with Bambam (four) than I did with any other participant, and we covered topics from judge’s chambers to Judgment Day.

**Jay.** A 16-year-old Black male, Jay is also considered a repeat offender who was in KPJDC for the seventh time when I interviewed him. He’s an exceptionally bright and charismatic youth who is both personable and humorous. He was the most outspoken and loud juvenile in the high school classroom, leading discussions and giving both youths and staff a hard time, not shying away from anybody. His conversations with Katie were probably the most dominant discursive feature of our film viewing sessions. He began carrying drugs for dealers when he was eight or nine years old, recruited by
older drug dealers because, as he explained, “If you little like that, the cops are never gonna look at you.” Since then, his roles in drug trafficking progressed from a child ferrying drugs to a teenaged dealer with increased responsibilities. He’d also demonstrated some business acumen and was considered a profitable dealer. This afforded him some status in the community, on par with his athletic ability. He’d played sports competitively in high school, primarily football, and was quite good. One staff member who was familiar with his work on the field and had seen him athletically said that he was exceptionally fast and possessed enough skill to attract the attention of universities and perhaps attend college on an athletic scholarship. If it weren’t for his life of crime, of course. His participation in the study took place immediately before his final release, before his seventeenth birthday, a bittersweet transition because he was getting out but was informed that the next time he was picked up, he’d be taken to an adult facility. The final interview was marked with optimism about getting out and staying out.

Jay explained his reasons for participating in the project saying: “I just like givin my opinion . . . If I see something, I’d be like, ‘Hold on, man, I gotta put it out there to see if somebody else sees it too.’ Because you’re gonna miss something . . . Stuff that’s goin’ on around here, I like to point it out to people: ‘Look, this is what’s goin on, man. You don’t see this?’ And then they’re like, ‘Yea, man, I know what you’re talking about.’ ”

**Katie.** Katie is a Black female and, like Bambam and Jay, is also 16 years old and is in the ninth grade at Southlake High School, the school she earlier described as for “rich and preppy kids,” and she doesn’t care for being at Southlake at all. When I met Katie, it was her third time at the facilities. Technically, she’s a repeat offender but her
parole officer describes her more as a runner with a history of running—from home and from law enforcement. Her aspirations are to be a successful and famous rhythm and blues singer/diva and she idolizes Mary J. Blige. She sees little value in school and what little value she does identify and associate with education diminishes the further along she gets. From the first time I spoke with Katie, I found her quite verbal, headstrong and direct, and seemingly honest to the point of bluntness. When I asked her what she’d like her name to be in this dissertation, she immediately answered “Katie” and I repeated the name, “Katie.” She corrected me though, I guess assuming that my pronunciation meant I would spell it K-a-t-y. She repeated the name louder and more emphatically: “Katie! K-A-T-I-E.” She didn’t hesitate to correct me or make a comment that could be taken insultingly. Her exchanges in class, with Jay, were no less censored. While watching Medea’s Family Reunion (Cannon & Upton, 2006) and discussing one of the scenes of domestic violence, Jay muttered a comment intended to incite Katie’s ire. He was successful and she glared at him and issued the following warning: “Don’t fuck with me and make me come across that table” to which Jay responded, dismissively, “Aw, look at this. She’s tryin’ to turn this bitch into Jerry Springer.” Both of them laughed, as did the rest of the class, as did I. I decided to ask Katie to participate after a vote in class to watch First Sunday (a film about crime and redemption featuring a predominately Black cast) or Miracle (the movie inspired by the United States’ gold medal in ice hockey in the 1980 Winter Olympics). First Sunday won by a considerable margin and Katie remarked, triumphantly, “Ah hah . . . Now the minority is a majority.”

In a later interview, she explained why she said yes when I asked her if she would participate. “I mean, the way I feel . . . I feel like, he’s out here tryin’ to help other kids”
she offered, “and, you know, put an opinion out there from other children that’s in this situation that’s goin down the road these other kids goin down” because, as outsiders, “they don’t know what’s goin’ on with me, they don’t feel my pain.”

I worked with these three participants during my third visit (second official data collection visit) at the facilities, from April 4 to 19. I left Louisiana and returned to Toronto to meet with my advisor, share some preliminary findings and impressions before my next trip to the facilities a few weeks later, from May 9 to May 16. During this third data collection trip, I worked with the following three participants.

**Rider.** The youngest of the youth I worked with, Rider, is the only one not in high school. He is a first time offender, a 13-year-old Black male eighth grader who attended junior high in a relatively rural town outside of the city. I’d gotten to know Rider a bit on my first two previous trips to KPJDC, at the time of our interviews in May he had been locked up for five months, since January of 2009, on some significant charges. He was a quiet, seemingly well-mannered kid who never really got into trouble inside the facility and was often a recipient of certain privileges afforded to the most well-behaved youth (e.g. placement in the O.R., a room at the front of each hall that isn’t a cell but rather a windowed entry space leading to the halls, that’s more open, offering views into the Rec area and the televisions in them). He was also well respected by his peers because of his behavior and easy nature as well as his athletic ability. During the basketball games in the gym, Rider’s talent was apparent and he often dominated players that were older than he. His behaviour in the junior high classroom was also deferent, respectful, and compliant.
Because I’d only had one week during this particular visit, I felt that a youth such as Rider, with whom I’d already established a relationship, would make a strong participant even though I had my reservations about his age relative to my other participants. He had exhibited, though, a maturity and though I knew he was younger, I was surprised when he told me he was only thirteen. When I asked why he agreed to participate, he simply said that he wanted to participate because he thought it would be “cool” that someone wanted to know “how I’ve been since I been up in here.”

**Fisher.** Fisher was the most frequent offender in KPJDC that I worked with; he had lost count of how many times he had actually been locked up but guessed that it had been “about 11 times” since the age of 10. He’s a 16-year-old Black male who knew that he would be on probation at least until he turned 18 but wasn’t sure what would happen to him after that. I’d spoken to Fisher on my February trip to the facilities and noticed that he was extremely talkative and spoke with considerable familiarity on the policies and procedures of the facility as well as the drug scene in the city. He was often the centre of attention, reminding me of Jay in that regard, because of his tendency to dominate conversations as well as the acquiescence of others around him to listen. He was outspoken and articulate and I thought after that first trip that he might contribute much to the project but when I returned in April, he was gone and back out on the streets.

By my May visit, however, he was back in KPJDC, sans mohawk, later explaining to me that he got rid of it and he knew it was time to grow up. And this time around he was no longer in school; the first time I’d met him he was in the high school classroom, enrolled as a student in the district, but by May he had become one of the lab Kids. This placement allowed him more latitude to speak, and he took full advantage.
When I approached him about the project and the participation, he enthusiastically agreed, without hesitation. He thought that it was a good thing that I was doing and said that this was a good place to start my work because it was a smaller facility, adding that I probably wouldn’t want to go to a larger facility so early in the research because he thinks I wouldn’t last. When I asked him why, he said, “you’re too nice, too soft,” adding that I would also have trouble fitting in at another, more dangerous facility because I “didn’t come to hurt juveniles and a good person like me don’t belong in a place like that.” He then made some suggestions about future work at larger facilities before concluding, saying he decided to participate mainly “Because I feel like some people don’t really get to see how it is up in here and understand some of the stuff that we go through.” In that single statement, Fisher encapsulated, microcosmically, much of my argument and purpose: that the dominant discourse and depiction of these kids and their lives doesn’t really allow outsiders to see how these kids and their lives actually are. Of course, I also realize the limitations of my work as I try to represent their perspectives because I’m also an outsider and don’t really know about these kids’ lives, either. But the final comment about understanding was a point well taken. Even after all of my work with these youths and on this project, I know I don’t completely “understand some of the stuff they go through” but by featuring Fisher’s voice, among others, better understandings might be achieved.

**Nemo.** The final participant was Nemo, a 15-year-old Black male and first-time offender who awaited trial, confident he would get out because of the nature of the charges, his relative innocence, and his past record (or lack thereof). His court date was still ahead of him and even a verdict of innocence would not change the fat that he would
have served at least a month behind bars, while also costing him his enrolment in school. His file was much smaller than any of the other participants, with only a few notes about some minor school disciplinary issues. When I meet Nemo for the first time, it’s in the lab and he’s wrestling with the confusion surrounding his school status. He reported to the high school classroom on his first day at KPJDC but was informed shortly thereafter that he had been expelled from school and was designated as one of the Lab Kids and was escorted out of the classroom to the Lab. While he much prefers the computer lab to Mr. Trent’s classroom, he’s bothered by the utter lack of explanation about why he’d been expelled from school. Neither he nor his aunt (his guardian since his mother died when Nemo was eight years old) really know the situation with the school and Nemo wants to return to school when he gets out, but isn’t sure he’ll be able to. The anxiety of his educational limbo features prominently in our discussions and interviews.

He’s a very sociable youth and strikes me as kind, admitting later that he didn’t watch much TV programming but did enjoy some of what was on Nickelodeon and Disney channels (his chosen pseudonym is of the titular fish in Disney’s feature film Finding Nemo). He had also recieved some teasing about his nickname and for being “soft” from some of the other kids in the Lab. But he’s opinionated and doesn’t back down during the conversations and he knows a lot of the people in the facility, since he comes from the same neighbourhoods as many of them, having lived in two of the city’s most impoverished areas of public housing in his life.

When I asked Nemo about participating, some of the other Lab Kids commented that he’d be a relatively worthless authority on this topic since he was so soft and had only been in the facility a couple of weeks. For them, there is a legitimacy borne of
recidivism for these kids because of “the trend to commit more children of colour to secure detention facilities” which creates “a culture in which to have gone to prison is a badge of honor—a rite of passage that has influenced many aspects of hip hop society, and therefore young African American popular and economic culture” (Williams & Sapp-Grant, 2007, p. 331). Most of my participants were, after all, repeat offenders and, compared in discouraging ways to their imprisoned adult counterparts who had “come almost exclusively from the most precarious strata of the urban proletariat” and were “regulars of the carceral system: 59 percent have already experienced detention, and 14 percent were previously put on probation, leaving just under one-quarter who are novices to the jailhouse” (Wacquant, 2009, p. 73).

Nemo seemed appreciative of the opportunity, flattered when I asked him. When I asked what message he wanted to get across, why he’d volunteer his perspective, he replied: “To tell people this not no place to come—I wouldn’t wish this on nobody to come here . . . You just sit in your room all day until you go to PE or lunch. That’s not something I’m used to—you gotta adjust to it. And it’s not hard—it’s not easy to adjust to it.”

Consent

Because my participants were minors, I needed their consent as well as that of their parents/guardians. In some juvenile cases, that party is a larger bureaucratic entity (e.g. the state of Louisiana) which, in my case, would greatly complicate the consent process for prospective participants. I only selected participants who were still under the care of their parents at the time I asked for consent. I had a consent form for the youths and a separate consent form for the parents—both are located in the appendices. Before
the first audio-recorded interview, I had each participant read, sign, and date the consent form and made them aware of the fact that they were free to pull out of the project and stop participating at any moment. None of the six youth did; all signed the consent forms and sustained their participation throughout.

Gaining permission from the youths, incarcerated as they were, proved to be an easier affair than securing permission from their parents/guardians. Because KPJDC services the entire parish, the detainees can arrive at the facility from anywhere in the parish. In some cases, this facility holds juveniles from other areas of the state as well. I was told by Mr. Carradine that access to the parents can be a difficult process and that driving around for parent permission might be difficult and time consuming, an issue worth consideration because of my limited time at the facilities. He said that he would be willing to call the parents on my behalf and explain the process to them since he was used to tracking down parents anyway. I told him that I needed the consent from the parents, using him as a proxy was not a choice. I did, however, submit an amended ethics review form to the University of Toronto, asking for permission to receive verbal consent over the phone, rather than relying solely on written consent. The University expeditiously approved the amendment, and I began working the phones. Verbal consent, over the phone, however, was not an easy task either. The contact information located in the juveniles’ files was sometimes out of date or featured numbers that weren’t working. Karen, a security staff member, said that some of the parents would dodge calls from the facility and that I should consider using my cell phone, but even then, there were no guarantees because some of the parents refused to answer any unfamiliar number.
It was a frustrating process, as I sat on the park bench outside the facility’s double doors calling one number after another, noting successes and failures in my field notes. In Jay’s case, for example, I tried a home number first and received no answer. The second number, for a cell phone, returned an out-of-service error. A third number, listed under his father’s name, returned no answer as well. A fourth call, also to a cell phone, returned an answer from Jay’s mother who agreed to allow Jay to participate and she sounded enthusiastic about the project because she believed that Jay is a good, talented kid who simply chose his path poorly. She wasn’t sure if this experience would help him but she still thought his participation was important, saying, “If he isn’t helped then maybe he can help others, maybe his story can help other kids stay out of trouble.”

Reaching Jay’s mother was typical of the process for many of the kids—disconnected numbers, numbers no longer in service, no answers, no returned calls. Most frustrating, however, was trying to reach Katie’s mother. I tried four different numbers, the first three to no avail. The first listed number was disconnected and no longer in service. The second number had also been disconnected, but the automated message indicated that this was a product of an unpaid bill. No answers at the third number. And no other number was listed. Feeling that I’d reached a dead end, I spoke with Karen and she suggested I head to the east side of the complex, where the parole officers are housed, and speak with her parole officer. Neither Karen nor Shauna, Katie’s parole officer, seemed surprised that I wasn’t having much luck since she could be a very tough mother to track down, even for Katie. The parole officer looked through her file and found another phone number that ended up being a work number for Katie’s mother and reached her at work. I got on the phone with Katie’s mother and received consent. The
field note entry for this call briefly chronicles the complications in securing permission with her:

*Work number—consent rec’d 4/16 @ 3:00 pm via phone call in Katie’s parole officer’s office. Toughest parent to track down. Numbers in the file at detention center offices didn’t work—not connected. Was told to head to her parole officer’s office and see if there was any other information. She pulled out Katie’s file and it was considerable, saying that the difficulty I’m having getting in touch with some parents is because they’re dodging calls. Says she’s had the same problem with Katie’s mom. After establishing contact, her mom explained that she was going that afternoon to pay the phone bill and the numbers on the file should be working soon. Officer says she doesn’t want to contact her at work but doesn’t have much choice.*

In the end, I managed to talk to the mothers of Jay, Bambam, Katie, and Rider, as well as Fisher’s grandmother, and Nemo’s aunt and received verbal consent from each.

**Ethics**

I submitted an ethics proposal to the University of Toronto’s Office of Research Ethics and received approval after a single round of amendments. In an effort to protect the participants as well as demonstrate my intent to act ethically I proposed/practiced the following: that the students’ names appear nowhere in the document and instead pseudonyms would be used (each participant was asked to choose his/her own name); after the interviews are fully transcribed and analyzed, the audio files will be deleted or erased; and the information gathered (recordings, field notes, etc.) will only be accessible by me whether in digital form through encryption or hard copy form through locked file cabinets at home. I also underwent a series of criminal and background checks by the state of Louisiana and Kakau Parish as part of the process in getting permission to speak with these students and abided by their rules and regulations regarding student privacy; the open lines of communication with facility administration helped as we negotiated ethical terrain throughout the process. And I provided all participants with my contact
information as well as that of my advisor and the University’s ethics offices should they feel the need for them.

In the course of the interviews, the participants were not required to share any information which they were uncomfortable sharing and they were notified that they can cease participation in the process at any point with no adverse penalty for them. During the research and writing phases, I kept hard copies of information in a locked office in my home and for any digital information I encrypted or password-protected files on my personal computer. The only risk I could identify related to potentially hurtful recollections as I ask students about their experiences at school and at the detention center. I tried to keep the questions open-ended enough that the participant shared only what he/she was comfortable sharing. Beyond this, the risk was minimal and was considered “low risk” research with a “medium risk” subject population by the criteria set forth by the University of Toronto’s ethics board protocol.

Dealing with the visually ethnographic aspects of the study required ethical consideration on my part as well. Such “decisions are best made once researchers are in a position to assess which specific visual methods will be appropriate or ethical in a particular research context” though “certain decisions and indicators about the use of visual images” (Pink, 2005, p. 40) were made before my field work and the photography began. The ethical issues involving visual ethnography and children are well documented. Pink (2005) cites several studies in which this issue was a factor (e.g. Hyde, 2005; MacDougal, 2005; Ragazzi, 2006; Raggl and Schratz, 2004) and concludes that it is advisable that all ethical considerations are made. For the photographic method at this facility, the youth were not able to photograph themselves or one another but no
other restrictions regarding subject matter were made. There were, however, changes made in the process of the photography, addressed in an upcoming section.

Aside from the single change to the ethics review regarding the permissiveness of verbal consent, there were no complications relating to the formal, documented application submitted to the University of Toronto. That is not to say, however, that ethical considerations ended there. I learned that ethical mindfulness did not end with a stamped approval from university bureaucracy, but rather was something that happened throughout my research and continues through the writing of this dissertation as I consider how to handle this subject, the data, and my participants ethically.

**Interviewing and Photographing**

My interview questionnaire (see Appendix C) was open-ended and served as a guide for the initial discussions. I wanted the primary content of the interviews to be on certain subjects, but I was hesitant to impose further restrictions on these participants, whose lives, both inside and outside the facility, had become increasingly circumscribed by authority and other subordinating factors. I also wanted the interviews to be as casual and informal as I could. It was already very tough to do, inside a booking room within a juvenile lockdown facility with a juvenile who is wearing a prison-issued uniform. It was difficult to escape this stage, but the attempt is important. Scott writes that, “We cannot know how contrived or imposed the performance is unless we can speak, as it were, to the performer offstage, out of this particular power-laden context” (1990, p. 4). Establishing a comfortable, less rigorous interview atmosphere certainly does not remove either of us from this power-laden context, but it was my attempt to establish a discussion that wasn’t organized with me as an authority seeking deferent, attentive, ordered
responses guided by a strict questionnaire. Such less-structured interview instruments
and “interview guides” also give “greater control to respondents” (Reissman, 1993, p. 55), control which I felt was important for my participants to experience as they reflected on their possession or lack of control in other aspects of their lives.

This “person-centered approach to ethnography” allows me to take “something that is perceived as ‘strange’ and making it ‘familiar’ to audiences who might otherwise cast aspersions on groups unlike themselves” (Luttrell, 2003, p. 6). What Luttrell struggled with in her work with poor, pregnant teenagers is comparable to what I faced with representing these incarcerated, marginalized youth. There exists an idea, largely informed by mainstream stereotypical depictions, of what criminal youth looks like and acts like. In Chapter 2, I discussed the influence that such mediated messages have on attitudes of people on the outside of juvenile prisons and these interviews were designed with the intent of providing another perspective on stereotypical depictions and conceptions of the “strange.”

I interviewed each participant three times; Bambam I interviewed a fourth time because he was still at KPJDC when I returned in May, while Katie and Jay had both been released. And all interviews, except for one interview with both Nemo and Fisher that I conducted just outside the Lab one day, were individual interviews. I would have preferred more focused, formal, small group interviews, but logistical difficulties around finding space and sufficient surveillance proved difficult. As it was, I had to conduct interviews in spaces that could be monitored by security camera and if I was talking with more than one student, there would have to be security staff available. It was also tough to negotiate time with a single youth, much less coordinate time with multiple youths.
With such time and space and security/surveillance restraints, I only had one formal, recorded interview with more than one participant at the same time.

Thus, I ended up with 18 interviews total and the transcription of these interviews made up the bulk of my recorded data. At the conclusion of my transcribing, I had over 115,000 words (approximately 400 pages) worth of interview content. Some of the interviews were as short as fifteen minutes and one as long as two hours, but the majority of the interviews fell in the thirty minute to one hour range. They didn’t all go as planned, however. One interview with Rider was cut short because they needed the room I was conducting the interview in for a new booking into the facility, and during a second we had to move to the gymnasium to finish the interview. Another was ended unexpectedly when Bambam’s mother showed up for a family counseling session. Katie and I were displaced from one location because a youth needed to use the telephone in the room we were in, but I convinced the staff to let me finish the interview in Rec 2, in plain sight of the security staff in the control room. Like Luttrell, “I learned from doing this project that a key habit of mind for the ethnographer is being able to be patient and accepting of surprises and conflicts in the field” (Luttrell, 2003, p. 147).

The photographic component required more discussion and strategy, because I was reliant on the willingness of the security staff to implement or oversee the cameras and the photography to an extent. After some discussions with administration and security personnel, we decided on a plan that allowed the youths access to areas of the facility and time in order to photograph. During the school day, when most of the youths are in class and are easier to monitor and supervise, a security staff member could be made available to escort me and my three participants for that visit throughout the
facility. We had about an hour’s worth of time to tour the facility, with the cameras, and photograph whatever they chose to. During this time, I gave few directions other than to make sure their finger isn’t in the picture or blocking the flash during interior photos. They were also told that they were not to take a picture of themselves or another juvenile and we (the security staff member and I) would be watching for this. Aside from that, they could photograph whatever they wished.

The first photographic tour took place in April with Bambam, Jay, and Katie while the second occurred in May with Fisher, Rider, and Nemo. Each was given a disposable camera, with 27 exposures available. Only one participant, Bambam, asked for an additional camera. Only Katie took fewer than 27, handing me the camera when she was done and saying she was finished. And there was only one denial on the part of the staff member regarding a request: Nemo asked if he could photograph the inside of the control room, but was told no. We moved from one end of the facility to the other, and the youths asked for cells or rooms or closets to be opened. They asked for uniforms and restraints to be taken out. They asked to be escorted to every area of the facility which they had normal access to. When I asked if there was anything they wanted to photograph but didn’t, nobody offered a response or additional request. After the walk around the facility, I took the cameras from the students, rather than leave them overnight in the control room and took them directly to a one-hour photo lab for development and waited as they were developed. In total, the youths had taken 170 photographs, some of which are included in the dissertation, most of them in Chapter 9.

Beyond Media
Initially, the focus of my project was media depiction, responsiveness, and engagement. The interview guide features questions about the type of media that these youths consume on a regular basis, particularly the televisual and to what extent they felt that this either informed their own ideas about themselves or how accurately they felt it portrayed their lives. The responses to those questions surprised me, as each indicated that movies or television really didn’t mean much to them, or that they didn’t watch it very often. Coupled with my post-Powerpuff realizations, I knew that the project needed to transcend a focus on media depictions and extend to the social spheres (neighbourhoods, schools, and prisons) that are typically used as backdrops for these cinematic depictions. The lives and experiences of these kids occurred within these environments and in the intersections between them.

When I asked Bambam about influences from television or the movies, he jumped straight to music, but answered with no real specificity except to refer to a song, whose name or artist he couldn’t remember, with the lyrics, “I’m an American soldier, I stand up for my freedom.” I was, and remain, unsure about how to reconcile this comment with respect to the frequency with which military careers are referenced in the facility (from signage, to brochures, to the responses during the interviews as we discussed their future options) and the relative lack of freedom behind a locked steel door. He said, though, that while he liked that song and country music, generally, he didn’t feel it really reflected his experiences nor did it influence him. He followed up by saying he didn’t watch a lot of television, either, choosing usually to watch the news “sometimes” or a TV station, TruTV, whose programming is allegedly “real.” Jay echoed a similar sentiment regarding truth and fiction, preferring films and programming that was true because he
doesn’t “like seein’ fake stuff.” He didn’t care if a movie had an R-rating or not, preferring instead to pay attention to whether or not a movie was based on a true story because “if it’s based on a true story, I know it’s good. I know it’s real ya feel me? That happened before.” Here, Jay was evincing the same attitudes that I was trying to combat, undermine, or question—that alleging truth or claiming the depiction of truth is not an indication of actuality. I then began to question to what extent my participants might be victimized, themselves, by these stock representations.

Katie said she’s rarely home and even then, she only watches movies when she’s bored. When I asked her if those movies ever influenced her, she laughed and said, “The [kind of] movies I watch shouldn’t influence me at all.” She watched more movies in her time in detention that she had at home for a long time. She prefers to be away from home and working, when her “mom’s not really trippin’ ” and allows her to get a job, so most of the television she watches at home happens with her younger brother, and that’s usually the Disney channel. Like Katie’s little brother, Nemo was also a fan of the Disney channel. He didn’t watch much television, preferring to be outside, a self-described “outside person” who’d rather spend time playing basketball or out in the park or hanging out with his cousin. But if he’s at home, watching television, he’d prefer to watch sports and if there are no sports on, he says he’ll turn it to the Disney channel because he “could sit there and watch the Disney channel all day.”

These weren’t the answers that I was expecting. I was working with detained juveniles, inquiring about TV programs or movies that they aren’t watching often or regularly and they’re responding with programming, such as the Disney Channel, that don’t dedicate air time to the depiction of violence or youth criminality or law
enforcement difficulties. I knew that the conception of and discussion around media had
to expand, and that my project’s focus could shift to address that since:

Academics can, in part, exercise their role as public intellectuals via such
approaches by giving students the opportunity to understand how power is
organized through an enormous number of “popular” cultural spheres . . . By
laying claim to popular, mass, and alternative cultural spaces as important sites of
public pedagogy, educators have the opportunity, if not the responsibility, to raise
important questions about how knowledge is produced, circulated, and taken up in
different pedagogical sites. (Giroux, 2009, p. 140)

The incorporation of their photographs and the visual method is one staked claim in the
popular mass media space of public pedagogy. And their responsiveness to their
experiences existed beyond interaction with mainstream televisual representation.

Though they might largely be excluded from the dominant media culture, there are means
and methods to produce and disseminate multimedia as part of cultural and political
projects (Kellner, 2008, p.161), and photolanguage methods are one example. And
though the subjects of these pictures are of the various parts of a lockdown facility, the
commentary in the interviews, as we discussed the images, reaches outside of the bars
and provides community, social, political, and educational commentary. These cells
represent, in some ways, the culmination of the “grave dangers for youth” but, as Kellner
points out, these can be combated if “youth are able to achieve a variety of forums of
literacies, including print, media, computer, and multiple literacies that will enable them
to engage and help construct contemporary culture and society” (Kellner, 2008, p. 62).

Transcription and Organization

I decided to transcribe each interview in its entirety, every word of mine and my
participants. I felt too apprehensive about listening to the interviews and making a
decision, on first pass, about what should be transcribed and what should not. The
significance and silences aren’t always apparent in the first listen. Even full transcriptions are inherently “incomplete, partial, and selective” (Reissman, 1993, p. 11) and those complications are compounded if such edits are made initially. I also didn’t feel I had the experience in listening to interviews and transcribing, or with qualitative methods generally, to make such decisions upon an initial listening.

I also could not hand the audio files over to a third party for transcription because of the ethical issues surrounding the protection of the identity of my participant minors and the preservation of their anonymity. I set about, then, to transcribe each word of all 18 interviews, which amounted to just over twenty-four hours worth of audio recordings. I decided, after reading Reissman’s thoughts on transcription, that a single pass would not be enough, either. “Close and repeated listenings coupled with methodic transcribing often leads to insights that in turn shape how we choose to represent an interview narrative in our text” (Reissman, 1993, p. 60). Since I’ve struggled with the crisis of representation, I felt that such an approach would prove useful. The first transcription was very broken and disjointed, as I stopped—in fits and starts—using a software “foot pedal” that turned some of my keys into Play, Pause, Rewind, and Fast Forward buttons. This part of the transcription was an awkward, uncoordinated, and oddly syncopated dance of my fingers across the keyboard and, as a result, I never felt that I was back in the interview, listening to my participant. At times, I had to slow the speed down so that I could catch the words completely. Other times, I had to adjust the volume, from one interview to another and within the same interviews, when the participant’s voice rose or dropped or when background and ambient noises (e.g. other youths, air conditioning units) rose. It did feel, as Reissman put it, “methodical” and I would add tedious, unless
she implied tedious; in that case, it was doubly “methodical.” During this first transcription, I felt very removed from the process and knew that I would need additional listenings. I listened to the interviews a second time, with the original transcription in front of me, making changes and adding notes. I listened to some of the passages three or four or more times, particularly those narratives providing significant commentary and insight on their lives.

As I transcribed, I did my best to capture the pronunciation and vocal features of each of the participants. Some of the youths had distinctive features in their responses and stories. Jay, for example, used the phrase “ya feel me?” very, very often while Katie punctuated her narratives with one “like” after another. These appeared in the original transcriptions, but in many cases have been edited out in the dissertation. I struggled with this censoring of their words and was initially reluctant. But after reading how Wendy Luttrell handled the transcripts of her pregnant teen participants, I felt a compromise could be reached where I recount accurately their dialect and style of speech and the content of their stories without making them appear unintelligent. Luttrell writes:

I also was selective in using the girls’ dialect; I deleted certain speech utterances (such as “um” or “ah”) and I also (reluctantly) deleted some repetition of words and phrases that were a feature of their performative style of speech because I worried about giving the wrong impression of the girls. As other ethnographers have noted, when translating conversational speech or oral storytelling into a written text, the person speaking can be misinterpreted as sounding less articulate, or less educated, than they are (2003, p. 42)

There were instances when I was listening to the interviews for a second time when I looked down at the words on the hard copy and thought to myself that even though the words were the same, that I had indicated every pause, every utterance, every sigh, what was on my page didn’t actually match with what I was listening to. I’ve decided to adopt
Luttrell’s approach, deleting words and often repeated phrases and utterances while keeping their dialect and other speech patterns as close to the actual audio as I can. I do want to emphasize, however, that none of my participants came across as uneducated or inarticulate, so for those passages in the dissertation that might appear so, that product is likely a result of my (mis)handling of the transcription.

Even early in the observation and interview stages of data collection, themes began to appear; this evolving, thematically revelatory aspect continued to take place throughout the transcription process. Some initial transcription took place before one trip to Louisiana and it was on the drive back, as I pulled off a highway just outside of Toronto on my way back, at the end of the trip (most of which was spent in reflection of the interview and field notes transcribed), when the organization of the dissertation revealed itself. I had considered organizing the chapters by participant, by media format (e.g. interview versus movie versus photography), by theme (surveillance, discipline, resistance). None of these approaches felt as if they effectively conveyed the relationship between or across one another’s experience and their relationship to the larger social (and stereotypical). Instead, I needed something that connected the stories while providing insight in each environment where these youths experienced subordination. Recognizing that the subordination was fairly perpetual, I understood that the dissertation would be organized by each of these subordinating spheres of their experience (not to be considered as disconnected bubbles because there is certainly a great deal of interconnectedness): their homes and neighbourhoods, their schools, their encounters with law enforcement and the judicial system, their incarceration, and their futures. And my intention is that this dissertation not become another instance of such subordination,
so “in writing about the conversations, stories, and art forms I have struggled not to set up a hierarchy between the [youths’] words and my interpretations” (Luttrell, 2003, p. 42).

The following chapters are arranged according to these areas. Within each chapter, there will be references to the films and the photographs. It’s important that the statements made in relation to the movies and by the photographs are not treated independently, separated from other parts of the dissertation. The comments they made while watching films and in looking at their pictures weren’t just about the films or images themselves, nor were they exclusively about KPJDC. Rather, they stretched beyond to indict the homes they’ve grown up in, the schools they attended, and the cops that harassed them. Such descriptions, across all of these experiential boundaries, are important because these youths are more than merely locked up youths or criminalized juveniles, for as Faith (1993) reminds us, no “essential” prisoner exists. Moving beyond such singularity is important in better understanding these youths because:

Once we have named a condition of subordination such as wage-laborer or slave, it remains to specify the particular ways in which the subordination is experienced by those who occupy that status. We know relatively little about a Malay villager if we know only that he is poor and landless. We know far more about the cultural meaning of his poverty once we know that he is particularly in despair . . . (Scott, 1990, p. 113)

My work, though not about Malay villagers in poverty, attempts to pick up where Scott’s ellipses leaves off. We know far more about the cultural meaning of these youths’ lives once we know he or she has been locked up because . . .

Their participation, through their stories and pictures, contribute to the completion of that sentence as part of an “effort [to link] a revitalized critical pedagogy that attempts to empower individuals so that they can analyze and criticize . . . as well as participate in producing its cultural and political forums and sites” (Kellner, 2008, p. 162). Their
contributions also provide a counternarrative, constituting a similar function as the world-upside-down prints for Scott while serving as “counterculture in a quite literal sense, to a dominant transcript of hierarchy and deference” (1990, p. 172). Although, considering the nature of my incarcerated participant demographic, the oppositional phrase “inside-out” would probably be more accurate than “upside-down.”

The upcoming chapters build on narratives that have been hinted at in this, and preceding, chapters. Increasingly, this dissertation’s content and structure was directed by the narratives of these youths as a:

- means to influence the turn of events that can be squared with its own nature, while that nature cannot be preserved for long without “critical pedagogy”—education sharpening its critical edge, “making society feel guilty” and “stirring things up” (Bauman, 2005, p. 14) through stirring human consciousness. (Giroux, 2009, p. 66)

Making society feel guilty, as Bauman phrases it, returns me the compelling importance of Richardson’s “criteria” that opened this chapter, as well as the emphasis that Tim O’Brien places on story-truth over happening-truth, in an effort to make the stomach believe. Luttrell puts best what I’ve attempted to do with my participants as she explains what she intended to do with her pregnant female participants: “Perhaps the best way to describe what I have done is to say that I have written these chapters hoping to bring readers into the girls’ personal and social worlds” (Luttrell, 2003, p. 43).
Chapter 6: At Home

And all my people that’s drug dealin just to get by
Stack ya money till it gets sky high
We wasn’t supposed to make it past 25
The jokes on you we still alive . . .
As a shorty I looked up to the dopeman
Only adult man I knew that wasn’t broke, man
Flickin Starter coats man, Man you don’t know, man
Sittin in the hood like community colleges
This dope money here is Lil Trey’s scholarship
Cause ain’t no tuition for havin no ambition
And ain’t no loans for sittin your ass at home
So we forced to sell crack, rap, and get a job
You gotta do something man your ass is grown
- Kanye West, “We Don’t Care”

Each of the participants described subordinating aspects of their lives at home; this included the nature of the neighbourhoods and communities in which they lived as well as their lives with their family and friends. They described the difficulties they had in their houses and neighbourhoods and the extent to which these affected their own attitudes and perspectives. All of the youths came from low socioeconomic homes within neighbourhoods that featured a high police presence where arrests were common, as was the prevalence of drugs, though there were different types of dwellings (i.e. trailer parks, low rent apartment buildings, subsidized housing, housing projects). Law enforcement officers were no strangers to these kids; some referenced cops they saw routinely by first name. Their role and presence increased in the last couple of decades, the result of legislation that put these communities, along with their youth, under closer watch.

During the 1980s, with the support of the federal Department of Justice, most big American cities established computerized registries called “SHODI youths” (the acronym means “serious and habitual offender/drug infraction”), which catalog teenagers believed to be real or potential delinquents—a convenient pretext for placing segregated neighbourhoods and their residents under reinforced police and penal surveillance. (Wacquant, 2009, p. 136)
The familiarity with narcotics was common across participants, and their attitudes toward harder drugs across the participants were generally similar with regard to a disdain for, at least, the harder drugs if they expressed any acceptance of drugs at all; the admitted dealers and users expressed a disgust or contempt for harder drugs and their abusers (e.g. crack cocaine). Each of the participants had close family members locked up, some immediate. Close-to and at-home subordination impacted the lives of each youth, though the type, degree, and frequency varied from one case to another. Their narratives, with regard to their neighbourhoods and the presence of police, are an example of Simon’s observation that “poor and minority people—the historically discriminated against—find themselves on the worst end of all the changes driven by governing through crime” (2007, p. 182). This chapter begins with a description of the neighbourhoods of each of the participants and their responses, when offered, to living there. Their lives reflect the intersection of the impoverished realities that Judt talks about the rise in poverty in the United States since 1970, identifying the “social dysfunctions” marked by “the pathologies of inequality and poverty—crime, alcoholism, violence, and mental illness” which have multiplied (2010, p. 175).

**Participant Neighbourhoods and Communities**

*I’m from that dirty dirty south  
We put guns in yo mouth  
And see ya talking to laws  
And then you run in yo’ house  
Listen up boy  
Cuz I’m trying to tell you what I’m talking about  
This little boy right hea will pop ya eyeballs out  
I’m cutthroat, committed, lil Fish be savage wit it  
I run from out my hood, I’m takin over whole damn city*  
- Lyrics from a rap by Fisher
Rider was the furthest removed, geographically, from the city and KPJDC (and the rest of the participants), living in a small semi-rural town about 15 miles west of KPJDC. When I asked Rider about his neighbourhood, he described it as follows:

It’s when you go out on the highway or the main road—like when you get to my there’s some houses on this side [gestures to left] and houses on this side [gestures to right] and I live on the right side. They got a two-story house across the street from my house and that’s my—one of my best friends I grew up with—he lives across the street and then they got this street nearby named Barton and I got some cousins that live down the street right here [continues to gesture with his hands on a map he’s drawn with his fingers on the table]. And then you go to the next road and I got some cousins who live down that street. It’s like all my cousins live, we all live out there.

There was no other participant who talked about his/her extended family and their activities more than Rider; comparatively, he had a relatively stable family structure that lacked some of the neglect and abuses that were apparent in the narratives of some of the other youths. As we talked, it became very important for him to describe the layout of the neighbourhood and where everyone lived relative to his house. This semirural community is more closed off than the urban neighbourhoods that are featured in the narratives of the other juveniles. One of his favourite pastimes (as well as his name for this study) reflects this close-knit rurality as he talked about trail rides, a very popular tradition among African Americans in this area of Louisiana. Rider described the trail ride:

It’s like when you go to different places, we’ll ride horses on these trails. Have music. People selling like, uh . . . baked turkey legs. Stuff like that. Food. Drinks. Beer. Liquor. Stuff like that for grown men. All different kinda horses. I started when I was like 13 or 12 . . . Sometimes I ride my cousin’s horses. My daddy had bought me some he had bought some horses for me I’m still tryin’ to ride ’em and break ’em in right.
This tradition serves as a bonding time for Rider and his family, even though other juveniles consider it less “ghetto” because it’s more rural and take advantage of this difference in order to ostracize him. One day, after his mother brought him a birthday cake that featured a couple of horses and a fenceline with the phrase “Happy Trails!” in the middle, another youth walked by, looked at the cake, and said, turning to Rider, “Man, I know you liked them fuckin’ horses,” and walked away laughing. Rider showed no indication of the comment bothering him, however, and later that day after lunch the incident seemed to have been forgotten as everyone had cake.

Rider admitted to having gotten in trouble at school and his record reflected some minor transgressions, enough to prompt his father to punish him by not allowing him to raise a few hogs that he’d purchased for Rider. The charge for which he was incarcerated, however, was much more serious than anything else he’d done at school (a single expulsion, disciplinary write-ups, and referrals) and this was his first criminal offense. Further, the length of his stay this time exceeded those of all other participants except Bambam. Even though his cousins and he lived in a rural area outside of the city, his neighbourhood featured a prominent police presence and he’d seen several cousins arrested and knew that they’d served time. In this regard, Rider’s community and family life was discouragingly similar to those experiences of the other participant youth who’d lived in the city’s more urban areas.

Nemo lived for a time with his aunt (following his mother’s death) and attended school in the same town as Rider and explained the differences, as he identified them, between the futures he perceived as being a kid from a rural area to being a kid still living in the projects:
They’re different . . . I think if I’d a still been in the projects I probably wouldn’t have the mindframe that I got. I’d prolly have the mindframe that I’ll grow up and sell drugs and stuff because that’s all I’d see. And you know as a kid when you see a lot of one thing, you gonna grow up to think that that’s the best way to go. I’m kinda glad, ya know, I moved. I mean I still—if people ask me now where I’m from, I tell ’em ‘the Cornerstone projects.’

He acknowledged that his chances of a better life increased as he moved from the housing projects but still claimed Cornerstone as where he was from (as opposed to where he “stays”) because of both the potential stigmatization of rurality and the importance of community, neighbourhood in terms of self-identification, bringing up the issue of territoriality that Jay addressed in more detail later in the chapter.

Nemo’s life segues the neighbourhood discussion from the “more country” (in Rider’s words) closer to the city where the rest of the participants live: Fisher and Jay both grew up in one of the city’s housing projects (Jay’s family eventually moved to low-rent apartments); Bambam lives in a trailer park; and Katie had lived in projects before bouncing from one low-rent apartment to another between two different cities in Louisiana. And each one of them spoke about the struggles in their communities, primarily as they related to the presence of law enforcement, poverty, crime, and drugs, all of which were more concentrated than they were in Rider’s community.

The projects in this area of Louisiana are not the high-rise projects that are found in other neighbourhoods, such as the ones in Macleod’s (2008) study. Rather, they are often single-level buildings in close proximity or perhaps apartment-style buildings of just a couple of floors. When asked about his neighbourhood, Fisher immediately described the presence of drugs, violence, gambling and crime in a single sentence: “Well, it’s a known drug environment and we got the highest crime for the neighbourhood, I mean like crackheads all over, people gettin’ shot, shoot dice all day.”
Jay said his neighbourhood was simply a place with “just a lotta crime,” specifying drugs and prostitution. The violence in the neighbourhood was contextualized with a film reference to the movie *Juice* (Frankfurt, Heyman, & Moritz, 1992) as Jay endeavored to explain “how it *is* in the hood.” The need for self-defense and always watching one’s back, while surrounding oneself with “homeboys” he could trust were important in staying safe, and he had no respect for “snitches” and pointed out that one of the quickest ways to find a gun at your head is to snitch on somebody. This snitching designation is akin to “calling peer informants ‘rats’,” and by expressing this “disdain for informers,” Jay and others who seek reprisal against these rats “identify themselves [as] at odds with the law that governs them” (Conrad, 2005, p. 36). Similar community violence existed in the apartment buildings too, where Katie lives; they don’t necessarily offer an escape from the pressures of violence and survival for these youth. Katie believes:

> They gonna have people out here you don’t wanna fight but you gonna have to fight ’em regardless because if you don’t fight them, they gonna fight you. It’s like—it’s a dog eat dog world. Either you goin’ choose—make a choice or pay for the choice that you not gonna make. And I felt like—hey, I don’t feel like fightin’ today—I’m just gonna cut y’all. I don’t feel like fightin’ today. So the choice that I made got me here.

Despite his move to a rural community, Nemo vividly recounted the housing projects he grew up in, and revisited the violence and drugs that Jay and Fisher described, but added the element of police presence in the community:

> I wouldn’t say it was rough but it wasn’t the kinda life that you’d expect to live for my age. I mean, I done saw plenty of people get shot in front of my face, drugs getting sold, I saw people smoking crack, just . . . saw everything when I was growing up. That’s what made me realize when I got in eighth grade it was time for me to cool out because I didn’t wanna grow up like that, selling drugs. I wanna have a job where I ain’t gotta worry about the police kicking in my door anytime the night tryin’ to find out if I got drugs. I wanna have it good to where I’m the last person—I wanna be one of the last people on they list whose house they come to. I don’t want them kickin’ down my house with me and my wife in
there or something—just kickin’ in my door, comin’ in because they’re lookin’ for drugs. I don’t want that.

Nemo was the only participant who envisioned a future with a spouse and having a good job. It remains unsettling, however, that there is a presumption that, despite even accomplishing these goals, the police have a right to come to his house or that it’s something to be expected. He didn’t say that he wanted his name not to appear on the list at all, but rather he wanted to be “one of the last on the list” because police kicking down your door was an eventuality, more a matter of “when” than “if.” The police, he explained, are around “every day, goin’ in somebody’s house.” Nemo repeated, several times over the course of our interviews and discussions, that he had no intentions of returning to prison and that he wanted to have a “good lifestyle” explaining, “I don’t have plans of goin’ to jail or prison or nothing in the future at all. I don’t have plans for that. I have plans for having a good lifestyle and a good house, good family,” but punctuated this vision with an acceptance that police presence will be a part of that. In an interview with hip-hop artists Dead Prez, Asante Jr. addressed the same issue of the prevalence of police presence in these communities, witnesses to “the same blue steel ring around our community, which attempts only in criminalizing us with no social justice, we get no justice at all” (2008, p. 163). Further, this presence is one proposed hypothesis offered to explain the increasing disparity in the incarceration rates of minorities and poor compared to White and middle/upper-class youth (Williams & Sapp-Grant, 2007; Cole, 1999).

Similarly, Katie accepted proximal violence and dysfunction as typical of life in general. She described her homes while growing up as “nasty” places with domestic violence between parents and children, siblings, and neighbours as “Just natural, you know. Life.”
The closest analog to Bambam’s neighbourhood to the projects, meanwhile, was the predominance of the drug trade:

I grew up in a bad neighbourhood, I could say. I mean, drugs all around—just grew up in a drug farm. Drugs around me—marijuana, cocaine, somas, lortabs, xanax bars. I got one elementary school right there by my house, I got a supermarket and then most of ’em are just trailers and some are houses and trailers. I live in a trailer park. Now there’s hardly any trailers in my trailer park because of the hurricanes but other than that the neighbourhood was nice.

The final description of the neighbourhood as “nice” surprised me as it appeared to contradict the general description otherwise of a “bad neighbourhood.” He explained that the neighbourhood was safe, that despite the presence of all the drugs (including the manufacturing/growing of some), he felt safe and that it was a bad neighbourhood because of the drugs and not because of violence, a contrast to Fisher’s reference to “people getting shot” in his neighbourhood.

The prevalence of drugs was a primary correlation among all the city neighbourhoods and the lives of the participants from those areas. “Drugs is everywhere. Everywhere,” offered Jay, calling the projects “drug infested.” Of all the listed drugs, crack cocaine was the narcotic singled out the most as being more dangerous and more of a community detriment than any of the other drugs. Jay declared, in no uncertain terms, that: “Crack was the worst. Crack always gonna be the worst” because it creates a high on that first hit that “fiends” spend time and money chasing thereafter. It causes people to sell all of their belongings, steal from friends and neighbours, lapse in their rehabilitation efforts, and contributes to the high adult incarceration recidivism rates that are statistically apparent in the United States. Even the rural area where Rider lives is witness to the presence of crack cocaine; there’s an area near his house, by the railroad tracks, that he said was “where the drugheads, crackheads and stuff” are.
At the time of the interviews, Jay’s family had since moved out of the projects and into apartments within the last two years, but he still felt constrained by the projects since “you never can move out, ya feel me? You never can get away from it. You can move out but it still in you,” pointing to a relatively indescribable but internalized aspect of his fifteen years in the projects that still affected his attitude and self-identity. When pressed to elaborate on the difficulties in getting out and overcoming the subordinating and confining obstacles of his upbringing, Jay reasoned:

It’s supposed to be hard. Feel me. It supposed to be—but some people, man, they just get a blessin’. Like little bitty kids on commercials and shit—Gerber babies on commercials. They just get blessings, ya feel me. Some, some little kids just laughin’ and he get paid millions of dollars just for laughin’. But for some—if you stayin’ up in the hood, it’s harder I say. When you stayin’ up in the hood, when you stayin’ up in the projects it’s harder cuz you got everybody— you get everybody on your back don’t want you to do this . . . Some of your friends really ain’t got nothing to live for—they just like ‘man I don’t care about nothing, man.’ They don’t care, they don’t really care about nothing, feel me. So they tryin’ to make you not care about nothing you feel me.

Jay distinguished between children of fortune, prosperity, and luck as being opposed the harsher realities of drugs and violence that have contributed to his life of crime and resulting incarceration. While some children are being paid millions just for laughing and smiling, some children, like Jay, are conscripted into the drug game at a very young age. Such a decision, from someone hardly capable of making one for him/herself, has consequences on the perceived options down the road, limiting their possibilities; in Jay’s case this is apparent in Chapter 10 as he discussed his goals for the future, both idealized and the anticipated. The pressure of others who have little hope also weighs heavily on Jay as he battled against what he interpreted as a general apathy resulting of the acceptance of a fate with little hope.
The peer pressure existed in Bambam’s trailer park as well, evident as he described the difficulty he perceived in breaking his own substance-abuse and recidivist cycles. He didn’t believe that he’d be able to resist the narcotic temptations of the surrounding trailer park, believing his best chance is to be free of the park. None of the other participants, aside from Bambam, talked about their travels, real, imagined, or desired. It’s frustrating for him that he’d never really been anywhere, never been far from the trailer park. Some of his fondest memories included his travels with the high school football team because it enabled him to “see the world.” Realizing that this is, perhaps, a bit of an overstatement, he amended his phrasing, “Well, I mean I didn’t get to see that much—we stayed right here in Louisiana but just to be able to [travel within the state] —I got to see more than what I normally see.” But his dismissal from the team meant an end to traveling to games, with the single exception of a school field trip to a museum in Houston, Texas. And his dismissal from school meant an end to those field trips. Still, the separation from his neighbourhood was something he spoke about often, talking about his plans to maybe live with his sister, holding out hope for a living arrangement that didn’t include his trailer park because he recognized the subordinating influence of his neighbourhood for both him and his brother (who was incarcerated in the facilities at the time of the first three interviews with Bambam):

Me and my brother both says that we can’t live here because of the drugs. The drugs ain’t gonna follow us or nothing, is what we’re tryin’ to say, if we move outta here. Because we can leave the drugs alone, but if we’re right there and they’re around us 24/7 we can’t leave the— I mean it’s gonna be eggin at us 24/7, that ‘come on, come on, come on.’

The difficulties in resisting the pressure of their peers led to a diminishing conceptualization of the future for both Jay and Bambam. Throughout the project, Jay
espoused more optimism about his future but all acknowledged that defeating this
dynamic of substance abuse was simultaneously difficult and necessary in order to break
their respective recidivism.

The potentially repressive nature of their neighbourhoods was perhaps expressed
best in one of Fisher’s raps. Contrast to the violence-riddled, power-seeking lyrics that
opened this section, this rap is more somber and reflective of the violence, the toll it takes
on the young people who live in this (and similar) neighbourhoods.

*Why we die so young?*
*Why do we die so young?*
*Livin’ in the hood that I’m from*
*Say we dying young*
*Lost souls I done pictured*
*Bad vision*
*Dreaming nightmare*
*People hit me with their pistols*
*Like how it is*
*In my life that I live*
*Young people getting killed*
*Hit you hit you with that steel*
*It’s a vision that I see*
*People creepin’ on me*
*Trying to jack me for rims*
*Knock me off of my feet*
*Uh-huh*
*My momma told me*
*She had a dream last night*
*That she saw me in a alley*
*People hit me wit a pipe*

These lines are a rhapsodic inversion of the sentiments and structure in Gwendolyn
Brooks (1960) in her poem, *We Real Cool*. Brooks begins by describing the violent
delinquency of her pool players as they “lurk late” and “strike straight.” Eventually,
however, the lifestyle takes its toll and they “die soon.” Conversely, the deaths and
demise of the youths initiate Fisher’s rap; he starts with the ending and the lines
following the first two (a single line repeated) explain why the young are dying. Though a half century separates Gwen’s pen from Fisher’s flow, the underlying sentiments resonate.

**Participants’ Families, Crime, and Imprisonment**

The neighbourhoods and communities weren’t the only home-related influences that featured subordinating elements and served to influence the attitudes of these youths. The impoverished lives and neighbourhoods of these kids reflect statistical sociological elements of “social denudement” whereby “only 40 percent [of inmates] grew up with both parents (as against a national average of 77 percent)” and “nearly half were raised in households receiving public assistance, and over one quarter grew up living in public housing—the most reviled sector of the urban housing market due to its extreme dilapidation” (Wacquant, 2009, p. 71). There were instrumental family dynamics that contributed to their self-identity, their history of crime, and the degree to which they identified hope in their own futures. Fisher lived with his grandmother because his father had been in prison since Fisher was six years old and his mother wasn’t around very much, “in and out” of prison; his teenage sister and her year-old daughter also lived with them. There had been times that these siblings, as with Bambam and his brother, shared time in KPJDC. When Fisher explained his family situation and the struggle it’s been for him growing up without his parents, he cited the 1975 film *Cornbread, Earl, and Me* (Manduke) which tells the story of Nathaniel “Cornbread” Hamilton, a young basketball phenom gunned down by police on the streets in a tragic episode of mistaken identity. The film informed other aspects of Fisher’s interviews, but here Cornbread’s family structure is identified as a domestic model:
But then at the same time [Cornbread] wasn’t the type of person that was into that lifestyle—he had friends that was doin’ stuff like that but his mom and his dad were there for him. That’s what it really was. Most people don’t have moms and dads there for them . . . my dad’s been gone since I was six.

Once again, the impact of surrounding peer influences is identified as a limiting influence; Cornbread, however, was able to overcome them because of a stable family structure whereas most kids (and Fisher identified himself as one), “don’t have moms and dads there for them.” The lack of parental guidance in his life was a topic he reflected on as much as his love for his grandmother, who had given him his interest in cooking, and his niece, whom he can’t stop looking at.

Bambam described his family as “troubled” and his childhood growing up as “a livin’ hell” because of the physical abuse he suffered at the hands of his parents and the substance abuse he witnessed in his mother, who had been cited and even locked up for multiple driving under the influence (DUI) charges. He said that he and his brother and sisters were all beaten as they were raised; when I asked how many brothers and sisters he was talking about, he said that his mother had five children, an older brother on his “dad’s side” who is 33, and a stepbrother and stepsister, “so all together that’s like eight or nine.” Most of the abuse, however, was suffered by him and his immediate siblings and the physically abusive nature of familial confrontation manifested itself in Bambam’s relationship with his twin brother. The only times that the two of them got along was when they were breaking the law; they would “go off on a stealin’ spree or just go do drugs together or whatever.”

His mother had been clean for the past seven years and as the substance abuse from his parents decreased, the physical altercations and animosity between him and his brother increased. In fact, the first time Bambam was booked in KPJDC resulted from a
violent fight between him and his brother that moved from inside their home into the
neighbourhood street. The catalyst for this fight was an assault on his mother that led to
his fight with his brother and his eventual arrest. He explained:

I mean the first time I got booked in here it was for domestic battery. I’d grabbed
my mom by her arm and threw her which I don’t remember none of [but] the
handprint was still on her arm when I went to court . . . And all I remember was
my brother—my older brother—had broke into her room and stole some money
or something and she was kickin’ him out. When I got home I said she wasn’t
kickin’ him out because he didn’t have a place to go. And when she had got
home she bumped into me or something and I just grabbed her and I blacked out
and threw her against the wall. When I come back to, she said that she was
pressin’ charges and calling the cops. And I blacked out again and me and my
brother, twin brother, ended up in the middle of the road fist fightin’ until the cops
pull up and I don’t remember nothing from there. And then I got booked in here
and ever since then I’ve been comin’ in and outta here.

This single night’s events, for Bambam, described the domestic violence he
witnessed and both suffered and administered in his home. He acknowledged that things
have to change between him and his brother, and him and his mother; the family had
been undergoing counseling in order to help repair the relationships and attitudes that
have contributed to the dissolution of their family and has contributed to Bambam’s
recidivist record. When we talked about the facility’s policies regarding letter writing,
Bambam said that in all of the time he’s spent locked in his cell, he’d only ever written a
single letter: to his mother. “It was a letter of apology,” he explained, “because I know I
been messin’ up . . . I can’t change my past, I can only change my future. And that I was
sorry for everything and all the trouble I put her through.”

He was not the only participant youth, however, to experience domestic violence.
Even before we had our first formal interview, Katie responded strongly and frequently to
cinematic depictions of violence in relationships, specifically as they occurred between
men and women in relationships and between mothers and daughters. A scene in
*Medea’s Family Reunion* (Cannon & Upton, 2006), a Black film by a popular contemporary Black filmmaker Tyler Perry, provoked Katie to make some strong declarations. One evening, a woman who was engaged to a physically abusive man attempted to leave him in the middle of the night. He woke up to find her trying to escape and initially pleaded with her not to leave before resorting to restraining her physically and threatening her, dragging her to the window in their high-rise apartment and telling her that the only way she’d leave that night is if he threw her out of the window. At the beginning of the scene, Katie said that she would “be putting golf balls in a sock and take that to his ass,” repeating the same thing again a few moments later. As the man apologized, Katie asserted, “Nigga, it’s too late for that sorry shit” and as he threatened to toss her to the street, stories below, Katie suggested that maybe she should throw him off the ledge instead. Jay responded by saying that “she can’t do nothing” and Katie, frustrated, stated that she should “do something.”

A discussion ensued over Louisiana law and the degree to which killing another human being in self-defense is justifiable. According to Jay, there was no such provision of homicide in Louisiana in self-defense while Katie disagreed, claiming that “you can stab someone in self-defense.” The matter isn’t resolved to either party’s satisfaction, but Katie’s frustration and anger over the violence only grew. Later in the movie, there was a faceoff between a mother and daughter in which they exchange slaps; the mother first slapped the daughter and, in response, the daughter “slapped the hell outta” (in Katie’s words) her mother, declaring, “Mom, you’re such a bitch.” As the others watching the film laughed, Katie stated flatly: “She wouldn’t have done that to me, I’d have whooped her.”
During the interviews that followed watching these movies, I talked to Katie about her responses to the film as they related to these scenes of domestic violence, offering, “I know about bein’ abused. I done been beat. I mean, it’s—pfft—it’s nothing. I done seen it, I done felt it. I know how people feel when they goin through it.” I asked her what she thought about this movie and she explained that she liked all of the Tyler Perry movies because they had a “concept” and a “message” that “you shouldn’t be abused by nobody.” She identified analogs between her experiences growing up and in her relationships with her mother and her biological father and those depicted on screen. When first asked about her family, Katie spoke about growing up, seeing her mother abused by her boyfriend and how the anger arising from this led to her lashing out at him and his property, admitting, “I kicked his car, bust his windows. I don’t care. This my momma. Like I feel like, ‘hey, you don’t give a shit about her so I don’t give a shit about you.’ Life is hard, life is hard.”

This protectionism toward her mother, however, is not the only sentiment she extended during the interviews. Their relationship featured a significant amount of discord that Katie believed her mother showed no interest in repairing. Even though her mother was generally around, unlike Fisher’s, she still felt a palpable disconnect with her mother that affected her attitudes and behavior. She never hit her mother because she had “too much respect for her” to do that; she did, however, cuss her mother often and act out because she wasn’t getting the attention from her mother that she felt she deserved, as a daughter. When I asked her what she wanted from her mother, her response sounded much like the “it’s too late for that sorry shit” comment she made while watching Medea’s Family Reunion:
I just want—I just want an apology. I wanna be able to free my spirit. I just want an apology from my father, I want an apology from my momma. Yea she says, “I’m sorry” but sorry means you’ll do it again. You done left me before, it’s not your first time leavin’ me. I just want an apology. Fuck a ‘sorry.’ I want an apology.

This lack of contrition, attention, concern or supervision from her mother, Katie felt, contributed to her extreme behavior and history of mental health issues (addressed later in the chapter) and traced her misbehavior to the point of delinquency to 2005, when her grandmother—and only nurturing, maternal influence in her life—passed away and “the one person who did matter was gone.”

Meanwhile, she has vowed not to harm her younger brother (who was 11 at the time of the study and one of two siblings, the other her 29-year-old sister) in the same way. The poignancy of her determination was never more apparent than as we looked at one of the photographs that she took of the KPJDC uniform (See Figure 12) and handcuffs (See Figure 13):

*Figure 12. Katie’s KPJDC uniform consisting of basic white undergarments and khaki hospital-style scrubs. (Photo credit: Katie)*
As we were taking photographs, Katie asked the staff escorting us if she could retrieve uniforms from the supply closet so that she could take a picture of them, and then asked the same for the restraints. She laid them out on the tables so that each item was visible, and later said she wanted people to see “the real” and then asked this series of questions, in quick succession without allowing me an opportunity to answer (thus, the questions seemed to be intended for an audience who would later see these images): “Who wants their kids to wear this? Who wanna see their kids in this? How many parents you know wanna see they children like this, you know?” She paused for a moment and then seemed to re-direct the question to herself, mentally, before verbalizing a response that indicated her concern for her brother: “I mean, I refuse to let my little brother see, you know what I’m saying. I don’t want him to be here . . . So if I can help him in any way, I mean, I want him to see the real.” While she looked at these pictures she talked about
how important it was to her that her brother avoid her carceral path, and how she doesn’t “wanna see my brother go through what I went through. And what me and my sister went through.” During this she teared up a few times and appeared more emotionally vulnerable than I’d seen her otherwise, prior.

In contrast, Nemo’s family featured no domestic violence, at least none he noted in the interviews. His mother died when he was eight and he’d been living with his aunt since then, but his regular contact with his father, a truck driver living in Virginia, with whom he speaks on the phone most days and sees when his father’s schedule allows it. Nemo also has two older brothers (one 33, the other 22), both employed working regular hours, one at a chemical plant and the other offshore, who “set a good example” and “look out” for him. When informed of the lone charge leading to this, his first offense and confinement, he said his brothers knew that he was innocent of the charges and they supported him in the ongoing case.

Of all the youths who participated, Nemo had the fewest criminal offenses in his family and the most stability (along with Rider), though the death of his mother affected him greatly, leading to his first trouble at school (discussed in the next chapter). No history of abuse (mental or physical). No history of violence. A consistent maternal influence. And he spoke most often and most positively of a future that didn’t include prison, violence, or lack of education. The other youths viewed their families and the dynamics within those families as more subordinating and limiting factors than Nemo did. Like Nemo, Rider’s family experience was also relatively positive, with no mention of violence or other such interruptions to a stable family dynamic, though he didn’t talk about his family very much. I witnessed Rider with his family on two occasions during
visitation hours and Karen, the security staff member, said that Rider’s family were regulars during visitation, and the visits never featured any conflict or mental/verbal abuse nor gave any indication that it was a feature of his home life. For his birthday, as noted earlier, his mother along with other family members drove to the facility to drop off a cake to him and speak with him briefly; during this casual, informal exchange I didn’t see anything alarming or disconcerting. The only reference that Rider made in relation to his family, specifically when asked, was that they just lived a “country” life but that he did have an uncle and three cousins in jail on drug related charges.

Jay, his mother’s only son, is a brother to four sisters (one older, three younger). His commitment to them, his determination to help them pay for rent or have nice things, drove him to increase his participation in the drug game as he got older. There was no other youth who spoke more about this perceived obligation, even at the cost of breaking the law, than Jay. Many of the kids, he said, faced the same dilemma growing up in a home that has too little to get by and they perceived the choice as getting in the drug game and paying bills or facing a harsher fate, possibly hunger or homelessness: “I got friends that’s 15 years old right now they payin’ bills for their momma’s house, their momma ain’t workin’. Some people, they gotta do that, man . . . That’s the only choice they got.” For many young men in these communities, this career choice in the drug trade is the product of diminishing options and collapsed infrastructure since the inception of the War on Drugs, what Wacquant—who agrees with Jay here—terms:

An ill-named policy since it refers in reality to a guerilla campaign of penal harassment of low-level street dealers and poor consumer, aimed primarily at young men in the collapsing inner city for whom the retail trade of narcotics has provided the most accessible and reliable source of gainful employment in the wake of the twofold retrenchment of the labor market and the welfare state. (2009, p. 61)
Later in his work, Wacquant notes that “60 percent of habitual offenders turned to crime by default, as it were, due to their inability to find a stable and durable occupational footing” (Wacquant, 2009, p. 133). For his own part, Jay has provided his sisters and his mother with financial support and given money to kids in the neighbourhood when they asked for it:

I was payin’ the rent. My mom paid the bills, the light bill. ‘Mom, I got the rent don’t worry about the rent, I got the rent.’ My sisters—I’m buyin’ for me and my sisters; my sister all happy and stuff. I like seein’ my sisters like that, givin’ ‘em money…. Everybody loved me, dog. Cuz you feel me – the kids in the hood would be like, ‘What’s up what’s up—gimme a dollar.’ I’d give ‘em five dollars ya feel me—give ‘em.

Jay talked about the cars and the money he’d earned, at the young age of 13, and what it meant to him, his family, and the community around him, identifying with a character from *Boyz in the Hood* (Nicolaides, 1991), “He had a lot of money. I had a lot of money. He had a lot of drugs. I had a lot of drugs.” I asked him about any personal conflicts he might have had because the money came from the drug trade; he started pushing marijuana and pills but had graduated to stronger substances, even selling crack to the “crackheads” he had no respect for. After considering the question, he framed his answer by focusing on what he did with the money as opposed to what he did for the money:

I think I did good—when I made my money, aw fuck, I did good by people, man. I liked to see people—but God know my heart, man, He knows how really I was doin’. I stay fresh, I stay clean—but I wanted people to stay clean, feel me. I had BBQs every Saturday; I was doin’ it myself. Thirteen years old, having BBQs every Saturday getting people together, buyin’ little toys and stuff for kids, doin’ little games. Like if they won the game they get a toy ya feel me. Doin’ it for my community—that’s why I see my community comin’ up.
He claimed that he was no longer active in selling “dope” and had not sold in about a year because a close friend of his was shot over drugs; this friend told Jay that he had too much going for him and that he shouldn’t be selling anymore. Now that his mother had moved out of the housing projects and into apartments, Jay didn’t feel compelled to sell any longer and now that he was a bit further removed from that community, he didn’t feel obligated to provide for others around him. He recognized, however, that the projects still existed and that meant that people still faced the same choices and made similarly illegal decisions every day.

Jay’s path to the drug trade began at an early age, recruited at the age of 8 or 9 because cops would never look at someone if “you little like that.” After a couple of years of being taught the practices of the trade, Jay was given goods to sell. At first it was primarily weed, but as he got older and started using the drugs himself, he changed what he was selling so that what he was using wasn’t the same as he was selling; that puts his own supply at risk. He explained the progression:

About 12 years old we stopped sellin’ weed cuz weed was the stuff we smoked and they always told us, ‘Don’t get high off our own supply.’ But that’s all, that’s what we always smoked. We started smoking weed so they like—we smokin’ weed—this ain’t workin. So let’s go to something that we ain’t gonna smoke; well we start sellin’ pills. Man we started poppin’ pills—like, oh we can’t do this no more because we ain’t makin’ no profit off it because we’re takin the stuff. So we stopped doin’ that. And went to sellin’ dope, sellin’ crack, ya feel me. We ain’t never did that cuz we saw how people was and stuff . . . I can’t even . . . you wouldn’t believe a 12-year-old had this much dope, man.

Both Fisher and Jay expressed disgust and disdain for people who smoked crack because they saw what it did to people. The fiends would steal from their family, show up in the early hours of the morning or late at night, “cracked out” and looking for another high. Just as Macleod’s (2008) Hallway Hangers had no respect for the heroine-
or angeldust-addicted “dustheads” in their neighbourhood, despite their own admitted use of marijuana and cocaine (and Jay’s selling of crack), Fisher and Jay had no respect for “crackheads.”

For Fisher, criminal lifestyle in the family hit very close to home. As we casually discussed movies one day, I asked him what movies he would recommend to me that made a statement about something he had experienced. “Colors,” he announced, without hesitation, a film (Solo, 1988) that looks at West Coast gang violence through the eyes of two cops, one rookie (played by Sean Penn) and one veteran (played by Robert Duvall). The film, he felt, depicted the gang-affiliated antagonism that cost his uncle his life in Oakland. Fisher was supposed to stay with him one summer but the tragedy changed the trajectory of his summer plans and his ideas about escalating gang/territorial violence in his hometown:

I went and stayed in Oakland (California) with my uncle; I was supposed to be stayin for the whole summer but he was a Crip, a rollin’ 60 Crip. But he had kinda got outta that lifestyle but once you in a gang it’s like you not just gonna stop bein’ in that. So he always wore blue, his car was blue—know what I’m saying. He was like a older person that was in a gang and didn’t really have to go killin’ people and stuff like that. But I was out there for two weeks and he had got shot so I came back home. They had killed him, but I couldn’t stay for the funeral because—I dunno why—I don’t understand . . . And like Colors—well back to what I was saying—they don’t really have gangs out here but now they got like Bloods, Crips, and all that other stuff like that. And that’s kinda how it is now and our crime rate is goin’ up – more murders happenin’ than there was. So it’s kinda how it’s ‘bout to be here.

His concern for his own and his family’s welfare in the housing projects in which he had grown up increased following the death of his uncle. Although he didn’t see the same level of violence here in town as he did back in California, he felt that it was only a matter of time until the territorial angst between sections of town led to escalating aggression and acts of violence. The convergence of the penal and welfare states that
Simon identifies are apparent in stories like Fisher’s, whose father was serving time for
drug-related offenses and whose uncle was killed in gang-related violence.

Governing this [poor, Black] population through the criminal justice system has
the guarantees of security that might inspire greater investment in the inner cities,
but instead has further stigmatized communities already beset by concentrated
poverty. Predictably, the poor, overrepresented in both groups [welfare and penal
states], share this fate. (2007, p. 6)

Similarly, Wacquant notes that the United States has, for over 30 years, conducted:

the gradual replacement of a (semi-) welfare state by a police and penal state for
which the criminalization of marginality and the punitive containment of
dispossessed categories serve as social policy at the lower end of the class and
ethnic order. (2009, p. 41)

Fisher feared the violence in a corroding inner city and he, along with others, related a
police presence to an increase in the intimacy between poverty and imprisonment, as
Simon points out, as well as the increased and subordinating, punitive dispossessioin of
marginalized families, as Wacquant points out.

Like Fisher, Jay rapped as a pastime and performed a few for me. And, like
Fisher, he lost an uncle to crime. It wasn’t a gunshot wound from a Blood out in
Oakland, California; rather, it was the consumption of “lean” or “syrup” (a drink
consisting of promethazine and codeine, the active ingredient in many cough syrups, and
a soft drink, often Sprite) which was especially toxic for him, a diabetic. The rap is
called “535” and as he rapped for me, he beat on his chest, as if an instrument, to provide
the percussion and bass line, punctuating inflection with the thump and echo in his voice:

*And last night I almost died*
*I got sugar inside*
*Daddy lost, my pride*
*Oooh you shoulda seen my eye*
*Same place my daddy died*
*Room five thirty five*
*Man*
And I’m lookin at my life
Gotta watch my momma cry
With my daughter on her side
Say dat –
And she lookin at her daddy
Ducking her head badly
And I know she ain’t happy
My momma tryin to keep her warm
IVs in my arm
Outside I hear a storm
Damn
It’s dark comin to get me
Intensive care where they sent me
Please don’t let em take a minute
Man – cuz if you let me live, I’m finished
I swear to God I’m finished
No more Sprite with with syrup in it
I gotta watch what I eat
Take my shot ‘fore I sleep
If you don’t know beat –
This sugar shit is deep
Nigga
And last night I almost died
I got sugar inside
Daddy lost my... pride
Oooh you shoulda seen my eye
Same place my daddy died
Room five thirty five

He explained the rap, saying:

He was in the hospital and he used to sip a lot of codeine, he liked to sip a lot of codeine... he’d drink it and he had diabetes. So he wasn’t really supposed to drink it. That’s why I say ‘this sugar shit is deep,’ cuz he gotta take [insulin] shots everytime. But he was so addicted to it—he’d be like, ‘I’m drinkin’ it man, I’m drinking it anytime.’ It’s addicting, though; you take it, you ain’t gonna stop.

For Jay, the substance abuse was often cited as a debilitating aspect of life in the inner city, but addiction wasn’t restricted to the alleyways of the projects nor was he the only participant who identified addiction as a subordinating influence. Bambam also battled addiction. While he was using drugs, he felt like he had control over the substances rather than the other way around and he never considered himself a drug “fiend.” After
he began to see the adverse impacts on his life and family coupled with his inability to quit despite that crumbling, he realized, “I always said it’s not an addiction, I’m not addicted to it. But now I look back at it, man . . . I guess I was addicted to it.”

Each one of my participants identified crime, drugs, violence, or incarceration as a subordinating and confining (I don’t intend that to mean specifically related to their incarceration, though it’s also—literally—confining). Only Nemo discussed a family dynamic that was absent of family members locked up or domestic violence. Jay lived a life in the drug trade from a young age and watched an uncle die from substance abuse. Katie experienced sexual and physical abuse from her father, emotional and verbal abuse from her mother. Bambam fought inside and outside his house with his family members and battled his own drug addiction. Rider had cousins serving time and lived around the corner and just across the railroad tracks from crackheads. And Fisher watched his mother’s career in nursing come to an end because of drugs, lived without his father from the age of six because of his conviction as a drug dealer, and wrestled with the shooting death of his uncle during a visit to California. Thus, “incarceration is quite familiar to detainees in the strict sense that more than half of them have or had a close relative in prison (a brother, 30 percent; their father 16 percent; a sister or mother, 10 percent)” (Wacquant, 2009, p. 71).

**Family Influence on Attitudes**

Such events were unquestionably tragic for these youths. In the discussion of their lives at home and with their families, however, most of the participants spoke of the potential positive influence and support that their families could provide. In some cases, the actions of family members served as a catalyst for anger or resentment; it also led, in
some cases, to deliberately and admittedly poor decisions by the youth as they attempted to revisit some sort or degree of reprisal on those family members through their aberrant behavior.

The discussions with Katie addressed this issue more than most others; I’ve already alluded to the degree to which she blamed her mother and her insistent refusal to be such a model for her younger brother. Upset with her mother’s seeming disinterest in her life, Katie soberly reflected that even though she tries to talk to her mom, “she just don’t hear it yet” but believed that “within due time she’s gonna understand.” In the meantime, she understood that she has the “power to make a difference” for her younger brother. She spoke about this familial impact with more specificity, and urgency, with regard to her younger brother and his changing behavior, evincing a concern that he would follow in her incarcerated footsteps, directing us back to the sentiment articulated when she looked at the photos of her uniform and cuffs. She said, once again, that she didn’t want her brother to go through what she had to go through, but already she identified troubling signs:

Jonathan: “Is he getting in trouble right now?”
Katie: “He getting in trouble, yeah. It's not as big, you know what I’m saying.”
Jonathan: “He hasn’t been to this place?”
Katie: “No. You start off small. You start off little things and then it grows.”
Jonathan: “What kinda stuff is he doing that worries you right now?”
Katie: “I mean, the thing is he talking back and stuff now. He like arguing with people, fighting. Like that’s how it start off.”
Jonathan: “Yeah?”
Katie: “Cuz I know that’s how I started off.”

Katie believed strongly that more involvement and more interest from her mother, while providing a better model of behaviour, would have led her down a different path.

Knowing the potential in this type of relationship she realized that she will be, for her
brother, a “focal socializing agency, especially in the early years of a child’s life,” and that “the family plays a crucial role in the process of social reproduction” (Macleod, 2008, p. 51). Thus, Katie was determined to be a different model for her brother, though she did admit that her behaviour and recidivist record wasn’t it.

This resentment toward one’s elders frustrated Jay as well, as he discussed his school performance and successes along with the utter lack of encouragement or approbation from his grandfather, a key figure in his life. As he delivered the following response, his voice grew more passionate, with increasing emphasis, the burgeoning resentment more apparent than perhaps any other time over the course of our interviews:

My grandparents on my mom’s side, they be downin’ me a lot. ‘Aw he do, that boy 12 years old, all he do is sell dope. All he do is this, do that, all he do is smoke weed.’ Well, when you talk to a kid like that it make him be like, ‘You won’t believe in me anyway, so fuck you man. You don’t believe in me anyway so why should I do this and I’m doin’ right and you still say I’m doin’ wrong.’ You supposed to build a nig-, build your child or someone you close to spirit up. When they down, tell ‘em this not the right thing to do—or tell ‘em when they doin’ the right thing, ‘Good job.’ Give ‘em a pat on they back, feel me . . . I’m like, ‘I’m a show him.’ I start makin’ good grades. ‘Oh that’s what you s’posed to do—you don’t get no pat on the back for that.’ Man, I make—I stopped going to school. I stopped even studying man—I used to study every day, if they prolly woulda just—just a simple word, just woulda said, ‘Good job, man, good job . . .’ I prolly woulda kept on doin’ right, feel me. Just some words, man—to keep a person doin’ right, man. For real.

The role that his grandparents played, particularly his grandfather, soured Jay on any incentive to keep trying to please him; they were, he believed, unpleaseable. So what’s the point, he wondered. The irritation was evident, and the resulting resignation, deflating. I certainly don’t believe that his grandfather’s comments were the only, or even primary, reason that Jay stopped doing his homework. But I also never felt that he was manufacturing excuses to pardon his behavior; Jay was consistently quite open in talking about his infelicities and guilt. The significance, then, isn’t in my belief as to
whether or not he’s being entirely truthful but rather in the fact that the emotions he
evinned as he spoke and the singularity of blame placed on such disapproval had
significant impact on his actions, attitudes, and self-identity, confined (as he felt) by
expectations and approval he perceived he could never realize.

While both Jay and Katie acknowledged the potential positive family models
despite the actions of their mother and grandfather, respectively, Nemo’s interview
provides proof through example. His generally positive attitude and outlook was, at least
in part, due to two older brothers who “set a good example” for him and provided support
throughout the stressful process of his arrest, court appearances, and imprisonment. He
considered himself lucky because he hadn’t had that “hard of a lifestyle” and had positive
relationships with his parents. He agreed with Katie that many of these kids had “parents
that coulda done a better job as parents” elaborating:

Some kids grew up without no father and you know when you without a father
figure in life, that’s kinda hard because you don’t have no father…to teach you
and tell you what a male need to know. You gotta be raised by a mother and a
mother can’t teach you everything that a father can teach you. A mother just
knows certain things to a certain extent. A father know certain things that a
mother can’t teach you. And . . . how you grew up determines your future.

On his closing point, Jay would agree; family, home, surroundings, life in those
formative years have considerable impact on the person one becomes, disagreeing with
people who say that where someone grows up doesn’t much matter:

Sometimes people is like, ‘it’s not where you at.’ It is where you at. It is where
you growin’ up at man. Cuz the stuff you see—if you was raised by some dogs,
that’s what you gonna try . . . you gonna be a dog if you raised by some dogs. If
you raised by something, that’s what you gonna be. You can’t be raised—if you
was raised by some rich people, you probably couldn’t stand no projects like that,
you probably couldn’t stay no poor place like that cuz that’s—that’s what you
used to, feel me.

Mental Health and Support
There was one additional dynamic of the family that two participants, Katie and Bambam, spoke of that no other youth did: their individual mental health. Each had spent time in a mental health facility and, as they shared these aspects of their autobiography, cited their families as contributing factors to their mental and emotional problems. For Katie, it was the years of abuse (physical and sexual, from the age of 12 to 13) that she suffered at the hands of her father that caused her so much mental anguish and duress. She wanted to put that behind her, claiming that she didn’t want to spend time in and out of prisons and in and out of mental health hospitals, but knew that it was not going to be an easy road, mentally and emotionally, because she had “all kinda problems. I got anger management problems. I got depression. I got all of this. And it start off small and it gets bigger as you go.” And Katie wasn’t alone in this regard; juveniles in detention suffer from issues such as depression at higher rates than in the general population (Teplin, Abram, McClelland, Dulcan, & Mericle, 2002; Mitchell, Smedley, Kenning, McKee, Woods, Rennie, Bell, Aryamanesh, Dolan, 2011). The issue was not one that was discussed at length and, because of established ethical reasons, I didn’t press Katie into any details that she wasn’t comfortable in sharing. It was nevertheless evident that Katie’s mental health issues were a problem for her and little to no mental care had been provided outside of mental care facilities, visits to which were periodic and reactive as opposed to regular and proactive.

Bambam was more forthcoming in details about his experiences in local mental health facilities, including being locked up on a secure floor in one of the city’s hospitals. Once again, the catalyst was abuse by a family member, this time paternal. Faced with moving in with his abusive father, Bambam saw little opportunity to escape the
impending violence and pain of such a living arrangement. Since refusing to move in with him was no help, he took his belt off and tied it around his neck and threatened to kill himself through asphyxiation knowing that it would lead to (not his first) faceoff with the campus security arm of local law enforcement. He described the scene:

So I’m holdin’ the belt like this and the cop’s like—boom—and hits the belt and breaks it. Well they detain me in handcuffs. Okay, handcuff me, I don’t care. They handcuff me, ‘we’re gonna have to take you to the hospital.’ And my mom’s sittin’ there and I said, ‘Nah-uh, said I wasn’t—I just didn’t wanna go with my dad.’ So they released me to my mom.

He punctuated this story with laughter, though he went on to share another story of his confinement in a psychiatric ward, one that was considerably less humorous. Bambam described being bound and placed in a locked room, the security camera monitoring him, the Taser that local police officers threatened him with should he get out of line, the injections administered to keep him calm. Six times, in total, he’d been housed in a hospital for care and observation for mental instability issues. And, like Katie, he spent time in a group home for youths who have mental issues. Suicide threats precipitated each of his visits, but he insisted that he never really tried to kill himself and had no intention of killing himself. But the lack of consistent care, for both Bambam and Katie, were evident. Hospital stays and group homes do not supply the type of routine mental health care that is so absent in the system for these kids; “more resources are needed for counseling and mental health staffs, which are shamelessly underfunded and understaffed in most schools” (Kellner, 2008, p. 150) and juvenile justice systems for youth in custody (Mitchell et al, 2011; Teplin et al, 2002).

Concluding Thoughts
Before these kids went to school. Before these kids were harassed for the first time by a cop. Before their first arrest. Before they found themselves locked up. Before all of these events, most of my participants faced challenges near home. Most lived in poverty or on public assistance, or both, and lived in public housing. And this poverty needs attention in the lives of incarcerated youth; a single chapter in this larger dissertation on incarceration doesn’t do enough to counter a concern that Wacquant elucidates: “Indeed, the obsessive focus on crime, backed by ordinary and scholarly common sense, has served well to hide from view the new politics and policy of poverty that is a core component in the forging of the neoliberal state” (2009, p. 287). We are reminded that even though these voices have largely been silenced and the lives of these kids relatively absent from the scholarship, that poverty, itself, “has not receded, but the social visibility . . . of the troublemaking poor have been reduced.” (Wacquant, 2009, p. 292) and this chapter seeks to highlight that poverty and the subordinating impact it has had on these participants. Poverty aside, they also had family members who abused them. Some abused their own family members, in turn, as domestic violence affected their lives. Most were closely related to someone in jail. None were strangers to drugs and substance abuse; that relationship for some was intimate. Each one of these youths discussed his/her lives at home and the obstacles he/she had faced—overcome or otherwise—while growing up and highlighted the subordinating nature of these social dynamics and realities. Jay summarized the sentiment behind this impact best:

You always just need somebody just to brighten your day up, man. Just to be like, man. Cuz if you keep on thinking—if somebody keep on telling you—“You ain’t nothing,” in your mind, that’s your mentality. “I ain’t nothing, man. I ain’t gonna be nothing.” That’s gonna be your mentality.”
Chapter 7: In School

*Kids going to school putting fears in their teacher*
*The teacher let them know that it ain’t all good*
*Cos the gang was created to protect the neighbourhood . . .*
*Cutting school budgets, US stock market plummets*
*Conditions only worsen and I wonder what becomes of it*
*Metal detectors replace music classes*

- Wyclef Jean (ft. Rah Digga, Scarface), “Next Generation”

“You can tell it’s been a while since I’ve been in school. *(Laughs)*”
- Bambam, after signing the wrong year on his consent form

No participant in this study escaped school disciplinary actions nor lacked a school discipline record and for half of my participants (Bambam, Katie, and Fisher), school-based offenses led to their arrest and subsequent incarceration. Early in my research, in our first casual conversation, Bambam oriented me to the role that schools play in the juvenile justice system, an increasing phenomenon in “recent decades [that] have seen a swing back in the other direction, with more attention to school behavior, harsher sanctions, and greater readiness to bring juvenile justice system intervention for school-based misconduct” (Simon, 2007, p. 173). On the same day we watched *Powerpuff Girls* in the computer lab, Bambam shared the story of his arrest on bomb threat charges that he said were “bullshit” but nevertheless landed him on campus police radar and in trouble. In my field notes, I noted the exchange:

*Bambam starts to talk to me while the movie is playing, finishing a conversation that he started shortly after I walked in and sat down. He explains why he’s here—a bomb threat. As he tells it, though, it wasn’t a threat. He was talking to a teacher and said the only thing that would close the school was a bomb and the teacher reported him for making a bomb threat. The latest in a string of “bullshit charges.” He admitted that he did do some of the things he was accused of doing but he’s positive that it’s not worth kicking him out of ALL district schools, permanently. He’s in 10th grade and expressed some regret and frustration about his remaining options.*
This field note entry addressed many of the issues to be discussed in this chapter.

Bambam had faced a regional law enforcement official who was given security responsibilities on the school campus and felt that he had been unjustly and unfairly administered, by the campus administration and the law enforcement officer, whose presence and role serve as an example of the larger trend of campus security presence and jurisdiction. This charge led directly to his arrest and incarceration as well as his expulsion from the school district. He’d been removed from the site’s high school classroom, as a result, and spent his days in the computer lab with the other Lab Kids, unsure of what his educational future held. This academic ambiguity and uncertainty impacted several of these youths, complicating their possibilities and compounding their problems as they reflected on their future after their release.

School Campus Violence

The increase in school security and surveillance, and the means through which they are achieved, have proliferated in recent years (e.g. Bracy, 2011; Giroux, 2009; Simon, 2007) despite the fact that a national study found that “between 1992 and 2005, the total crime victimization rates for students age 12 to 18 generally declined at school . . . This pattern held for the total crime rate as well as for thefts, violent crimes, and serious violent crimes” (Dinks, Cataldi, & Lin-Kelly, 2007, p. 10). Of all the participants, only Jay discussed school violence at length, but did so with a great deal of violent description:

The school was mayhem, brah. They gonna make a movie about that school in the future —for real. For real. There was mayhem. Every day was a fight. Principals was gettin’ punched. Cops was gettin’ hit with crowbars and stuff. It was crazy, man . . . It was a fight every day. Every day you came to school there was a fight, man . . . I’d be walkin’ down the hallway, see a fight. Principals
getting punched, principals laid out on a locker, telling you man—they had cameras. Niggas was pullin’ down the cameras.

When asked the cause of the violence on campus, he cited the closing down of another high school in the city, in another part of town, north of his school. The dispersal of the northern high school’s population into the south’s high school led to a rapid escalation of territory-based conflict. Katie spent some time at the same school as Jay, but when asked about the violence, indicated that it could be violent compared to a “rich, White preppy school” but didn’t assign such violence to the campus to the degree in which Jay did. In contrast, when asked about his and Rider’s high school, Nemo said the campuses were relatively violence-free compared to Jay’s school. The biggest problem, the main cause of disciplinary actions according to Nemo, was dress code violations. “It wasn’t bad,” he says, adding that students could stay out of trouble “if you follow the dress code [and] keep your shirt tucked in, pants pulled up.” Bambam didn’t cite any instances of school violence on his campus, aside from those in which he was directly involved.

Jay’s comment referred to the surveillance apparatus that is appearing on school campuses with increasing regularity. Citing a 2004 study by DeVoe et al, Simon notes that half of the schools in a large survey had “security and surveillance systems in place” (2007, p. 208). One middle school, in a prosperous area of Florida, emblazoned a warning with the following on a conspicuously placed sign: “DRUG FREE SCHOOL ZONE, minimum 3 years in prison” and “YOUTH CRIME WATCH, to report: 757-0514 or Your Local Police Department.” (Simon, 2007, p. 208) Such signage is reminiscent of a sign at the detention facilities (See Figure 14) that Nemo took a picture of:
Figure 14. A sign warning against Escape hangs from the rafters of the awning that leads to the prison Yard (Photo Credit: Nemo)

When asked about this photo, Nemo said that it’s a constant reminder of the penalties of breaking the law and that it’s not worth it to try and escape. The similarity in the two signs—in purpose and verbiage—is unmistakable. Even the references to the Youth Crime Watch are Orwellian, reminiscent of 1984’s Youth League.

Jonathan Simon (2007) goes on to discuss the rise in public consensus regarding violence on school campuses, a rise that Bracy (2011) believes is more the product of paranoia and fear rather than demonstrated increase of incidence or actual elevated risk. Nevertheless, most people felt that this violence is an issue and one way to combat this issue was by adding more security and more technology; inspiration for these means were taken from prisons and law enforcement (Simon, 2007). This model, adapted from criminality, assumes that crime is the central problem on these campuses and are developing tools, procedures, and responsiveness that appear closer related to law
enforcement policies than educational ones. The resulting conflict concerns Giroux, who writes: “Through the introduction of police, probation officers, prosecutors, and a host of private security professionals into the schools, new forms of expertise now openly compete with pedagogic knowledge and authority for shaping routines and rituals of schools.” (2009, p. 95)

Even though only one of my participants described a school campus predicated on violence and featured physical confrontations between the student body and administration or security, each of them had received heavy-handed school disciplinary action which, in some cases, precipitated a court date that landed them behind bars. Additionally, the thoughts the youths had regarding the omnipresence of electronic surveillance technology contributed to the perception that students have when it comes to school campus security cameras. This concern, and the anxiety it creates for these juveniles (discussed at length in Chapter 9), has implications beyond these kids, beyond their cells.

**Campus Security Presence and Disciplinary Penalties**

Giroux (citing Grossberg, 2005, p. 36) refers to the frequency with which students and youth experience some form of discipline in the United States:

Every second, a public high school student is suspended; every ten seconds a public school student is corporally punished; every twenty seconds, a kid is arrested. Criminalization and medicalization are cheap (financially and emotionally) and expedient ways to deal with our fears and frustrations. (2009, p. 91)

For many kids, including half of my participants, school discipline leads to arrest and eventual incarceration on charges. Bambam thought that the charges for which some kids
were booked into KPJDC for did not necessitate an arrest and subsequent imprisonment. When asked for an example, he replied:

A fight will break out—the fight needs to be fully investigated before someone gets locked up. I mean if you get in a fight at school it’s automatic you get sent here—they sit you in the front if you in probation. They talk to the probation officer. The probation officer says, ‘Well . . . let’s lock ‘em up.’ 15 days probation violation. I mean it’s not really anything to lock anybody up over without a full investigation. Some people’s in here for self-defense fightin’ and they still get locked up.

In reviewing the transcript, I recognized an unasked question that I should have followed up with. When Bambam talks about probation violations and parole officers, he’s presumably talking about repeat offenders. The student in question has a parole officer, in the first place, because he/she is on parole and has offended before. A requisite sentence of 15 days for “probation violation” (probably the most common charge I heard referenced by all juveniles in all my time at the detention facility) would be, again, for a youth who is already on parole. In my years of teaching, I saw fights break out that didn’t result in the combatants being automatically taken to a juvenile lockdown facility and booked. I can only assume that here Bambam was talking about a juvenile, on parole, who gets in a fight that leads to an automatic 15 day carceral sentence; he didn’t think this was fair.

Even before the level of police involvement, there are discipline practices and trends in schools that affect poor and minority kids on campuses. Ferguson (2000) found that the punishments faced by African American males in a relatively racially diverse school were troubling and seemingly arbitrary, as Black youth were assigned to in-school suspension and other punishments more often than White counterparts, and, in some instances, were discussed in prison contexts, e.g. some of these kids were simply destined
for jail. Such disciplinary tendencies increasingly connect the school campus with the youth carceral system as school administrations demonstrate “more attention to school behaviour, harsher sanctions, and greater readiness to bring juvenile justice system intervention for school-based misconduct” (Simon, 2007, p. 173), a disconcerting extension of Rios’s (2007) youth control complex. Giroux (2009), citing Dohrn (2000), talks about this difference over time, contrasting punishment that was once “sanctioned by the school vice principal, family members, a neighbour, or a coach” is now handled by “an adolescent being arrested, referred to juvenile or criminal court, formally adjudicated, incarcerated in a detention center, waived or transferred to adult criminal court for trial, sentenced under mandatory sentencing guidelines, and incarcerated with adults” (Dohrn, 2000, p. 158)” (Giroux, 2009, p. 98). Jay’s high school provided an immediate example in his life of this trend when he laughed and commented that the police presence at his high school had grown so much that the school sometimes looked “like a police station they got so much police cars over there, man. They got a lotta police cars.”

With increased police presence comes an increase in what Simon calls the “technologies of exile” (2007, p. 172) at work in schools along with increases in school detentions, suspensions, and expulsions; notably, every single one of my participants had experienced at least two of these school disciplinary measures and some, all three. The proliferation of police presence and the surveillance technology discussed in the previous section aren’t the only ways these “technologies” of exile find their way into schools. In some cases, instances of harassment and arrest are the product of legislation. Giroux uses New York City as an example and Mayor Bloomberg’s decision, in 1998, to hand over
school safety to the New York City Police Department. The result? A proliferation in
the number of agents on the force in the name of “school safety,” which also led to “an
intensification of abuse, harassments, and arrests of students throughout the school
system” (2009, p. 100). Michelle Fine (2009) witnessed similar abuses in New York City
as part of her Polling for Justice initiative with NYC youth when a judge divulged the
abuse of the police as part of Operation Clean Halls. Under this law, police can patrol
school hallways and search anybody who doesn’t look as if she/he should be there or
doesn’t have identification. The latitude of this law led to an increase in harassment of
youth by police in the Bronx and when this rise in incidence was mentioned, “Judge L.”
said the reason was “overtime” because the cops can log overtime hours just by booking
youth and processing their paperwork (Fox, Mediratta, Ruglis, Stoudt, Shah & Fine,
2010). Meanwhile, in Luzerne County, Pennsylvania, two judges pocketed more than
two and a half million dollars in the form of kickbacks from a privately owned and
operated juvenile incarceration facility, assigning sentences that were out of line with the
school-based offenses (e.g. an honour student whose offense was lampooning an assistant
principal on a MySpace page) (Pilkington, 2009) in one of the most egregious abuses of
law enforcement responsibilities that I discovered during my research. The relationship
between the educational and the carceral is becoming increasingly more intimate, and the
stories of school-based offenses for Fisher, Bambam, and Katie demonstrated this.

**School Based Offenses Leading to Arrest**

Earlier, I alluded to Bambam’s arrest on bomb threat charges and his belief that
the allegations and sentencing were unjust. In the interview, one of the longest
transcribed passages from across all the interviews focused on this event, from the initial
provocation leading to the officer’s presence through to his arrest. He started by
describing what he said that led to an interpretation of his words as a bomb threat:

It was in the middle of the school day but I didn’t have a class that hour and I was
goin’ to smoke a cigarette and then come back on campus. Well, before—when I
was lightin’ the cigarette when I got off campus, the sheriff said, ‘Go back to
school and go to the office . . .’ They said they were gonna handle that and they
brought me inside, told me to empty my pockets and I had a pack of cigarettes
and a lighter. Well, they told me they was putting me up for expulsion, so I
grabbed my cigarettes and lighter and walked out of the school. And when I got
outside the school, me and the sheriff was talking and she said that the school was
in danger from me and I said, ‘How is the school in danger?’ I said, ‘The only
way the school is in endangered is if there’s a bomb in the school’ and she said
that she was gonna put that [threat] against me.

Bambam knew that he wasn’t allowed to smoke on campus and recognized the
contraband status of cigarettes and a lighter on school property. He didn’t deny that he
had the lighter and was leaving campus during the school day to smoke, neither of which
was allowed. He explained, later, that he left the principal’s office because he was going
to be suspended and that there wasn’t any use sticking around, so he decided to leave
campus. It was on his way out that the local sheriff’s department officer stopped him, as
he was holding his lighter. He disagreed that he was a threat to the school and,
admittedly, picked a poor example to explain it. The mention of the word “bomb” was
the catalyst for what happened next, including his being booked at the facility and
eventual release when he was found innocent of the charges:

And then she called for backup and the local PD pulls up and says they have a
warrant for my arrest. They handcuff me and all and take me in and they never
had a warrant for my arrest. The cop that had got me supposedly said I had a
warrant out for my arrest. And the sheriff they charged me with uh false bomb
threat—well I went to court and I denied the charge because I never made no
bomb threat. And I come back with my lawyer—come in [to KPJDC] and was
talking to me and said I think they got some false information on the report—I
want you to look over. So I look over it and there was a bunch of false
information . . . So I got a subpoena from my PO to be in court to testify as a
witness for me and before I got in the courtroom they had started the trial and my
PO had got on the stand before I got in there and said that she never said none of [what they said she had stated]. So when I got in court, the sheriff and the principals was outta the courtroom and I went in there and they asked me what I had said—and I said the same thing as I did earlier . . . They took it off my record, I was innocent on that count.

Even though Bambam was eventually found innocent of the charges, he still resented the police officer and the entire episode because he blamed this officer, at least in part, for the harassment that he suffered at school, his expulsion and dismissal from school, and the time spent locked up for charges that he was eventually exonerated of. It should be noted, however, that the decision regarding his expulsion seemed to have more to do with his discipline record and (in this specific instance) his possession of a lighter and cigarettes, both of which preceded the intercession of the sheriff.

This episode, however, was not the only one between Bambam and this law enforcement officer, who spent a great deal of time in a school security role on his campus. When the bomb threat charge didn’t stick, Bambam said that she tried having him arrested and charged with battery against an officer; she claimed that he hit her in the chest, the result of an altercation that started when she tried to restrain him. Feeling he was unjustly being cuffed, he pulled his arms out of her grip and began walking away, admitting that he did resist arrest (even though the reason for the arrest was later deemed unjust), but didn’t lay a hand on her. In court, though, other police officers who appeared on the scene after she called for backup, and after the punch allegedly took place and who “had seen nothing,” testified that he did assault the officer. Feeling powerless to refute their testimony, he pled guilty to a lesser charge of simple battery when the district attorney offered the plea and reduced charges.
The resentment and frustration was clear in the interview and the anger rose again in our last interview, following an episode in which Bambam was slammed to the ground and bloodied after security guards put hands on him. Bambam recognized that he has issues with security staff and officers putting hands on him, the result of a breach of trust that dates back to his experiences with the local sheriff’s department on his school campus. Afterwards, he found himself expelled, out of school, unsure as to whether or not he’d be allowed back in.

Likewise, Fisher fought charges that he felt were unjustly levied in the wake of a physical altercation with police officers who were responsible for providing security at his high school (the same high school, incidentally, that Jay attended). When I asked Fisher what the worst charges were that he had ever faced, he responded, like Bambam, “assault and battery of a police officer.”

He described the series of events precipitating the charge:

I was at school and I was around a dice game. At that time I wasn’t shootin’—sometimes I shoot but that time I wasn’t shootin’ cuz I had left all my money at home that day . . . So [the cops] ran up on the dice game and told all of us to go to the office. I told the police, I was like, ‘Man, I’m gonna go to the office but don’t put your hands on me,’ and he told me, ‘I’ll do whatever I want’ and I said, ‘You gonna put yo’ hands on me and you gonna see,’ and he was like, ‘Oh you threatenin’ me?’ And then he waited until like—cuz the school has cameras—and he waited ‘til right whenever we got out of camera range and him and another police officer tried to arrest me or whatever. But I felt like they ain’t have no proper cause to put me under arrest or nothing. So I fought ‘em off of me and hit both of ‘em but my charges was dropped because they didn’t have no proper cause and I fought my charge. But I coulda just pleaded guilty and they wouldn’t have knew nothing about it. And the police officer didn’t get done nothing—they still work at school and I was expelled for that.

The similarities to Bambam’s story are striking. Fisher was threatened with discipline and arrest for something that he wasn’t doing and said so. When he indicated that he had done nothing wrong and made it clear that they ought not count on his
complicit participation in his arrest, there was a physicality to the incident and this exchange led to a charge of assault and battery on a police officer. Fisher, unlike Bambam, was found innocent of these specific charges but still faced arrest and incarceration as he waited for trial, where the officers’ case was found to be without merit. The expulsion, however, Fisher believes resulted directly from this altercation.

On my first visit to KPJDC, Fisher was in the high school classroom and, thus, still enrolled as a student in the local public school system. A couple of months later, on my third visit, he had been expelled and assigned to the computer lab and had become one of the Lab Kids. What his dismissal from school means for his education and future is discussed in greater length in Chapter 10.

Katie recounted several instances of school discipline over the course of our interviews. Her school dismissal resulted from a campus-based iteration of a three-strike policy. Her transgressions? Dress code violations, reminiscent of Nemo’s account earlier which said that students could largely stay out of trouble if they “keep [their] shirt tucked in, pants pulled up.” Katie, however, refused to abide by the dress code and, in her words, “kept wearin’ my shirt out” despite knowing the penalties. After three suspensions following her disobedience, she was dismissed from her high school campus and reassigned to the school district’s alternative campus (the landing spot for students deemed to have discipline problems by their home campus). She didn’t have a problem with the alternative campus; it was a welcome change from the “preppy” kids at Southlake. She thought that she was too different from these students and that “there was no space in the schools for much of the knowledge that [she] brought into the classroom” which “emphasized the fact that [she] didn’t fit in” (Tilley, 1998, p. 141). After serving
time at the alternative campus, she returned to her home campus and still didn’t want to
be there; this led her to do something more extreme because she saw no purpose in and
had no reason to be at some “fuck ass school” so she brought a knife to school in a
premeditated act to get kicked out:

I wasn’t gonna be able to move, transfer to a new school. So I felt like—hey, oh
well they can do what they gotta do. Bring my knife to school, they gonna expel
me regardless. I mean, I knew I was gonna get expelled regardless, know what
I’m sayin”? I’m a Black kid; I brought a knife to school round all these little
preppy kids you know what I’m sayin”? ‘What she gonna do? Cut up people.
We can’t have that around our school.’ So I knew I was gonna get expelled. So I
really wasn’t trippin”—I was like, ‘Oh well, whatever.’

Unlike Bambam and Fisher, Katie knew that she had broken a law and didn’t feel
that she’d been unfairly disciplined, dismissed, and later, adjudicated. She agreed, on
more than one occasion, with the sentiment that she’d done the crime and now she had to
do the time. All but one of the participants expressed some degree of regret at being sent
from school and/or some measure of respect for education and its importance in each of
their respective futures. Katie, however, remained unapologetic in discussing her
thoughts on education and schooling (discussed in an upcoming section on the
achievement ideology).

Nemo’s school discipline record was much shorter and considerably less violent
(in terms of charges) than any of the others. He generally followed the rules and abided
by the school’s dress code, but admitted that he was inclined to “clown” and get in
trouble with his teacher. There was one incident—of a fight—that led to the first
suspension on his record, a punishment that he still felt was unwarranted. I mentioned, in
Chapter 6, that Nemo’s mother died when he was eight years old. A few years later, as a
Grade 9 student in high school, another student started taunting him and making cracks
about his mother. Nemo claims that he asked the other student to stop with the yo’
momma jokes and comments because his mother was dead and the other kid refused to,
continuing the insensitive barrage of comments, ignoring Nemo’s request. Nemo, usually
calm and collected, admitted that he has a short temper that can get him in trouble and on
this day, it did:

I was like, ‘Can you please stop talking about my momma cuz my momma’s
dead?’ and he was like, ‘I’ll talk about whoever I want to.’ And he kept on
talking and I punched him and we got into a fight and they sent me to the
alternative school. That was my first suspension.

Once again, a relatively short list of disciplinary problems led one of my
participants to the district’s alternative campus. I asked Nemo if he felt that the
punishment was fair and he shook his head. After I asked him why, he simply offered,
“Cuz I mean, it was my first suspension.” He did discuss some disciplinary episodes in
junior high that he had gotten in trouble for before, but since arriving at high school his
discipline record had been clean, the product of a realization that he needed to grow up.
Junior high might’ve been fine for wanting to “clown all the time, don’t wanna get my
work done. Just stuff like that—bein’ a regular ol’ teenager. That’s pretty much all it
was—just bein’ a regular teenager.” He didn’t elaborate on what he meant by “regular
teenager” but his string of discipline problems at junior high were, as he put it, related to
not doing his work or not listening to his teacher, habits that he had apparently put behind
him since he started high school.

Rider had only been expelled a single time, for talking back to a teacher and
disrupting the classroom, and accumulating too many write ups. As a result, he faced
only a single expulsion when he was in seventh grade; the charges he faced were
unrelated to school-based offenses.
Enrollment Status, Immediate Educational Futures, and Ambiguity

Of all my participants, only Rider was still enrolled in school and had not been dismissed and thus, attended school in the facility’s school classrooms. When I started the research, during my first observations, all the other participants were enrolled in the public school system and, thus, placed in the KPJDC high school classroom or had started there while I was back in Toronto. By the time the research was over, however, each of these students had been relegated to Lab Kid status. Finding themselves no longer in school, they reflected on their short-term educational options. Rider, because he was still enrolled, planned on returning to his home campus. But the rest of my participants weren’t sure where they would end up or what their options where.

Nemo was the most puzzled by his current status and excommunication from the high school classroom. When he was arrested, he was enrolled in the alternative school (following the fight—which was unrelated to the charges he was booked on, discussed in the next chapter) and settled into the high school classroom. Abruptly, though, one day he was told he needed to leave and could not be taught in the facility’s classroom because he was not enrolled in school any longer. Nemo described the confusing episode:

I was at class the first day I came and they called the school and they was like ‘Well, we have Nemo here in JDC’ and the school was like, ‘Oh, he’s expelled’ and I didn’t know nothing about it. My aunt didn’t tell me nothing about it—she didn’t even know . . . I didn’t know nothing about it. That’s why I was like, ‘Why I gotta come here?’ They was like, ‘Tomorrow you gotta go to the lab because you not in school.’

This was a surprise to Nemo who had no idea that his school enrollment status was in jeopardy or question. The most discouraging aspect was Nemo’s reluctance to even attempt to return to school at all, and he began considering other options, such as Job Corps. While he preferred the Lab environment, because it was much more casual
and allowed him to talk and hang out, he admitted that it would be better for him to be in school in the long run but now he’d probably seriously have to look at alternatives to his high school. The school-to-prison transaction, in Nemo’s case, might have cost him his school status, a resolution that caused him more confusion and angst than it did the other participants.

Bambam and Fisher both saw GEDs in their immediate future, but each considered other options, a discussion more fully developed in Chapter 10; here I discuss the ambiguity of Bambam’s status. I pressed him, asking if this was the route he preferred ideally, and he said he’d prefer to return to school if they would allow him to enter as an 11th grader:

If they let me go to the 11th I would enroll. But if they would start me back at 10th grade and make me redo the whole 10th grade I’d just go with my GED because, I mean, I don’t wanna graduate when I’m 19, 20 years old. I mean here it is, I’m 16 years old. If they make me start from when I’m—now—retake 10th, 11th, and 12th, I’ll be 19 graduating. So I mean I’d rather go and get my GED or graduate when I turn 18 than graduate when I’m 19.

He recognized, though, that he’s not even sure if returning to school would be a possibility considering his current status and discipline records, so the preference to return to school might well be moot. Fisher’s plans included the GED (as part of his participation in the Youth Challenge Program) as well, but like Bambam, he preferred to be enrolled in school, in a grade level commensurate with his age and would consider it if “I could get skipped up to my right grade;” as someone who is already 17 years old, however, and at least two years from graduation he had no desire to pursue re-enrollment for a diploma when he could get the GED instead.

The Youth Challenge Program is supposed to simultaneously serve educational and behaviour-modification needs, by offering a boot camp-style, militaristic discipline
structure and the completion of the GED. During one of my visits, as I was driving around town, I heard a commercial on the radio with a very kid-oriented jingle and a voiceover teeming with unbridled enthusiasm talking about a place for teenage fun. At the end of the commercial, they announced the phone number: 1-800-CAMP-KID! This advertisement, featured on a local hip-hop radio station, was for the Youth Challenge Program. YCP boasts a 90% pass rate for students who participate in the GED component, which is optional, along with the ACT College Entrance Exam; required, however, is completion of the Armed Services Aptitude Test (ASVAB) (Haney, 2011). The website for the program features parent testimonials highlighting the program’s success stories. Not all stories about YCP, however, appear to be of the successful variety. While I was at KPJDC, one female was booked on return from her dismissal from YCP and she still wore the bruises on her face where she had been physically beaten in the face by a YCP “sergeant” while being restrained on the ground. Fisher corroborated the physically aggressive style of this program, which was contrary to what was explained to him before he agreed to go. He described the abuse in his case:

Well they was treatin’ me wrong up there. I had told ‘em they ain’t give me a phone call for like the first two weeks and I told ‘em soon as I get my phone call I was gonna call my PO and let ‘em know. Cuz they told me when I entered the program it was a volunteer program so I wouldn’t have to worry about people puttin’ their hands on me or whatever but it still happened. And I let ‘em know as soon as I got my phone call I was gonna [tell how they] grab you, whatever, throw you around. I saw some kids get punched in the face but I didn’t get hit in my face or nothin’. But other kids did.

Fisher was declared a discipline problem and was summarily kicked out of YCP and returned to the custody of the juvenile facility. The convergence of law enforcement and education wasn’t the only one impacting the lives of these kids; the purpose and stated function of YCP connects school with the military (further explored in Chapter
And, as he sat in the interview, he pondered what his educational future was in the short term, unsure whether or not he would be allowed back in school or under what conditions, but practically resigned to perhaps working on his GED and that represented, for him, his educational ceiling at the moment.

The Achievement Ideology and the Perceived Importance of Schooling

The experiences, frustrations, and disciplinary reprisals that each of my participants faced didn’t necessarily diminish the importance they placed in schooling, at least rhetorically. After all, Bambam, Fisher, Nemo, and Rider explicitly stated a preference or intent to return to school; it went beyond that when Katie, Jay, and Bambam talked about schooling. Jay and Bambam, specifically, talked about the importance of education, reifying certain educational aspects of the “achievement ideology” in much the same way that Macleod’s (2008) Brothers did.

Bambam spoke generally about the importance of education for everyone, saying that “everybody does need an education” before adding that he knew of kids, like him, that had a much harder time because they were “comin’ back and forth” between lockdown and school and that “might make them fail.” This failure, however, wasn’t always a product of a youth’s lack of ability or interest in school. In some cases, for these youth, blame can be placed on the disconnect between their home campus and KPJDC’s classroom curriculum; there is a single high school classroom with a single teacher, for all subject areas and all high school grade levels. If the curricular content taught at the facility doesn’t match up with the content, level, or pace at their home campus, these juveniles find themselves even further behind and, thus, more frustrated. Bambam described such an example in his strongest subject area, math:
I’ve also had times like in my geometry class this year when I was in school I was booked into here and we was in like Chapter 2 out there in geometry. I get here—I told [Mr. Trent] what chapter I’m in. When I get back they’re in Chapter 6 and he’s only got me in Chapter 4. I’m two chapters behind; I gotta make up all them tests. I mean, I know I’m good in geometry and all but doin’ it off the top of my head not knowing—you can’t do no math that way. I mean you’ve gotta know the formulas before you can get the answer and guessin’ at the formulas don’t really work.

The problem is further compounded because math isn’t the only subject being taught and the longer a youth is locked up and locked out of his/her school, the harder it is to catch up in class, even aside from the stigma of being locked up that affects some detained juveniles; one sentenced youth in the case of the Luzerne County judges was “completely destroyed” and eventually dropped out of high school after spending four months being locked up on his first offense on charges for which he still maintains his innocence, but has now resigned himself, like many of my participants, to a GED (Rubinkam & Dale, 2009).

When Bambam tried to explain this problem to Mr. Trent, he was rebuffed and claimed that he was told that Mr. Trent insisted that he do work he had planned for him, independent of what might be happening on his campus. Frustrated, Bambam pleaded to work on work that his fellow students were doing, “Because when I get back, I’m lost.” It should be noted, however, that teaching in this context can be very trying for a teacher. The student population changes frequently and the day’s roster can vary, depending on new admits, unexpected releases, juveniles being placed on lockdown, court appearances, meetings with lawyers, etc. The home campuses are also supposed to send work to the facility, but oftentimes there is no such work sent, so then Mr. Trent is left with little choice but to design plans on his own. How capable he is of carrying that out was a matter of much contention with the students and discussed in more detail in Chapter 9.
And even though Katie generally regarded education with contempt, she did express her frustration with the lack of cohesion between what was being taught at her school and what she was learning in the site’s classroom:

We learnin’ our math and all of this other stuff. We just not learnin’, know what I’m saying? Like, my high school—they on it. Every other six weeks they on another chapter, doin’ this, doin’ that . . . Yea they passin’ us up in school.

When we discussed how much this mattered, she didn’t share the concern that Bambam did, frustrated with her entire educational process. Ultimately, she felt like education wasn’t preparing her for anything substantial and wasn’t addressing her priorities:

I mean, I don’t like school because I got responsibilities that I gotta handle. And school not helping me with that. So right now, really and truly, I could care less about school, about bein’ a lawyer, you know? I could care less. Cuz my brother’s my priority and as long as he make it, that’s really what matters to me.

This led Katie, eventually, to decide that going to school really wasn’t worth it as she rhetorically asked, “Why go? Why wake up every morning, go to a fuck ass school?” The answer to that question, already clear. Her resignation is reminiscent of Jinx, a Hallway Hanger in Macleod’s work, when he says, “Even if you get a high school diploma, that don’t mean shit . . . You get a high school diploma, and they’re still gonna give you a shitty job. So it’s a waste of time to get it” (2008, p. 103) and Freddie, another Hallway Hanger, who is likewise “pessimistic about his prospects for social mobility and disputes schooling’s capacity to ‘deliver the goods.’ ” (2008, p. 1). Her feelings are a singular example of a general trend that Macleod discusses (quoting Apple, 1982, p. 19) in Ain’t No Makin It when he quotes Michael Apple, who believes “rejection of so much of the content and form of day to day educational life bears on the almost unconscious
realization that, as a class, schooling will not enable them to go much further than they already are” (Macleod, 2008, p. 19).

Contrary to Katie, stood Jay’s and Bambam’s perceived emphasis on education. Bambam spoke about his difficulties in transitioning between secure custody and his home campus, but still believed that he needs an education. The importance indicated by a complete lack of hesitation in his answer to my question below:

Jonathan: “But you think education is part of your ideal plan?”
Bambam: “Yeah.”
Jonathan: “Even though you’ve been kicked out of school, even though you sit in the lab and watch movies and shoot the shit, even though the school system has kinda—you still believe, well if I’m gonna make it somewhere education has to be part of that place?”
Bambam: “Yeah [no hesitation]. That’s the only way you can get somewhere in life. Because nowadays it’s changing and it’s changin’ quick and now it’s hard to find a job without an education.”

Securing a job meant a release from the educational system, a release from reliance on his family, and a release from his recidivist history in the prison system; Bambam put much faith in finding a good job and the lynchpin was his education. Like the Brothers, Bambam cited the necessity and “efficacy of schooling” as a “remedy for the problem of social inequality” (Macleod, 2008, p. 99). Jay, meanwhile, acknowledged that school is difficult for some kids, like him, who attend violent or underachieving campuses but need to continually work hard, despite the “fights, fights, fights” that surround them. School, he said, is important and achievement is related to a youth’s ability to resist the temptations in the surrounding neighbourhood (discussed in the previous chapter). It’s easy, he said, to “push homework to the side” but “you gotta be smarter than that . . . Like stay on top of your game. If you know you wanna go somewhere, man, stay on top your game, man.” Going somewhere is an option for everyone, agreeing with Super who
told Macleod that, “If you don’t want to do it . . . you ain’t gonna make it. I gotta get that through my mind: I wanna do it. I wanna be somethin’. I don’t wanna be livin’ in the projects the rest of my life” (2008, p. 81). But actually getting somewhere included homework (i.e. education) as a prerequisite. Failure to resist the “devil” (represented by the allure of “dope” and “money” and “playin’ ball”) will lead to failure in “going somewhere,” as Jay put it, echoing Macleod’s point that “barriers to success are seen as personal rather than social” and an exoneration of the “opportunity structure” because failure is attributed to a “personal inadequacy” rather than any implication of the social (2008, p. 81).

During one of the conversations about a photograph he took, Jay described an incident that qualified, for him, as an obstacle to school attendance when he was in junior high school as he singled out the picture of a Black history timeline (see Figure 15).

*Figure 15. A timeline poster of famous figures in Black history that hangs on a whiteboard in the high school classroom. (Photo credit: Jay)*
When I asked Jay about the significance of this picture, he answered that it was “my Black history. And some stuff people did that made it easier in the world for—made it easier for people to get a job.” He then thought further about the significance of the picture and why he took it and added, “We’d prolly still be fightin’ White people to get into stores and stuff. It’d be only White and coloured ya feel me. Cuz—like it’s still some people like that. Like cops—most cops still like that, feel me.” He paused, and then discussed an episode that took place years ago, when he was in middle school. The discrimination wasn’t at the hands of a cop, however, but rather a bus driver that he considered racist. As he shared the following story, Jay became more frustrated at the fact that such discriminatory attitudes and actions still occur, despite what those figures in his Black history had worked for:

We had a White bus driver at our middle school and we’ll be on the bus stop and every morning it’ll pass us up. She picks us up on our first day, to tell us, ‘Yea, I know y’all at the bus stop for this bus but I’m just passin’ y’all up for a reason.’ And she’d pass us up all them days—she’d pass us up, pass us up. So one day we had some eggs and when the bus passed we threw the bus with eggs. She stopped and we were like, ‘You gonna let us get on the bus now?’ but she called the police on us and we had got charged for property damage. But we tell the principal at school and they was like alright, ‘We gonna handle it,’ but they was really like ‘tsk – they just lyin’.’ We were walkin’ to school every day, getting tardies. Then, getting suspended for havin’ too much tardies but it’s not our fault.

The discussion over this photograph began as something Jay took pride in but as he thought about the legacy of discrimination toward Blacks, he remembered this episode, as a student, that impacted his school experience.

Aside from a discriminatory bus driver, Jay did feel (as did Fisher) —positively—that teachers and campus administration can also actively contribute to this efficacy of schooling. Jay struggled with the lack of support and approbation from his grandfather but maintained that kids still need someone to support them, telling them that they are on
the right path and doing a good job and when family members don’t or can’t, there are people in the school system that can. For instance, he suggested, “I think teachers can—because I know teachers that got people where they at right now. Anybody man, anybody. Counselors. Anybody. Your basketball coaches.” When he made this comment, though, it’s not personalized; he referred to other people who received help from teachers. I asked him if he received any such support at school, but he shook his head and replied, “I ain’t gonna say they didn’t care but they was just all like equal. They was just, ‘Alright, yea you’—they just treated me equal as everybody else. Only person I really had take me in is drug dealers.” Jay never talked about getting into much trouble at school; as an athlete, he said he was treated pretty well generally and given more latitude with regard to his behaviour and academic performance as a result, but admitted that such relative permissiveness probably did him more harm than good.

Fisher, however, was often in trouble on the same campus and when we talked about the good that teachers and administration can do, he had to reach for a movie character from one of the films we watched to make his point, Morgan Freeman’s principal Joe Clark in Lean on Me (Twain, 1989) because he couldn’t recall an example from his own experience. Principal Clark was able to change one of the worst schools, demonstrating that a principal “can change and can make a difference” and he found the story of this principal and his school inspiring. He’d been watching the film since he was “a kid” because it demonstrates that “[you can’t do] it by yourself—you gonna need help somewhere down the line, somebody gonna help you.” Although he couldn’t speak to a teacher or principal who had done that for him, he still believed it was possible. Both Jay and Fisher ascribed to this sentiment, an extension of the educational achievement
ideology and schooling efficacy, despite the fact that neither felt impacted by this potential directly.

**Concluding Thoughts**

In *The Limits of Change* Richard Elmore declares that high schools in the United States “are probably either a close third or tied for second as the most pathological social institutions in our society after public health hospitals and prisons” (2002). In the lives of my participants, the pathology is not cleaved; the carceral, security, and surveillant infrastructures that have come to distinguish prison pathologies are being adopted and adapted on school campuses. The result is an extension of secure custody and presumptions of guilt that these youth struggle with, ideologically and practically. Bob Hebert, in another *New York Times* piece, speaks to this flourishing convergence and proliferation, disturbed by the fact that “school officials and the criminal justice system are criminalizing children and teenagers all over the country, arresting them and throwing them in jail for behaviour that in years past would never have led to the intervention of law enforcement” which leads to an increased metaphorical assignation, dialogically and legislatively, of children as criminals (2007b). The permissiveness of this criminalized discourse when discussing students and children makes it increasingly easier for school administration, district officials, and elected representatives to legitimate a police presence and a surveillant omnipresence in their hallways. Simon refers to these phenomena as an “eradication of barriers between the juvenile justice and school systems” which has led to the enactment of “laws giving criminal justice officials greater access to school-based information and administrative systems” (2008, p.220).
This “eradication of barriers” impacts the lives of students everyday; the implications aren’t, and shouldn’t be, just framed as theoretical generalities or a trend with certain ominous potentialities. Every day kids are affected. Kids ambushed by the abuses from Operation Clean Hallways in New York City. Kids unjustly imprisoned for minor offenses, even when parole officers and prosecutors pleaded for leniency, in Luzerne County, Pennsylvania. Kids arrested in the hallways and parking lots of their schools in Kakau Parish, only to be exonerated (after having served time) after appearing before a judge. Giroux refers to these attacks on youth as part of a “punishing society” treating kids as if they were “disposable” and closing “down any hope they might have for a decent future” (Giroux, 2009, p. 94). These youth are aware of the impact on their respective futures, as they vacillate between the ideals of their aspirations and the reality of what they expect (an issue addressed in greater depth in Chapter 10). There was evidence of a faith in education and the achievement ideology, but it was tempered by a psychological preparation “for jobs at the bottom of the occupational structure” (Macleod, 2008, p. 127). For most of these marginalized youth, including my participants, their stories provide sobering, personal examples of Giroux’s belief that public schools “now prepare many students for entry not into universities or colleges but into the juvenile criminal justice system” (Giroux, 2009, p. 94). As such, their stories from school serve as an unfortunate and discouraging segue to the next chapter, dealing with their encounters with law enforcement.
Chapter 8: Against Cops

You’ve got to have the police, cause
if there were no police, look at what you'd be doing to yourselves!
You’d be killing each other if there were no police!
But the reality is
the police become necessary in human society
only at that junction in human society
where it is split between those who have and those who ain’t got

- Dead Prez “The Police State”

There was not a single participant in the study who had not experienced some subordinating harassment at the hands of law enforcement; all 6 shared stories of encounters with law enforcement officials (and some, later, with the court proceedings) that they considered unfair or incommensurate, even though most acknowledged that they had done wrong and deserved the time and punishment they were serving. These events coloured their attitudes and perceptions toward cops and undermined the trust they placed in those endowed with the responsibility to serve and protect. Though their experiences differed in frequency and degree, their narratives serve as illustrative examples of the youth harassment discussed by Giroux (2009), Fine (2009), Fox et al (2010), Rios (2007) and other academics at a place where theoretical and academic dialogue intersects with youth experience.

By highlighting their stories, in opposition to those of law enforcement (e.g. police officers, parole officers, judges), I hope to reveal a glimpse of their “hidden transcripts” with our discussions and this dissertation as a “privileged site for nonhegemonic, contrapuntal, dissident, subversive discourse” (Scott, 1992, p. 25). One of the most oft-repeated sentiments over the course of my work was a plea for people to listen to what these kids have to say, and this forced silence by cops who ignored them or
refused to acknowledge their stories is no exception. More than one participant expressed a frustrated desire that they wished the cops would’ve asked them questions or listened to what they had to say; instead, they jumped to conclusions and juveniles were cuffed, confined, tased, thrown into the back of patrol cars, and/or booked into secure custody. Their willingness to participate in my research resulted from the chance to have their stories heard and their voices listened to, similar to Tilley’s (1998) participants who were also “happy to have the opportunity to say the things she had wanted and tried to say so many times before, but no one would listen” (p. 38-39). This chapter focuses on the limitations of juvenile recourse in the face of arrest and adjudicating processes, but I should also note that it should not be taken as an utter and total lack of agency on their parts. Certainly the kids make choices, sometimes poor ones, and there were few times where they were validated at some point in the process. In many (if not most) cases, however, these choices are already circumscribed by things outside of the youth’s control; as Macleod points out: “We must understand that teenage peer groups make their own history, but not under circumstances of their own choosing” (2008, p. 152). The contrast between the police reports and the youth narratives are, I believe, a small but crucial example of “the kind of action that would dismantle the systemic conditions that promote such practices of exclusion and disposability” (Giroux, 2009, p. 18). In other chapters, I’ve taken the approach of building background leading to encounters with authority and law enforcement, capitulating the chapter with those authoritative encounters. For this chapter, however abrupt an approach, I begin with the harassment and abuse experienced by my participants before discussing broader social experiences/research reflecting their encounters.
Law Enforcement Encounters

In his study, Rios talks about his participant youth who, like those in my work, experienced what they perceived as unfair police harassment. He writes that these kids:

have been affected by the decline of the welfare state and the expansion of the criminal justice system . . . The youth felt that on an everyday level, their lives were being defined and controlled through discourses and practices of crime and policies related to crime even when they were not committing crimes (2007, p. 21).

Though all of my participants had been victimized by police harassment, there was no youth who had had more run-ins than did Jay; he recounted three specific episodes of unfair or incommensurate harassment. The first centred on a shirt he was wearing, with Obama on one side and Martin Luther King, Jr. on the other side; the second resulted not in his being booked but rather dropped off in a rival part of town; and the third was a case of racial profiling.

Of those three stories, the most frustrating one for Jay to share was the episode that began when a cop tried to get him to take his shirt off. I should note, though, that Jay admitted to having marijuana on him, while urinating in public on the side of a house. He disavowed neither of these but felt wronged because neither were the reason he was stopped and cuffed by the cop. Early one morning, as he was walking back home, Jay had to use the bathroom and, as he was urinating on the side of a building, the patrol car passed and saw him. He zipped up, threw the “dope” over the fence and then proceeded to continue walking. Unsurprised as the cops stopped him, Jay began to offer his defense of why he was urinating on the side of the building but the cop began berating Jay, not about his urinating but rather about his T-shirt which Jay described as “a Obama and
Martin Luther King shirt—they was on the side of each other and they he had a speech
about Martin Luther King and Obama together.”

It was this shirt, and not the public act of urination, that drew the officer’s ire. He
asked Jay abruptly, “How the hell you gonna put Martin Luther King with Obama?
Obama ain’t do shit for this country—Obama don’t do nothing for this country man.
How you gonna put Obama with Martin Luther King?” Jay answered dismissively with a
“Yea, man, alright . . . whatever.” His impertinence didn’t sit well with the cop, so he
pressed Jay further, demanding that Jay lean up against the car. Jay issued a curt, “yes,
sir” and complied with the request. He explained that he had been taught how to talk to
cops by the person who put him in the drug game, that interactions with the cops were
difficult to manoeuvre as he had to toe a line between acquiescence and insincerity,
because a police officer could detect whether or not he were agreeing simply to be rid of
him. Jay explained:

As I got older I see the cops messin’ with me and beat my friends cuz they
talking, they can’t hush their mouth. I know I control my mouth—I know they
can’t hush their mouth. They talk but I know how to hold myself around cops. I
show ‘em respect; that’s what I was taught. I studied.

This dialogical dynamic echoed what Scott discusses in his work on resistance
when he writes that “in the short run, it is in the best interest of the subordinate to
produce a more or less credible performance, speaking the lines and making the gestures
he knows are expected of him” (1992, p. 4). The advice that Ellison’s grandfather, on his
deathbed, gives his father also evokes a similar sentiment to how Jay (and Fisher,
discussed later) described living in such a patrolled community:

Son, after I’m gone I want you to keep up the good fight. I never told you, but
our life is a war and I have been a traitor all my born days, a spy in the enemy’s
country ever since I give up my gun back in the Reconstruction. Live with your
head in the lion’s mouth. I want you to overcome ‘em with yeses, undermine ‘em with grins, agree ‘em to death and destruction. (1995, p. 16)

Jay admitted, however, that even if he “overcomes ‘em with yeses” that’s not satisfactory and won’t end the harassment; such was the case this time. As the cop searched Jay as he leaned against the car, he ordered Jay to “take off that shirt and throw that shit away!” Again, Jay did as the officer asked in the hopes the gesture would lead to a quick resolution but he didn’t want to lose his shirt so he threw it on the ground so he could pick it back up when the cops left. The officer would have none of this however, and told Jay to throw it in the trash can but when Jay didn’t move, the cop did it himself.

Finally, Jay was too angry to comply with the cop any longer and his visible anger led to his being tased:

[When he threw the shirt in the trash can] that made me mad – I’m like, ‘Man how you gonna throw away my shirt? How about I come to you and tell you take off your uniform, tell you take off your badge, and throw your badge away.’ ‘Don’t talk to me like that,’ he said. Tased me. Put me on the ground and stuff.

As soon as Jay stopped “speaking the lines expected of him” the aggression and violence of the scene escalated and Jay ended up on the other side of a Taser.

This might’ve been the most violent a cop had been with Jay, but it wasn’t the most violent conclusion to an encounter with the cops. Jay described a second episode in which he and a friend, and their two girlfriends, were walking down the street and they had been smoking weed so they “weren’t really carin’ bout nothin’ ” when a cop stopped them. They had nothing on them and Jay was, once again, mad that he was being harassed and didn’t speak as he normally did to the cops, accusing them of unfair profiling: “What’re you stopping us for, man? Just because we’re Black and shit? Ain’t you got somebody else to mess with?” To which, the officer instructed the girls to go
home unless they “wanted to go to jail, too.” After a search produced nothing with which either of the boys could be charged, Jay thought they’d be allowed to go and asked, “We can go now? We ain’t got nothing on us. We can go now?” The officer, however, accused Jay of “talking smart” and told him and his “homeboy” to get in the car. Instead of being taken to the police station (because there was nothing with which the cop could charge them), however, they were taken to the south side of town which had significant territorial and violent animosity toward people from the north and Jay had become a known figure, even as a young teenager, from the northern part of the city. Once they reached the housing projects on the south side, the cop made them get out of the car so they could walk home, through enemy territory. Jay told the story of the rest of that trip:

He brought us to the worst part of Cornerstone . . . everything goin’ on, sellin’ drugs and everybody was outside. And he dropped us off there. And we got beat the fuck up; man, we get beat up. Cuz it’s like he dropped us in a part that just got—it’s a entrance—there’s no exit. Wherever you enter, you gotta exit so he dropped us to the back so we’re tryin’ to sneak our way around to get—he left us there and we tryin’ to sneak our way around to try and get outta there. They caught us . . . I was like, “Damn that was fucked up.” We walked home all bloody . . . And he (the cop) didn’t even have to lift a nightstick.” Jay said that this would never show up on his file, but it was one of the worst experiences he had with cops.

He described one other episode that didn’t have the same degree of harassment or physicality, but illustrated the racial nature of profiling minority youth. They were pulled over even though they weren’t doing anything, “just riding” but because of “how the car looked” with six television screens inside and 24-inch rims. When they asked the police officer why they were pulled over, they were told that it was because they were “driving too close to that Honda” in front of them. They weren’t speeding and they weren’t issued any citation for breaking any driving laws and felt that the only reason they were pulled over was because they were Black kids driving a car that looked a particular way in a
particular part of town. He describes the relative frequency and various reasons why he, or his Black friends, would be pulled over and the officer’s assumptions behind them:

It’s different the way they search you in other neighbourhoods—like they’ll just pat your pockets and see if you got something on you. But if you in a neighbourhood like mine they’ll grab all on your privates. Make you take your shoes off. You could be along the highway and they’ll just pull you over just cuz they see you and it’s a known drug area. . . That’s how they look at you. How you dress—sagged pants, or you got Jordans on your feet and the law’s like—I heard the law tell one of my homeboys ‘Y’all crazy. I can tell by the way y’all dressed—like I see Jordans on your feet and you like 16 and I know you’re mom’s prolly a crackhead. How you get that? You gotta sell drugs.’ And my homeboy wasn’t even that type of person. He was a basketball kid but that’s just how they look at you.” When I asked about how often this happened to him, he said it could happen on a daily basis, adding, “the only time when it don’t is when I stay at home.

After speaking in generalities, Fisher recounted one instance when they were pulled over because they thought his friend was a White boy being kidnapped by Blacks:

I got a friend they call him Whiteboy—he’s Black but he’s got bright, bright skin and we was in the truck one time and we all got pulled over. He pulled Whiteboy out the car—that’s his nickname but his real name’s Devon—he pulled him out the car and he asked him, ‘Are you in danger? They tryin’ to do you somethin’?’ And he was like, ‘No, that’s my friends.’ I’m listenin’ to ‘em and when he got back to the truck—see me, I like to talk smart because once I feel something, I’m a go with it and if I feel somethin’ wrong that’s just how I feel. And that’s just how I felt. So I start talkin’ smart to the man or whatever and he caught a attitude and he wrote me a ticket for something stupid. Just like that. And he let my homeboy go. But he didn’t search him but he searched everyone else in the truck.

Fisher, here, makes the same point described above by Jay, Scott, and Ellison; there is a certain protocol of subordinate deference established between these kids and cops when they are stopped or pulled over. These youth are expected to respond in a certain way, without question, to the officers and any violation of that unspoken propriety could result in trouble for the youth; here, Fisher was issued a ticket that he still doesn’t feel he deserved.
When I asked him if he ever felt like he had any ability to speak against the cop or exercise any agency on his part, he had no answer from personal experience. Instead, he once again reached for fictional cinematic representations, a peaceful nonviolent part of *Lean on Me* and a more violent community response from *Cornbread, Earl and Me*. In *Lean on Me*, as Morgan Freeman’s character sits in a jail cell for doing what he believed was right for his students, the students, parents, and teachers from the school, in a show of solidarity, stand outside city hall and chant “Free Mr. Clark! Free Mr. Clark!” While we watched the film, previously, Fisher commented that the people protesting had no idea how much power they actually had and, if they chose to, they could “take them cops if they wanted to.” Instead of the peaceful scene that played out, there could have been a brutal physicality to the communal reprisal as there was following the shooting death of Cornbread because the “whole neighbourhood beat up the cop who did it.”

He responded affirmatively when I asked if the cop deserved such retribution, but it wasn’t solely because he was wrong for shooting Cornbread by mistake; he continued to reconceptualize the entire scene as if it was not a mistaken identity and the cop had shot the man he thought he was firing at. He simply said, “An officer’s not really supposed to shoot you in the back” declaring that even though the man did commit a crime, he wasn’t “much of a danger” and that such lethal force should be used only in those cases where there was a potential for greater human harm. Nemo also mentioned this movie and talked about the violent beating the cop had received and while he didn’t go as far as Fisher to say the cop deserved it, he does believe that cops “harass people too often . . . for no reason.” What Katie witnessed, though, was the most violent and resembled closest the scene in *Cornbread, Earl, and Me*. She related a story that took
place when she was in seventh grade and witnessed a man shot in his back, near her school. She wasn’t sure of all the details surrounding the shooting, but recalled:

This dude was just walkin’ down the street mindin’ his own business. He kinda crazy. He had just got out of prison and the cop was like, ‘Freeze!’ but he couldn’t hear. So he just kept on walkin’, you know, mindin’ his business and she shot him. He ended up dyin.’

The school was immediately put on lockdown and the reaction of the students was of shock and anger; Katie said that the “whole school was mad—like we was pissed.” When I asked why, she offered, “He was Black. And the cop that shot him was White. So we felt like—hey, she only shot that man because he was Black.” Because she could recall no other details and I had no luck getting any details from local news sources, I’m not sure of any circumstances surrounding the shooting. The event, nevertheless, was significant because it validated their perceptions, however accurately, about White cops abusing their powers and, in this case, shooting a man just because he was Black. As students, though, they had no recourse in showing a collective response as the communities did in either Lean on Me or Cornbread, Earl, and Me.

Jay did mention, however, that if enough people did complain about an officer, then there could be repercussions for him. He mentioned one instance in which he was emboldened to provocatively gesture toward one particular cop, who has a history of harassing Jay:

So I saw him next week [after one harassment incident] and I grabbed my nuts and I’m like ‘Yeah—I’m still right here.’ He told me nothing. He did like this (points at me) and kept on goin’, just pointing his finger at me and kept on going. But it was a lot of people outside see he ain’t really gonna stop and do nothing because people gonna make complaints about him—he could lose his job.
His final point was notable because it was the only reference, from among any discussions across all participants, to any recourse these kids have to counter abusive or harassing police officers or hold them accountable.

Returning to Fisher and his fictional, cinematic allusions to explain his point, he personalized the Cornbread scenario for himself saying, “I ran from plenty cops and got away but I woulda felt like, what if they woulda shot me in my back while I was turned around? I mean, I did harm but I wasn’t tryin’ to kill you.” But this was as far as he could include himself in an answer to the question of any personal agency or recourse he had when he felt wronged by a cop. This reflected a general impression and some specific statements that I had from the youths, that there wasn’t much, if anything, they could do because they were kids and the law (meaning officers) was the law. They had come to accept this harassment as a part of their lives even when they didn’t agree with it.

The one item that he singled out as helpful when faced with a cop was that it helps to know one’s rights. The cops will “hack you up, search you, violate your rights” but if you know your rights, you can protect yourself sometimes, because cops “gotta have proper cause” even though sometimes that doesn’t help and the officers may say, as one said to Fisher once, “Mother fucker, I ain’t gotta have no proper cause.”

In an interview, Dead Prez stated that knowledge of rights, especially for those Blacks at risk of profiling and harassment, is an absolutely vital asset: “Coming out into these U.S. streets, prison streets, prison states without knowing your rights is like a soldier without a weapon. You almost have no defense for the bullshit” (Asante, Jr., 2009, p. 165). Like Jay, though, this knowledge doesn’t always lead to an end to a
harassing episode as Dead Prez found out one day when they asked cops why they were being arrested, despite not having done anything wrong:

“I think that not knowing what to do, because we knew our rights and we insisted to know why, we never backed down on why. We never said no, but we insisted on why . . . They started to try to handcuff each and every one of us . . . They began to try to move forward, handcuff us, harass us. Some of us were handcuffed . . . At that, they began to show excessive force, at that point we began to show more force. And that’s when, to me, the brutalization began. (Asante, Jr., 2008, p. 157)

The cops, faced with having no answers and a crowd of onlookers wondering what was going to happen, with an authoritative figure chose force rather than allow for any doubt to penetrate that authority. Just as the cop in Cornbread, Earl, and Me pulls the trigger, the officers elected to “brutalize” Dead Prez and the others. These examples underscore the nature and frequency of these abuses, harassing to violent, that my participants referenced.

Such frequency contributes to what Wacquant describes in the transition between the penal system and associated policing/surveillance procedures to the “life-world—and from the plane of sociological possibility to that of every day reality” (2009, p. 207). Such harassing practices had become every day reality for Jay and Fisher. Wacquant continues, writing that such experiences become “actualized in the personal experience and collective trajectory of the unskilled African American males trapped at the bottom of the class and caste order, for whom incarceration, like chronic joblessness and poverty, becomes a banal event” (2009, p. 207). In the introduction, I addressed the importance of discussing the mundane and banal aspects of these kids’ loves while avoiding a focus on
the sensationalized. These narrative excerpts of harassment and abuse are certainly sensational but, as Wacquant points out, they have also become banal and the two adjectives aren’t to be considered as mutually exclusive when discussing the lives of these kids.

Such interactions might not have been as frequent for the other participants, but they hadn’t arrived in custody without similar experiences. Bambam’s harassing experiences took place primarily at school or when his family or neighbours called the police. The amount that his neighbourhood was patrolled was never addressed specifically, but he never mentioned cops knocking down doors or patrolling his trailer park and harassing those living there, even though he described the existence of drugs, presence of trafficking, and violence in such a way that it resembled the housing projects and low rent apartments. Thus, his harassment by law enforcement took place primarily, as he discussed it, within the context of school.

Two of the remaining three participants, Katie and Nemo, also experienced the harassing abuses by law enforcement. Meanwhile, Rider only offered a single, short reference about being pulled over in his hometown. He didn’t say whether or not he felt it was racial, but he did feel that he was pulled over for no reason. The cops claimed to have pulled them over for not wearing their seatbelts and Rider did not mention that they were wearing their seatbelts, but said that they had given him a hard time for not having a license or ID because they didn’t believe that he was as young as he claimed. Aside from this single encounter, though, Rider didn’t feel harassed by cops and had never been pulled over.
Katie, however, said that she had been “stopped and asked questions” on several occasions, singling out one episode where she was stopped by police officers who thought she was someone they were looking for, because she fit the description. She informed them, flatly, “I’m not her” but that wasn’t the end of it; they asked her for her social security number and other information. She didn’t care to hand them over and wasn’t pleased that the cops stopped a group of her and her friends to question her as to whether or not she was actually someone who had a warrant out for her arrest. Another episode, which resulted in her being Tased, is discussed in greater detail in an upcoming section in this chapter in which I relate the experiences these youths have had with the electronic stun gun.

When I asked Nemo if he’d ever felt that he’d been harassed when he shouldn’t have been, he answered “once.” He was walking to his aunt’s house in a housing project and he said that the cops stopped him “for no reason.” They patted him down, searched him and found nothing. Since he had only been walking down the street, listening to his iPod with headphones in his ears, he asked the cops why they stopped him. Once again, Nemo said it was a case of alleged mistaken identity:

They told me that I was on the corner down there, selling drugs or something and when they pulled me over, after they searched me and found nothing on me, they said I was another person. They thought that I was another person that they was lookin’ for and they let me go. But I still felt like I was harassed for no reason because they pulled me over from the back—I had a hood on, it was cold and I had a hood on. How could you see my face if you pullin’ me over from the back?

While I can only guess at the sincerity of the cop’s claims and intentions, Nemo’s story does, however, point to the issue of purview granted cops patrolling these areas as a result of drug laws and the latitude granted for harassing people, including youth, on
questionable (and conveniently ambiguous) charges of suspicion (Simon, 2007; Wacquant, 2009).

As we continued our discussion, I asked Nemo about his criminal history and he said he really didn’t have one, certainly nothing that would cause him to be locked up. He said he had been in trouble with cops for “simple stuff.” I asked him to elaborate on what he meant by “simple stuff” and he said, “Just out too late or you know just walkin’ around the mall . . . or smoke me a cigarette and they thought I was smoking some weed.” And then harassing episodes began to tally more than just the “once” he initially answered. He had been stopped for smoking weed but had been smoking a cigarette (which also happens to be illegal for youth under the age of 18 in Louisiana according to the “Prevention of Youth Access to Tobacco Law”). He had also been in violation of curfew laws, another set of legislative practises that Wacquant (2009) believes contribute to the frequency with which kids are stopped by cops, arrested, and prosecuted. On both of these and across such instances, Nemo acknowledged that he was violating the law but the nature of the laws, themselves, beg the question as to whether or not they justifiably are grounds for such harassment in the first place.

The third example piqued my curiosity more than the other two: walking the mall. Nemo explained to me that there cannot be more than a group of five people together in the mall or the group is violating laws for unlawful assembly, or so they’ve been told by the mall security guards and later police, if they’ve been called to the scene. I told him that in all the times I’d been to the mall, I’ve seen groups of more than five regularly; I’d been in groups of five or more myself. He wasn’t sure if it was mall policy or the law, but the cops threatened them with arrest over it and he didn’t quibble over the law and
risk getting in trouble. Some security guards were more apt to stop them and threaten them with the police, while others will let them go. But on more than one occasion, he had been stopped by security guards and, on more than one occasion, it had resulted in police being called to the scene to break up these groups of more than five. These mall-based assembly episodes reminded me of what Hebert (2007) described happened to a group of friends on the way to a wake for a slain, teenaged friend. They found themselves surrounded by cops and searched “but nothing unlawful was found—no weapons, no marijuana or other drugs.” Since they confiscated nothing, the officers still arrested the grievers and were told that they were being loaded into paddy wagons because they had “assembled unlawfully.”

Hebert found, in researching his story, that New York City cops had searched people more than a half million times in 2008. He added that these searches were not “happening on Park Avenue or Fifth Avenue in Manhattan. Thousands upon thousands of them amount to simple harassment of young Black and Hispanic males and females who have done absolutely nothing wrong, but feel helpless to object.” (Hebert, 2007) These New York youths were not the only ones; the participant youth in my study, on a different coast, fifteen hundred miles away experienced harassment and felt the same helplessness.

**Tasing**

Of my 6 participants, three (Jay, Katie, and Fisher) had electroshock weapons fired at them and a fourth, Bambam, was threatened with one (when he was on the secure floor of the hospital). Neither Nemo nor Rider mentioned the Taser in any of our discussions. As the technological trappings of secure custody begin to appear in schools
and hospitals, two areas of increased academic attention in education and health care (e.g. Fine, 2009; Fox, 2010), so does the presence of the Taser gun and the potential for its use on youth.

In the previous section, Jay shared the story and conflict over the Obama/Martin Luther King, Jr. shirt that led to his being tased. He had been warned about and threatened with the Taser previously but had only been tased by the weapon once. When asked what it felt like, he asked me if I had ever had a “Charlie horse” (a colloquial term referring to a muscle cramp or spasm, usually afflicting the leg) and when I nodded, he went on to describe the impact and sensation:

It’s like your whole body catch a Charlie horse. That’s why people holler like that, because your whole body catch a strong Charlie horse. It’s not really a shock. You feel a shock when you first get it and yeah, [your muscles] tighten up.

He didn’t describe any pain associated with it but there’s a great deal of incapacitating discomfort and he did say that the weapon is effective at getting someone to the ground.

Fisher’s reference to the Taser arose from a discussion around his being shot with what he called a “mace ball gun” but is more accurately described as a “pepper ball gun” which is described as another non-lethal means of subduing a suspect. In a scene reminiscent of Nemo’s demand for assembly compliance at a mall, albeit on a larger scale, this weapon was used in Cincinnati to force a crowd of 400 teenagers, who had gathered for a private Sweet 16 party at a local mall, to disperse (WLWT, 2009). The weapon is also advertised for use in prison situations; one large manufacturer, PepperBall Technologies, highlighted the weapon’s use in mock riots (www.mockriot.org) which is a four-day “comprehensive law enforcement and corrections tactical and technology experience” that would be at home in Baudrillard’s treatise on simulacra (1988). Fisher
described a crowd fight that had broken out and when police showed up on the scene, the crowd began to break up quickly and everyone started running. As he ran from the scene, the cops grabbed their “ball guns” and he was shot in the back of his leg. He wasn’t clear as to whether this was one of the “mace” balls or a rubber bullet of some kind, but he did brush it off as “not really a big deal to me.”

I asked if that was the only time he had been fired at or been hit by any sort of law enforcement weapon and he shook his head, stating that he had “almost” been Tased. Once again, he was running from the law (he didn’t give a reason in this instance as to why other than to say it was following a fight after a dance) and the cop fired his Taser at Fisher, but missed. “I hopped over a fence and it hit the fence,” he said before adding that instead of hitting him it “clenched on the fence.”

In Katie’s case, the probes found their way into Katie’s skin but she, like Fisher, escaped actually being Tased. When I asked her, as I did Jay, what it felt like she answered, “I don’t know. I didn’t feel it.” The following is our exchange as she explained to me why she didn’t feel it:

Katie: Because you can pull it out before.
Jonathan: “So when they shoot the things and it puts two little things on you—“
Katie: “Fish hooks.”
Jonathan: “You ripped them out?”
Katie: “Yeah.”
Jonathan: “Did that hurt?”
Katie: “Not really. Felt like a bite.”
Jonathan: “So what happened after that?”
Katie: “I kept on runnin’.”
Jonathan: “You run from the cops a lot?”
Katie: “Nah—it was just some stuff I ain’t have nothin’ to do with and I wasn’t about to go to jail for it.”

Once more, Katie was in the crosshairs of a police officer despite her innocence (first she spoke about the case of mistaken identity and here a vague reference to something that
she had nothing to do with). We didn’t discuss any further details, so I am not sure of the
type of gun or the plausibility of her story, her position relative to the cop, or where the
probes had stuck in her so that she could pull them out so quickly but regardless, she had
never experienced the shock of tasing. Nor had Bambam, even though he had been
threatened with one on several occasions when he was under the care of doctors on the
secure floor for admitted patients with mental disorders and under the supervision of city
police officers. He described one such instance saying:

[The hospital staff member] brought me back and put me back in my room. He
had two of the security guards come stand at my door, then they brought another
dude in that was goin’ up to the 4th floor; they brought him in the same room but
divided by a piece of cloth. He was cutting himself or what have you—and the
two cops stood at the door and the security guards left. It’s City PD—they stood
there with Tasers and neither one of us could walk out. I’d go to walk out, they’d
pull that Taser [Bambam laughs]. He’d go to walk out, they’d pull the Taser and
tell him, “go back” [Bambam laughs again], so we couldn’t go.

Bambam’s recurring status as a hospital admit in this mental ward was something
he referred to several times, but I couldn’t comment with much depth as I am not a
diagnostician nor clinically trained. It does, however, reinforce my beliefs that there are
kids on the margins for whom psychological and emotional help is needed who do not
receive consistent, regular care. And his laughter underscored the futility he felt in this
situation and he said he had no desire to disobey orders and be Tased, though he had
attempted to resist restraints and medications on some occasions. The Taser, however,
was a different threat and one he didn’t entertain the thought of experiencing.

**Attitudes toward Cops**

The cumulative effects of a patrolling presence and police harassment were
evident when the participants talked about their attitudes toward law enforcement
officers. None of them regarded police officers with a default respect and none of them
complemented officers collectively; the farthest any of them went in speaking well of the cops was a sort of a vague disclaimer that there are some good cops out there, an assessment customarily followed by a qualifying “but” before they finished their point. For these youth, their confidence in law enforcement officials had almost entirely eroded and their experiences had shaken their “confidence in law enforcement” which is “essential to maintaining a free and ordered society,” (The Washington Times, 2011) a point made in an article covering the rising doubt and declining faith in law enforcement procedures stemming from the shooting death of Jose Guerena, a former Marine who was fired at over sixty times and whose home was invaded, military-style by a SWAT team, for marijuana possession (after he was killed and a search conducted, none was found). The only participant who didn’t advance an opinion on cops was Rider while all others disclosed their doubt in cops and their ability to deliver on their responsibilities.

Nemo’s feelings about cops followed the discussion of the film Cornbread, Earl, and Me as he reflected on the poor judgment of the officer who mistakenly shot and killed Cornbread. I asked Nemo if the events portrayed in the movie had any relevance to his own feelings about cops:

Jonathan: “What’d you think about the way they showed the cops?”
Nemo: “I think it’s the way that they be or do—I think that they done him dirty. I don’t think that he was s’posed to get done like that.”
Jonathan: “You think that’s something that happens often?”
Nemo: “I wouldn’t say often, but the police are – they harass people often. You know, for no reason.”
Jonathan: “So do you think that part of the movie, them doing that [harassment] is kinda real?”
Nemo: “Yea . . . I think them pullin’ him over is real, ya know?”

Nemo’s responses here link his dissatisfaction with the cops to the unnecessary and/or unjustified harassment, such as that which he experienced firsthand, pulled over because
the police thought he was someone selling drugs on the corner. Shooting deaths might not be frequent but the harassment is, especially when it’s a White cop and a Black civilian. He went on, elsewhere in the interview, to say that while some cops do their job, too many of them are “crooked” and can’t be trusted to fairly handle and process evidence. “Just crooked cops” he said, finishing, “You can’t trust none of ‘em because you don’t know which ones crooked and which ones doin’ their job.” It’s an unfortunate and damaging conclusion for both Nemo and for the police officers who happen not to be crooked; there’s so much suspicion and doubt and such a lack of faith in these officers among my participants, even for Nemo, whose record isn’t nearly as long nor is his file as thick as the others in this study.

Katie and Jay spoke specifically about the racial aspect of harassment and how it colours their opinions on law enforcement officials. Jay said that he doesn’t “knock people” based on their skin colour and that he had nothing against White people because some White people “show him love.” Cops, on the other hand, were more willing to profile and harass based on skin colour. He explained:

Some of ‘em, man, they just like—they don’t care, ya feel me? Like really if you go to say Riverside or Harrison there’s not a Black person in town, majority is White people. So they see you somewhere they gonna stop and harass you. They see you so they gonna stop and harass you just like if they see a White person in a Black person neighbourhood, they gonna stop ‘cause you’re you . . . Yeah, that’s what it is, man. That’s what it is. You a Black person in this White neighbourhood? Oh, he want—he must wanna rob something.

As a result, Jay didn’t believe that cops had been fair with him and were relatively incapable of being fair or indiscriminate because his personal history and that which he’d witnessed around him confirm otherwise. It was similar for Katie who dismissively believed that “Cops ain’t worth all of this, ain’t worth all of that.” She recognized the
respect and esteem that are afforded cops by others, generally, but had seen no reason, personally, to do the same. Being Black, this problem is worse because the cops are racist “honkies.” When I asked her if that comment meant that most of the cops were merely “White” she responded, initiating and punctuating her comment with laughter: “Those that arrest me? Yeah.” Once again, as with Bambam, her laughter underscored the frustrating futility of dealing with these “honky” cops because she was Black. The racial complexion to harassment is well established in the literature and Katie’s case was a discouraging example.

I was flatly told by Fisher that if I had been a cop, that there would be no way he’d talk to me and would never have agreed to be interviewed, claiming, “I can’t really say I would talk to the police. If it was a police doin’ this interview I wouldn’t talk to him.” When pressed to elaborate, he echoed Katie’s futility with cops’ attitudes and offered, “Because like—how they look at us—already got us set as something, it’s just like them. I got them set as somethin’. I think all police the same.” Fisher didn’t grant cops the same disclaimer or condition that this was the case with some cops; his distrust and assumptions stretched to “all police.” He believed that the police officers had their own assumptions about kids who walk with “sagged pants, or you got J’s [Jordan Nike shoes] on your feet,” then “your mom’s prolly a crackhead,” and “you sell drugs.” That’s “just how they look at you.” Thus, in return, Fisher didn’t feel obligated to extend to law enforcement officers any modicum of trust or grant any of them the benefit of the doubt.

Bambam stopped short of assuming that all cops were as bad or discriminating and harassing as those who patrolled his school campus, giving him a hard time. But he certainly had no general affinity for the police and mentioned a hypocrisy that none of the
other participants cited. He believed, as Nemo did, that “some cops are good people but some are crooked” before reflecting on his comment and clarifying that he actually thought “Most of ‘em, I would say, are crooked.” For him, crooked also implied a criminal hypocrisy; they were in charge of protecting the law and enforcing the law but were also known to skirt the law themselves. When I asked for examples, he replied, “They’ll just false arrest. They’ll trespass on your property without permission—I mean without warrants. They try arrestin’ people. They just stop you for anything. And I mean, I don’t really care for it.”

These kids, from first offender to recidivist, were all suspicious of cops, their motivations, their assumptions, their practices. This lack of faith in authority contributed to a reticence to speak to or trust the security staff at the facility, resulting in an importance placed in those staff members who were conversant and most unlike cops (discussed in the following chapter). The more I spoke with them, the more talkative and conversant they became. They increasingly discussed their frustration with people who assumed much about them and didn’t listen to them, as well as their appreciation and willingness to speak to authority figures and adults who did listen to them. This dynamic has implications for the next chapter on the subordination experienced within the facility with some of the staff members and the importance assigned to communication and trust by these youths whenever they interacted with an adult at the facility. It was clear when it came to cops, however, that the breach was a considerable one and discussions with these youths left little room for optimism regarding their feelings about cops, perpetuating the justifiable schism between the people in their neighbourhoods and the cops entrusted with protecting and patrolling them.
Charges Levied

The law enforcement encounters involved the youths’ arrests and charges, and our discussions about cops inevitably led to the crimes they were charged with. Each of the youths had thoughts about how the system had processed them and adjudicated their cases. On more than one occasion, to be discussed later in this chapter and the next, the youths admitted that they had done wrong and deserved the time that they were serving. This was not, however, a concession that they felt they were treated fairly. Most felt that they had been dealt with too harshly on some occasions and for minor offenses, a social reflection of a trend that’s existed since the 90s, specifically with the passage of the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994 which has resulted in the disproportionate forcing of “the imprisonment of youth and people of colour, often for minor crimes or infringements of drug law” (Giroux, 2006, p. 157).

There was one charge that kept coming up, over and over again, for four of my participants (Fisher, Jay, Katie, and Bambam): probation violation. The phrase occurred 22 times in my field notes and interview transcriptions. And each of the participants felt that their violations were minor and didn’t need to (or perhaps shouldn’t) result in being locked up. Jay had been locked up the most for violating his probation, a total of five times. When I asked him about that frequency, he let slip a “tsk” before describing the frustration of being bounced in and out of the facility. He agreed that breaking probation necessitates some sort of punishment (he even turned himself in to his parole officer once for violating his probation), but didn’t think that what he’d experienced in terms of sentencing and incarceration was commensurate with what he’d done. We discussed his perception and opinion of fairness:
Jonathan: “Do you think that everybody that comes in here for violating probation belongs in here? Like do you think that the sentence that people get is fair for what they did?”
Jay: “For probation violation?”
Jonathan: “Yeah . . .”
Jay: “Um some—some like that, ya feel me? But you don’t s’posed to lock a kid up, if he fail one drug test you not ‘posed to lock a kid up, man. Cuz you—this what you doin’: If you fail a drug test, he started—he smoking, he fail a drug test, he come in here.”
Jonathan: “How long’s he come in here for?”
Jay: “15 days.”
Jonathan: “That’s standard?”
Jay: “Yeah.”
Jonathan: “You busted—you fail a piss test.”
Jay: “15 days. (pause) So you ain’t givin’ him no time—you ain’t givin’ a kid no time in the world to get it—and when he in here he away from the drugs anyway. You ain’t givin’ him no chance to go in the world and just be like “man—I don’t wanna be.”

Jay’s difficulty with being locked up for a minimum 15 days for probation violation also highlighted his identification of lack of any rehabilitative component; the process is simple and straightforward. A juvenile is on probation and fails a “piss test” then he/she is locked up for 15 days, no questions asked. Bambam likewise felt that the penalty was too stiff saying, “I understand that it’s part of the probation and it is a violation but I don’t think you should get locked up 15 days in here for a failed drug test.” Since he admitted that violating his probation was wrong and in need of some sort of sentencing or punishment, I asked what alternative he might offer instead. He suggested, “Maybe give you community service—8 hrs, 24 hours whatever . . . They could maybe do a weekend lockup. I mean, but not a 15 day lockup.” He added that “quite a few” kids are locked up for failed drug tests that he’d seen, that “they do come in pretty regular.” Aside from being locked up for these 15 days, what is done? For these kids, very little it seems and it’s a gap that more than one of them noticed and expressed concern over, as discussed later in this section. Of Fisher’s 11 stints in the facility, the four most recent (he didn’t
disclose if any of the previous seven were for probation violations) had been for
probation violation and, like Jay, some had been the result from a failed drug tests.

Drug test failures, however, were not the only ways in which these youths had
violated their probation. Fisher also said that he’d been locked up for violating his
probation by not attending school. Katie faced secure custody when she violated her
probation by running away. As we discussed her running away and her perceived lack of
fairness in the system, the lack of any attention to her reasons, experience, or voice
bubbled to the surface. She became more visibly upset and her frustration was more
evident than most other times during our interviews. She was disgusted with the fact that
nobody bothered asking her why she had run because “they don’t care why you run away,
it’s just the simple fact that you ran away and you a minor.” I asked her what she’d like
to see changed or been done differently in her case and, without hesitation, she said, “I
think they should like ask why you ran away. Get into details and see why cuz it’s not
just people – people don’t just run away cuz the sky blue. It’s always a reason behind a
person’s actions.” In Katie’s case, she ran away from her mother after being beaten with
a plunger. She also ran away because she “was molested from 12 to 13 by a man that I
called my daddy.” But at no point did Katie feel that the catalytic contexts preceding her
running were ever a point of interest and she once again stressed how important she
thinks it is to ask. These runaway charges, not failed drug tests, constituted most of her
probation violations but she likewise felt that minimum sentencing for running away was
too harsh. She admitted wrongdoing and didn’t suggest that kids shouldn’t do their time
when they are found guilty, but that it’s not fair to be given 15 or 30 days behind bars for
that reason.
Katie also mentioned that she had been picked up for being out past curfew, reinforcing the point that Simon (2007) makes about current curfew laws and how they empower law enforcement officers to stop, harass, and question minors, particularly minority youth, with greater frequency. Neither running away nor curfew violations were cause enough, she felt, to lock someone up. What did she think was? “Cutting people... Stabbing people... Almost killing people.” These were the reasons for locking up a youth offender. On this point, other participants agreed. Fisher used the phrase “simple stuff” to refer to those acts for which juveniles ought not be locked up. The example he provided was fighting in school: “I’ve seen Black and White kids just in and outta here for school fights and disturbing the peace charges and stuff like that. That’s kinda crazy to me—why would you even lock a kid up for that?” These kids fight in school and should be dealt with, just not locked up. To Katie’s list of cutting, stabbing, and almost killing Fisher added “robbin’ people with guns.” There is a risk he added, too: kids who enter into the system on more minor charges sometimes end up committing worse crimes the more they are bounced in and out of the facility and exposed to a harsher criminal culture that exists in the detention center. In the following chapter, examining the prison itself, I explore this dynamic and the kids’ feelings toward it in more depth. It was not a sentiment that only Fisher held. When I asked Jay the same questions about criminality that deserved incarceration, he started talking about rapists and said that he was surprised at the number of juveniles that he’d met who were arrested on sexual assault charges. Those kids, he felt, didn’t belong in there with him (or vice versa) but perhaps could go to a larger, more secure facility. In any event, he didn’t think it was right that he was occupying the same punitive space as someone who was locked up for much more
serious charges. People for probation violation didn’t belong locked up and when I asked who did, he said, “robbers, child molesters and rapists.”

Thus, according to these kids, failed drug tests for weed, curfew violations, truancy, and running away were not charges they felt were worthy of locking a kid up. Instead, they set forth their own list of violators/violations: those who cut people; those who stab people; those who almost kill people; rapists; child molesters; and armed robbers. Each of these 4 participants felt that they had done wrong and deserved to be punished, but disagreed that their crimes were considered with much more violent offenses. Instead, relatively minor offenses, such as Giroux (2006) referred to, have led to a cycle of incarceration for many of these kids that is more recidivist than they felt they deserved. Unfortunately, as Katie pointed out, there weren’t people in the system who listened to them, so their proposed list of imprisonable offenses received no attention. There are, however, singular examples of change where kids are being listened to who become more involved in the law enforcement and diagnostic process. Diane Conrad, for example, at the University of Alberta, has convened a group of youths who have been in trouble to work with Edmonton police, educational psychology students, and Native Counselling Services as part of an initiative to provide more youth feedback in a system that often locks that perspective out (Stolte, 2011). For the youth in my study, however, there existed no such opportunity and several of them said that this was the first time when they felt someone took the time to care about what they had to say.

Court Proceedings and Mandated Rehabilitative Support

They also experienced a relative powerlessness following the charges when they found themselves facing a judge in a courtroom. Jay expressed this by stating: “You ain’t
got no choice. You just gotta take it and roll with it. You might be shocked but just gotta take it and roll with it.” Jay was frustrated by the perceived arbitrariness of some judges’ decisions, what Michelle Brown calls “the problematic nature of discretionary justice” (2009, p. 157-158) and Foucault describes when he says, “Today the judge—magistrate or juror—certainly does more than ‘judge.’” (1995, p. 21) The reasons for such arbitrariness varied from allegations of racism to what they perceived as the “judge effect” (Burrow, 1998); Nemo said that a judge can give anywhere from three months to two years, “depending on how the judge feel.” The former phenomenon is documented in the literature while the latter is harder to assess aside from a discussion of the relative power a judge has in the decision and sentencing of a juvenile. The racial disparities, introduced in Chapter 2, are reflected in sentencing trends in recent decades:

Judges detained 18 percent of White juveniles for drug offenses in 1985 and the same percentage, 18 percent, a decade later. In contrast, judges detained 34 percent of all African American juveniles in 1985—nearly twice the proportion of white youth; their rate of detention increased to 56 percent in 1989 and fell to 44 percent in 1994. Police arrest Black youth at much higher rates than they do White juveniles for all crimes of violence, especially homicide. (Williams & Sapp-Grant, 2007, p. 329)

This increase and disparity set the background for an impression of judges made on Jay from his experiences in this system:

Some judges—I ain’t gonna say all of ‘em—but some judges, they just like, ‘Man, I know this White boy gonna do alright. I know this Black kid, he ‘bout to go back to his Black hood and stuff; he ain’t about to do right.’ They think a White person goin’ to the most precious neighbourhood there is. But they wouldn’t be in here if they was right.

When I asked for an example, he mentioned a case of a Black boy and White boy who had been brought in and booked on assault charges for fighting each other. Both were due to get out the same day, but the Black youth was locked up for an additional
two weeks. He explained, though, that it might’ve arisen from a report filed in the facility by the security staff and might not have had as much to do with the judge’s bias; aside from that incident, he could think of no other specific example. He nevertheless felt that he wouldn’t get the same consideration as a White youth and, valid in his particular case or not, his sentiments certainly reflect a larger social, carceral trend.

None of the youth, however, spoke about his/her sentencing and trials more than Bambam did. By the fourth, and final, interview, he was completely exasperated and angry at the process and how he felt his case was handled. His first words in an informal conversation in his cell, before I could even ask a question, were, “Man, I got played at court.” In the time that elapsed between my third and fourth interviews with Bambam, he had gone to court hoping that he might be enrolled in Drug Court which he described as a program for drug offenders:

If you got a drug problem and you’ve been caught with drugs by the police, they piss test you three times a week. You gotta go to court like twice a month. It’s a very intense program but I mean they don’t slack off on you. I mean it’s continually tryin’ to press you to work harder and to strive yourself to do better.

His second, and primary, hope was that he wouldn’t be placed under state probation and custody, but that’s exactly the sentence he got, state custody and probation in a group home for six months. As the sentence was handed down by the judge, Bambam said he wanted to “cuss the judge pretty badly” but knew that it wouldn’t help his case, so he remained silent, feeling “ambushed.” Even the facility administrator, Mr. Carradine, said that he was surprised at the decision because Bambam had generally been a “model inmate.” Bambam had played by the rules and worked hard to stay on track while locked up, with the hopes of it paying off at sentencing. It didn’t and the difference
in Bambam’s demeanor in those last few days I was at KPJDC was significant; he had become much more resigned and somber.

I asked him what this state custody designation meant for him and he said that “the state has more control over you. It’s like they own you.” They could decide to take Bambam from his house and send him to a group home for six months (which was his sentence) or transfer him to another state juvenile custody facility. The most likely destination was a prison much bigger and more dangerous than this one, a fate Bambam (and others in the facility when they mentioned being locked up in this state penitentiary) was desperate to avoid. I asked Bambam what his ideal resolution was then, since being enrolled in Drug Court didn’t happen and he had been “DOC’d” (reference to state Department of Corrections) and he said the best he could hope for was “do my six months, get out.” And after that? He looked at me, shrugged and offered no answer.

He wasn’t the only youth who had experience with Drug Court, but Jay didn’t share Bambam’s optimism for the program after being enrolled in it following a probation violation for a failed drug test for marijuana. Instead, he spoke about the shortcoming of the programs and alluded to the lack of rehabilitation and support available for him and kids like him (a topic discussed further in the next chapter). The frustration was evident as he discussed the futility of the program and his inability to get the support that he felt the program dictated. So I asked Jay what they were supposed to do and, in his case, what they actually did. To the first part of the question, he answered, “When you fail a drug test, they s’posed to counsel you and I wanted it.” Despite claiming he wanted to remain in it, however, Jay was removed for what he called “behavioural issues” even though his drug tests were clean. He noted, “This is supposed
to be *drug* court, not *behaviour* court” and said that he was doing well and staying off drugs. “Y’all helping me out, why don’t y’all keep me in that program,” he asked. They answered with “all kinda excuses” but in the end he was removed from the program and ended up back on drugs, which led to more failed drug tests, which led to more probation violations, which led to more mandated sentencing.

This recidivist cycle is partly propped up by the sentencing procedures of the court system and the lack of rehabilitative support built into the system following sentences, Fisher believed. Some kids feel that there’s little use fighting the system or trying to stay off drugs, because they’ll just get caught again so they think, “Man, fuck it, when I get out I’m just gonna smoke again.” He said that kids who really want to get off drugs and, thus, stay out of prison need “more help” but some of them “get no help at all” and end up “in and out, in and out.” This leads to a carceral reality where Fisher recognized many of the same faces: “It’s very rare that I see someone come in here and I never see ‘em again. Just like I say 9 outta 10 faces that I saw in here I saw more than once, more than twice, more than three times.” Following a presentation/lecture by a local judge one evening, I asked Bambam how often the judges themselves come and speak with them and he said that such visits are “very rare” and there’s not much help at all offered by the judges or mandated by the judges. He did mention one program, a family therapy program with a family counselor, as part of a new program that had recently been implemented to help deal with the family issues that complicated the lives of many of these youths and contribute to their incarceration and repeat offender behaviour. He admitted that the program had helped, but only a little; most meetings
were marred by arguments between him and his mother and brother and not much is accomplished in the wake of that discord.

**Concluding Thoughts**

There wasn’t a single participant in this study who had not experienced some profiling or harassment that they felt was unfair; some experiences were more frequent and subordinating than others. Moreover, there wasn’t a single participant in this study who blamed his/her carceral record on these cops and these judges, and most felt that they had done wrong and deserved some measure of punishment. The sentiments of unjust subordination and self-blame were not mutually exclusive. Just as the Brothers “blame themselves for their mediocrity of their scholastic performance” (Macleod, 2008, p. 102) these youths blamed themselves for some of their imprisonment and recidivism. For these kids, the blame game was not an all or nothing gambit. Even Jay turned himself in once for violating his probation on a charge of running away. He even went so far as to express gratitude for his parole officer’s actions in locking him back up:

> I’m glad [my parole officer] told me to go back and I’m glad they came—I ain’t glad they came picked me up but I’m glad he told me to come back. I feel like it’s fair, though, because they don’t know what I’m a do; they don’t know if I’m a run again, so it’s fair. I feel like they did what they had to do.

And when Katie and I discussed how many kids were locked up, unfairly, she pointed out that she didn’t “feel like a statistic” because she “made some decisions that put me here.” Both Bambam and Fisher acknowledged criminal activity and didn’t disagree that punishment was in order. I think developing this particular issue, though, is important because, as was the case with Macleod’s Brothers, “the implications of this dynamic are important to an understanding of the overall process of social reproduction” (2008, p.102-103). To what extent does the self-blame contribute to their willingness to
be incarcerated or not fight charges and, in turn, to what extent does this contribute to the processes of social reproduction vis a vis criminality?

Generally, I found my participants to be articulate and vocal about the wrongs they perceived had been done against them but lacked the opportunity, agency, or recourse to respond; it certainly wasn’t for lack of words. So I wouldn’t conclude that any assignation of blame to the self results in an apathetic resignation but it does appear to complicate discussions of blame, distrust, impotence, and subordination in their lives when they find themselves facing a cop or judge. The abuses of authority by and mistrust toward cops significantly influenced the attitudes of these youth toward the system of law enforcement. More initiatives like Conrad’s are needed so that the voices of these marginalized and criminalized youth are added to the prevailing discourse of those who legislate and pass judgment. Otherwise, the result is an increasing number of youth subjected to authority, rendered powerless by a growing prison industrial state, and more juveniles finding themselves locked up in secure custody facilities, the site for the next chapter.
Chapter 9: In Prison

I want outta this hold, I'm in a cell
Under attack, lock up folks they in the hood,
Got an eye on every move I make
Open your face to info you ain’t know
Cuz it’s kept low
- “Cell Therapy” by Goodie Mob

This “self-evident” character of the prison, which we find so difficult to abandon, is based first of all on the simple form of “deprivation of liberty.”
- Michel Foucault, Discipline and Punish

Jonathan: “What’s the worst part about being in here?”
Jay: “You lose your freedom.”

The culmination of subordination in the lives of these kids, when I talked with them, was their incarceration. The various aspects of being locked up and the various practices and procedures within the secure custody facility were as varied as those subordinating elements outside KPJDC. This chapter examines their feelings and impressions about the detention center and include both positive and negative, subordination and agency, repression and recourse. We discussed the oppressive nature of their incarceration, even in an institution as relatively progressive as this site is (within a juvenile incarceration context), and most commented on the racial aspect of incarceration, a reflection of the harassment and structural debilitation of their communities (Davis, 2005; Kellner, 2008;) that appeared in earlier chapters. We also discussed the Center’s high school classroom, staff, surveillance, and structure. The youth also expressed frustration at the lack of rehabilitation they felt and acknowledged the potential that incarceration might actually make them “worse.” I was also made privy to some of the modes of resistance that these kids exercised. By highlighting the words and thoughts of my participants, the hope is that their carceral narratives from within and
about such a closed, private (and simultaneously very public, on display), and secure site will “open your face to info you ain’t know” and provide a peek into a hidden transcript that has been, like the subordinating experiences of the marginalized youth, “kept low.”

The voices of these juveniles are conspicuous in their absence in the general dialogue of incarceration and law enforcement. Jonathan Simon talks about the importance of directly referencing the victims of crimes:

> Though victims are the key subject addressed by crime legislation, they are not always or even often directly referenced. Instead, crime legislation has created elements within the state that have come to symbolically stand for victims; two in particular are police officers and prison cells. (2007, p. 76)

While I understand that Simon is speaking more about the victims of crimes than incarcerated youth, I think complicated conversations about crime legislation and enforcement should include these youth, for they are, at times, victims themselves and, despite and including that, offer perspectives on police officers and prison cells, those metonymical signifiers of victim representation. For the “centrality of the prison as a disciplinary, regulatory, and pedagogical model suggests that the carceral apparatuses of the twenty-first century may emerge in a distinctive and perhaps even more ruthless form than its predecessors” (Giroux, 2009, p. 79) and, as such, necessitate the implications for those youth interred (to borrow from Giroux’s concept of disposability) in these institutions. Giroux continues, saying, “As the politics . . . give way to the biopolitics of disposability, the prison becomes a preeminently valued institution whose disciplinary practices become a model for dealing with the increasing number of young people who are considered to be waste products” (Giroux, 2009, p. 82). The more each youth is maligned and subordinated, the more vulnerable to disposability he/she becomes and the general silence or exclusion of his/her carceral perspectives intensify that vulnerability.
Simon agrees on the disposability, claiming that “the prison today is a space of pure custody . . . a kind of social waste management facility, where adults or some juveniles distinctive only for their dangerousness by society are concentrated for purposes of protecting the wider community” (2007, p. 142). The youth have been brought to this facility because of personal poor choices, by their own admission, and elements beyond their control, however fair or unfair those might be. Like Tilley (1998) and Faith (1993) found with their incarcerated female adult participants, these discussions on KPJDC demonstrated that there is no “essential” juvenile prisoner and participant perspectives complicated the depictions of criminal youth discussed earlier in the dissertation.

**Detention Center Classroom**

As explained in Chapter 4, my first experiences at the facilities took place in the high school classroom, as volunteer, participant, and observer. Thus, it was my first peek into the subordination that the students often spoke of in our discussions. Initial impressions of the high school classroom were not as positive as those of the junior high classroom which, in contrast, showed more participation on the youths’ part and more interaction between the student and teacher. The high school classroom, however, evinced a power dynamic that was a decidedly more one-sided affair, much to the juveniles’ chagrin. The hostility that existed between teacher and students appeared on my first day when a chant of “Fire Trent! Fire Trent!” started out relatively quietly but grew louder and students wondered aloud if my presence meant I would become the new teacher. This display resembled the “grumble” that Scott discusses in his work:

> The grumble ought to be considered an instance of broader class of thinly veiled dissent—a form that is particularly useful for subordinate groups. The class of events of which the grumble is an example would presumably include any
communicative act intended to convey an indistinct and deniable sense of ridicule, dissatisfaction, or animosity. (1990, p. 155)

In this instance, the grumble which grew more audible but was silenced before it became too loud was an unmistakable exhibition of their dissatisfaction with his teaching and the animosity that existed between the teacher and some of his students. Discussions over the course of future visits further chronicled, with more detail, the frustration and subordination experienced in the classroom.

The opening conversations, between Mr. Trent and me, were quite cordial and he was initially receptive to having me in the room to help out with the kids. His interactions with the students, by contrast, were often more hostile, from both sides, student and teacher. During my first days, two students were insistent on being pulled aside and allowed to work with me because they didn’t think that they were getting anything from the class-wide instruction. I worked with two Black male students who wanted to work out of a GED workbook; the only value they saw in the site’s classroom was little more than GED preparation. They expressed resentment at being made to do work they felt was too easy or beneath their grade level, saying that they were often doing “seventh grade work” instead of ninth grade content, which put their passing the GED at risk. The GED workbook, then, became a focus for these two youths; if they misbehaved, the workbook was taken from them and, conversely, the workbook was used as incentive for their participation and compliance. As a teacher, this was difficult to watch, for several reasons. The educational goal for these ninth grade students was a graduate equivalency diploma and there was little else presented to these kids as options and, further, the instructional tool was held hostage from these kids. (Though, after looking at it myself, I had little confidence in its educational content and benefit.) Each
of these dynamics removed the youths further from any value they saw or invested in their education. After working through exercises on the Suez Canal and the Civil Rights Movement, I tried to extend the discussion to something beyond the multiple choice exercises in the book. Both students were quite vocal in our discussion about Civil Rights and our conversation covered law, history, and current events and culminated with a writing exercise they both participated in. After seeing these two juveniles cooperating that day, Mr. Trent did not hesitate to have the same (typically disruptive) students work with me when I was in the room.

These two young men, and my participants after them, expressed a “lack of respect” from the teacher and talked about how they’d like to gain some retribution for perceived slights by “beating the shit out of him” or “fucking him up.” Even aside from such violent comments, the atmosphere of the room could become quite tense. Lessons were generally short and required little more than recitation or worksheets and engendered little responsiveness, engagement, or participation on the students’ part. As we watched Life one day, the prison comedy, a montage of racism and violence played as Pink Floyd’s “Another Brick in the Wall” offered its tune as the soundtrack to the visuals. As I sat in this classroom, with these youths, and listened to the lyrics “We don’t need no education” I found them to be discouragingly synchronistic as life reflected art (in this case, Life).

While most of my participants were Lab Kids, they had all spent at least some time in Mr. Trent’s classroom and each offered up opinions of how class was conducted. Nemo, who was closer to being enrolled in school fulltime than any other participant, offered the most sustained opinion which was not surprising since his experiences in a
public school classroom and the site’s classroom were closer together than any of the others. His biggest complaint was that the classroom was “boring:”

Boring! He made me sit down there and do some papers. Like the first couple papers I understood it. I was like, ‘Well, this is school.’ You know, it was schoolwork. But the rest of the papers I done that day, it was just ‘bout my personality and stuff like that when he coulda just asked me about my personality and I coulda just told him. He made me write it down on pieces of paper—they had some questions and you have to pick a number 1 through 5. 1 is like you don’t get along with new people and 5 was like I’m good with new people and stuff like that. Boring. You just get your boring work then he made me do some of the papers twice.

Though Nemo kept referring to the boredom, his comments here underscored some of the concerns I had in my observations (which were certainly limited) and some of the feedback I received from other participants. First was the nature of the seat-based paperwork which Nemo accepted as “schoolwork;” most of the instruction was carried out through worksheets followed by curt question-and-answer periods after the worksheets were finished. The students, generally speaking, didn’t care for the worksheets or, at least, being made to do them so regularly. The boredom was evident through their lack of participation and, in some cases, heads on their desks, occasionally accompanied by snores. Nemo was also put off by the fact that the teacher, on his first day in the classroom, didn’t take the time to get to know anything about him, choosing paperwork as a means of introduction rather than discussion. Most of my participants felt that Mr. Trent was, at best, uninterested in them personally and, at worst, hostile toward them. In either case, the effect on their lack of engagement in the lessons and educational benefit were limited. Nemo was also frustrated by the dismissiveness or lack of awareness with regard to what Nemo had done by asking him to repeat exercises he’d already done. One of the biggest complaints, discussed briefly in Chapter 7, was the
insistence on doing work he wanted them to do with less regard for issuing work that was more appropriate for their grade level or had been sent by the teachers back at their home campuses; the students resented being made to do work that they felt was either not on their level, repetitive, or otherwise useless or irrelevant to them.

Bambam and Katie also referenced the frustration at the disconnect between the work that they were being made to do in the Center compared to the work that they would be doing at their home campuses and believed they should be doing in the Center’s classroom. Bambam described for me how the system works ideally: the teachers at the student’s home campus send assignments and work for them to do while they are locked up and the KPJDC teacher is responsible for administering those assignments, collecting the work, and getting them back to the home campuses or assessing them and turning the grades in. Often, though, no assignments arrive so the students don’t get their work and the site’s teacher is responsible for the lessons. The result is, as Bambam puts it, a classroom in which “everybody does the same thing” leading to a system of education that he describes as “whack” and inferior to the education he’d get if he were on a traditional campus. When I asked Katie if she felt like she was getting an education, her response was immediate and emphatic: “No. Because the stuff that we do, I mean, I already did. I done this.” She further claimed that her teachers would send work only to have Mr. Trent not pass it along to her, instead opting to “give you what he feel you need to do” and that, sometimes, this was work she had done in middle school (5th, 6th, and 7th grades she stated) as opposed to the work going on at their respective campuses. For both Bambam and Katie, the implications troubled them. Not only were they not completing work being assigned or done at their schools, but they were doing work that
was not challenging or commensurate with their grade level. So for each day spent in the Center’s classroom, they felt they got further behind and, as their sentences progressed and their visits repeated, the problems compounded themselves. Once they got back to their home campuses, they felt they were far behind which, in Bambam’s case, contributed to failure and the narrowing of educational options in his future. So he spoke of the GED (discussed further in Chapter 10), just as the first two students I worked with in those first days at the Center. The pervasiveness of the banking concept and resulting hierarchy in Pedagogy of the Oppressed (Friere, 2002) was clear; knowledge was codified by and contained in these workbooks, would be retained through practice and repetition, and finally measured by a standard assessment. The students had bought into it, believing that their education was the sum of taught parts held within GED test prep booklets or contained in the lessons sent from their home campuses; the teacher had bought into it as well, even to the point of withholding education, believing and practicing that it was up to him to bestow education upon them.

The attitudinal aspect was just as frustrating for Bambam and Katie as the pedagogical. Nemo alluded to the perceived disinterest on the part of Mr. Trent and the dismissive approach he took toward the students. Katie upped that ante, referring to his frequent missteps in lessons, and resorting to ridicule (Scott, 1992) to express her displeasure. She declared that the school on site was “worth nothing” primarily owing to the teacher, whom she felt
don’t really care, man. It’s like—he wanna be right about everything but he’s not. Like we proved him wrong like eight times and he still wanna get mad. Don’t get mad cuz you ain’t right [laughs].
I can attest to the veracity of this allegation; there was a math lesson which he was teaching one day and made an error. One student noted the error, raised his hand, and brought the error to Mr. Trent’s attention. And the class laughed, with someone commenting about how this wasn’t the first time they had to correct him. What followed was the teacher berating the students and talking about how none of them were always right and that their presence in prison was a testament to the fact that they screwed up and they were in no position to criticize someone else for being wrong. The ensuing tension was palpable and there was nowhere for the discussion to go after that exchange. So the lesson continued in much the same fashion as so many before, Mr. Trent talking at the students while the youths were increasingly disengaged with the lesson, resentful of the way they were being treated while remaining aware of education they weren’t getting.

**Achievement Ideology Behind Bars**

Another rhetorical characteristic of the classroom was the invocation of and reference to the achievement ideology. One example took place on February 11, Thomas Edison’s birthday. The social studies lesson that day consisted of a short reading passage about his life and a worksheet with a few multiple choice questions based on that passage, an activity incidentally whose grade level appropriateness and difficulty was more appropriate for a junior high classroom rather than a high school classroom. The students were given about ten minutes to complete a couple pages of reading and then another ten minutes to complete the few questions. After the time elapsed and the students were finished, Mr. Trent would read a question aloud and ask a student to give his/her answer to that question. This was repeated until all questions had been answered; incorrect responses were corrected but with little accompanying explanation. At the end
of the lesson, he began with one of his “sermons” (as one student referred to them). He would lecture the students about issues such as “hope” and the significance of hope and how important hope was, for example. On this day, however, he highlighted Thomas Edison’s ingenuity, dedication, work ethic, and desire to help society and pursue the greater good. He mentioned that these students had the same potential that Edison possessed—all they needed to do was work hard and focus their efforts and “they could achieve anything.” The concept, and accompanying sermon, was evidently a common feature of his pedagogy in the classroom.

The classroom, however, wasn’t the only place where the achievement ideology was perpetuated. Across two evenings and three guest speakers, the youths were made an audience for the achievement ideology, as Macleod puts it,

The reigning social perspective that sees American society as open and fair and full of opportunity. In this view, success is based on merit, and economic inequality is due to differences in ambition and ability. Individuals do not inherit their social status; they attain it on their own. (2008, p. 1)

As Ain’t No Makin It progresses, however, the underlying assumptions of this ideology are challenged and the simplistic notions complicated. On these evenings, however, there was little offered that extended beyond the rhetoric and its flat application to these kids and their lives. It wasn’t until the guest speakers attempted personal connections and listened to each of the juveniles that these sessions were assigned much significance by the youths.

The first speaker was a social worker who had worked with marginalized youth who’d had run-ins with the law. She addressed the complexities of the ideology with greater detail and fewer absolutes than the other two guest speakers (a judge and a lawyer) did. She began with an activity in which a spool of yarn was passed around from
one youth to another, as they sat in a circle, and once each youth had some yarn in his/her hand, she asked one or another to pull. As one pulled, the rest felt the tug on the string in their hands; this illustrated the reach of each choice that the kids made, emphasizing that it didn’t impact only them, but that each decision made could have implications for people around them as well as for their future. Likewise, the decisions of others could affect their lives, even though it was beyond their direct control. She followed this up with a passage from Tupac’s poem, *A Rose that Grew through Concrete*, in order to convey to them, in the words of a hip hop figure most of them knew and respected, the possibilities of growing into something despite very humble beginnings, while also recognizing the relative difficulty around making the right choices and resisting environmental temptations. After the session was over, she made an effort to speak with each one of the juveniles in attendance, to learn more about them and their cases. This was as responsive as the youths were the entire evening, a lived example of the recurring sentiment that these kids wanted someone to talk to and with them, individually. The facilitator for the evening mentioned that it was Black History Month and they reflected on the inauguration of President Barack Obama as the first Black President and what this meant. One student said that this demonstrated that racism was coming to an end; the facilitator agreed and used Obama’s rise to President as further proof that, like Thomas Edison, the meritocratic ideals of the achievement ideology are, in fact, in operation. And that if someone like Obama could become President, then they could do anything they set their mind to.

These sentiments were reinforced later at another evening of guest speakers, this time a local appellate judge and an attorney. The judge spoke first and talked about his
own upbringing in the city, in the “hood” in an area familiar to many of these kids. He spoke about growing up, determined to make something of himself and went on to graduate from university and law school. He then spoke about how following rules and working hard led to his current job and status. The word “rules” appeared several times in the course of his discussion. He said they needed to follow the rules so that cops wouldn’t arrest them. And if they did get arrested, they needed to follow the rules so that they could get out of detention. Once out, they just needed to follow the rules and they wouldn’t end up back behind bars. It was that simple and straightforward. He closed this section of his talk with an emphasis on the law and how their responsibility is to abide by the law and that laws and law enforcement existed to protect them and that the person who can “hurt you most is you;” more than a single pair of eyes rolled.

Before finishing, he reiterated the achievement ideology, stating that he was proof that these incarcerated kids could do anything they put their minds to if they followed the rules and worked hard. He solicited questions but none came. What followed was the most awkward part of the night: after the extended silence that met his request for questions, he decided to ask himself a question and answer it for them. He said, “Wanna know how much a judge makes? How much money I make? That’s usually the first question I get.” He told them that he doesn’t mind telling them how much he makes, since he works for the public and his salary is public knowledge before announcing, “I make $120,000 per year.” The youths were apparently nonplussed and said nothing in response. It was the only question (not) asked and the only one answered before the next guest speaker took her place before the juveniles.
The second guest speaker had a very successful career in private practice, but gave it up for a more forgiving lifestyle in public office so that she could dedicate more time to her family. She talked about growing up in a single-parent home, with her mother raising her. She engaged with the juveniles more and they appeared to be more attentive, as the lawyer worked to make her narrative closer to their experience and her presentation came off as more sincere and authentic and her demeanor was more personable. The youths were more attentive and responsive, as a result.

Again, as with the first evening, the most engaging part of the presentations took place after the lectures as both the judge and lawyer took the time to speak with the youths. Both of them were conversant with the juveniles and fielded questions until there were none left. Most of the discussion that I overheard was about individual cases as they asked questions and sought advice; the judge answered questions and gave advice. Once more, it was apparent that the most constructive part of the evening took place during this time in which the speakers and youths were more engaging, again returning me to the importance that I’ve come to assign to the narratives of these kids and how willing they are to offer their own experiences and how much value they place in those who listen, including (particularly) staff members, discussed in an upcoming section of this chapter.

**Relative Progressivity**

In this section, I develop in more detail the progressive nature of KPJDC mentioned briefly in Chapter 3, particularly relative to other state facilities and their reputations. The evenings described above, with the guest speakers, were part of the New Leash on Life program at the facility, a program which rescues animals and turns
them over to the facility and youth to train and rehabilitate so that they can then be adopted. The guest speakers spoke as dogs wandered amongst them, for them to pet and play with. The juveniles referred to this program (Bambam most often since he worked with the dogs more than any of the others) and photographed the dogs during our photographic session. The administration and New Leash on Life volunteers point to this program as an exemplar of the relative progressivity of KPJDC and how they have been entertaining policy changes in an attempt to change the carceral course of these kids and history of the facility. This section of the chapter offers a discussion of some of the more progressive aspects of the facility and specific opportunities or aspects of KPJDC where the youths identified relief from other, more subordinating aspects of detention.

The New Leash on Life is one variation of “prison-based animal programs” which have been on the rise in detention facilities since 2000 (Furst, 2006). Furst points out that even though the popularity of these programs has risen, the amount of research on the efficacy and benefits of these programs is lacking. Research is beginning to develop and Dr. Tamari Kitossa explained to me, in an e-mail, that he “recently reviewed an essay that addressed these very issues in adult prisons in the US. There is, as you know, growing articulation among criminologists about intersectional such as animals and the environment” (personal communication, September 13, 2010). Such work, he believes, should be approached with caution but will also become increasingly critical as “the fiscal crisis of the state will compel innovations that will utilize less overtly repressive means to compel behaviour modification.” There has been some work that points to some success with “Human-Animal Interaction” (HAI); one such study looked at a PenPals program and found that participation in HAI resulted in “increased treatment
progress in the therapeutic community, decreased institutional infractions, and improvement of social sensitivity” (Fournier, Geller & Fortney, 2007, p. 98). Such success buoyed the practice and intent of the facility’s program and it received the most attention from the participants and a considerable amount of expense, time, and daily effort on the part of juveniles and staff. There were two components to the program; the first involved one night, each month, in which well-behaved dogs of volunteers were brought into the facility for the juveniles to interact with while invited guests speak to the kids, and the second related to the care of the dogs currently at the facility. All youths (excepting those on lockdown/cooldown) are allowed to come to hear the guest speakers but only a few worked with the dogs housed and trained on the premises. While I was there, three or four youths had received their parent/guardians’ permission to work with the dogs and had been granted the opportunity (seen as an incentive) by the site’s administration. Bambam was the only one of my participants who worked with the dogs each day, training them. It was the privilege above all other privileges and incentives that he took the most pride in and he spoke of the dogs often, snapping a picture of Crystal (see Figure 16) and talking about working with her, which led to a reflection of his own incarceration.
Crystal was a rescued dog who arrived at the facility thoroughly fearful of humans as a direct result of the abuses she suffered at the hands of her previous owner; her condition was so poor that a chain had to be surgically removed from her neck because it had become embedded in the flesh. It had taken weeks of care and training for her to become trusting of any humans and Bambam was especially proud of the strides he had made in acclimating her to human interaction. Generally, he liked the pet therapy program because it granted him “extra time out of room” adding:

We get to see the outside more often, and I get to be with dogs and work with ‘em and be able to feel comfortable—not just that I’m locked up, I’m also helping someone or something and keep—and save the life of an animal, instead of them bein’ put down and killed.

As he looked at the picture of Crystal in Figure 16, specifically, he talked about how scared she looked and then began talking about his own feelings about being caged or mistreated:

How would I wanna be treated if I was a dog? I mean, I know if I was a dog I wouldn’t wanna be beat, I wouldn’t wanna be abused, I wouldn’t wanna be yelled
at—I don’t wanna be yelled at or nothing. I mean sometimes I do kinda put my voice into a forceful or a loud tone when I’m talking to the dogs but I mean you can’t—I mean I’m not sayin’ that you can’t do it but it’s not right to talk to the dogs in a loud tone. It kinda scares the dog. You gotta keep it in a sweet calm and gentle voice. And if you get frustrated with a dog or with any dog, take a minute—take a break, calm down you know. Say, wait a minute—put yourself in that place and you’re—how you’re speaking to ’em and change the way you speak to em. Umm . . . in this picture—this dog—she does look, I mean, you can see for yourself she does look kinda [scared], sad, depressed, down.

He also talked about the abuses he suffered as a child and compared them to the abuses that Crystal suffered as a puppy, saying that neither one of them would forget how they were brought up and it would make it hard for them to trust others as a result and perpetuating an abusive cycle that he’d been subjected to and was determined to break (discussed in Chapter 6). He explained that if a dog is beaten by “mean people” then the dog will become mean. Likewise, if a child is beaten and abused, “they’re gonna beat and abuse their family . . . I don’t know about everybody but I know for sure I am—I’m tryin’ to change myself to where I get older I don’t beat and abuse nobody.”

He also referred to the daily routine at KPJDC and compared it to the routine in the dog’s day, complete with scheduled eating times and a cage:

The dogs, they scared to go or they don’t wanna go in their cages. That’s like us not wanting to go in our cells. I mean we’re not scared of goin’ in our cells, we just don’t wanna be here. Just like the dogs don’t wanna be locked up in a cage, but I mean they have to . . . The dogs, we have similarities. They don’t wanna go in the cage, we don’t wanna go in our cage—I mean our cells.

The metaphor of the cell as a cage is revisited later in the chapter as the participants spoke specifically about their individual cells. Here Bambam alludes to his feelings, elaborating on them elsewhere.

During my last visit in the data collection period, in our last conversation, Bambam described his disappointment in being removed from “dog duty” in the wake of
his physical altercation with one of the staff members, resulting in his placement on
lockdown. In that sober discussion, Bambam expressed his frustration with the
procedural and administrative aspects that removed him from his role, but tried to
convince me that it wasn’t something that he was going to let bother him, saying, “I don’t
care. They can take me off [dog duty] but I mean, that’s their loss. Ain’t hurtin’ me.”
His demeanor and tone weren’t convincing, underscoring the importance he placed on
being able to work with the dogs and do something, in the facilities, that he’d earlier
confessed made him happy because he is “just good with animals” and he felt, even
though he was locked up, that he was “helping someone or something.” To what extent
this was at all transformative or rehabilitative for Bambam, I’m not qualified to say
because I was neither there long enough nor have any diagnostic/clinical experience. But
the program’s volunteer coordinator singled Bambam out as one of the examples of the
biggest changes she’d seen in a juvenile from the beginning of the program, over the
course of months that Bambam had participated (and often directed) the training sessions.

Second to the references and photos of the dogs, with regard to progressive
aspects of the facility where the participants perceived some recourse or agency, was the
grievance box (Figure 17).
Three of the youth (Bambam, Katie, and Nemo) photographed the Grievance Box and made reference to it and how they had submitted grievances to the administration through it. Bambam offered the most extensive description of the process:

The grievance process—and I got a picture of the box. The grievance is for when we don’t feel like we been treated right, fairly or should I say fairly to the rules or they’re treatin’ us unfairly and not following the rules. That’s when it’s our job to tell the director and the assistant director that and write it down on paper and send it; we put it in the grievance or outgoing mail box. And the assistant and/or director will come and pick it up and they go through and read it. Then they’ll bring us into a group or they’ll go over it and discuss what we have, our side of the story and then they go get the staff’s side of the story. But they want us to tell when the staff’s doin’ wrong.

When I asked the other participants if any other place that they’d been sentenced to (e.g. group homes, secure hospital facilities) had such an explicit box or process, they said that they either didn’t have one or wasn’t told there was one; in KPJDC its location is conspicuously affixed to the outside of the control room. Bambam placed a fair amount of faith in the process, declaring that “the grievance process works” because the administrator and assistant administrator (who are the first to read the grievances) take
the filed reports seriously and will issue disciplinary action against a staff member who has been found doing something contrary to established procedures for administering the juveniles and their punishment.

Katie, who emphasized several times that she didn’t feel youth are heard enough, said that the grievance box symbolized an opportunity for her to voice her opinion as well as a willingness on the part of administration to listen. She went on to explain how she wished she had the same recourse in other arenas of juvenile justice, frustrated that the grievance box was only “for in here. It’s not like you can write a grievance sayin’, ‘Hey, these people not listenin’ to me telling them, tryin’ to tell them why I ran away.’ You can’t write a grievance on that.” She acknowledged that she could file a complaint, but that it would only be taken seriously if the cops felt it was worth filing a complaint over, “like if he called you a nigger or all this other stuff,” but not if it’s to explain why she had run away.

The final example I wanted to cite, because it was discussed by several of the youths, was the relative safety of this secure facility contrasted to others in the state, specifically the Learning and Training Institution (LTI), a euphemistically named juvenile prison where most kids feared being sent to where “learning” and “training” were apparently not among the site’s foremost priorities, owing to its reputation as a much larger, more secure, and more violent facility. During one of the interviews, Jay talked about the safety that some youths feel at KPJDC, relative to home, and believed that “some people safer in here than on the street. And most people here is safer here than on the street.” Nemo added that he didn’t feel that he was in danger while being locked up, a product owing more to knowing other youths who were locked up than to
any policy. He admitted, “I don’t feel like I’m in danger at all. Cuz I know most of the people that’s in here.” He contrasted KPJDC to LTI, a place where he would have to “fight for my freedom every day, fight for my life every day for no reason.” He didn’t have any experience within LTI, but had friends who had “done time” there and referred to one of his friends who had to fight because of territorial conflicts within the state:

He gotta fight for his life every day cause he’s from around here and somebody from this city wanna fight him cause of his area code or somebody from that city wanna fight him cuz of his area code. I don’t wanna fight for things like that. I mean, I’m really not the fightin’ person but if it comes down to it, I’ll fight.

At KPJDC, even though territorial hostilities exist, there aren’t as many fights as at LTI. In the time that I was at the facility, there were more episodes of physical violence between staff and juvenile (two) than there were between two juveniles (one). Jay talked about how infrequent fights between incarcerated juveniles had become since he started coming in and out of the facility six years ago. And it was during an interview with Jay when we were interrupted by one of the staff supervisors who wanted to speak to Jay about a plan that she heard, in which Jay and another inmate were going to pair up and beat up another youth; the supervisor strongly discouraged Jay’s participation in the violent reprisal (for a perceived slight the targeted juvenile made toward his roommate). After the supervisor left the room, Jay admitted that he’d been approached and asked to fight but wasn’t going to do anything about it. Ultimately, there was no fight at all.

Bambam used the presence of a Nintendo Wii gaming console to initiate the discussion contrasting KPJDC from LTI as we looked at his photograph of the locked cabinet that contained the Wii in the Recreation Room (Figure 18)
Bambam wanted to take this picture to talk about the incentive programs that the facilities offer, which reward compliant behaviour with such privileges as food from outside the detention center, popcorn and a movie, and the Nintendo Wii. He explained that he appreciated these affordances and had been the recipient of several rewards over the course of his served sentences in KPJDC, because he generally stayed out of trouble and abided by the rules. The Wii was a privilege such as one would never find at LTI; he laughed as he said, “LTI don’t have no Wii.” When I asked him why, he says it’s because “LTI is a lot harder” with no rewards or incentives and agrees that it’s a much tougher place overall. In Chapter 8, when I discussed Bambam’s reluctance to be placed under State Custody, one of his cited concerns was that he could end up in LTI. Bambam discussed escape more than any other juvenile, even detailing a plan that he’d concocted to get out successfully . . . if he wanted to. The penalty for escape, however, was stiff: two years, and could include being sent to LTI. He admitted that he didn’t want to end up there and that might be reason enough for him to try and escape from detention. When I repeated his sentiment to him, saying, “you don’t wanna end up there,” he shook
his head and said, soberly, “I’d run, brah.” Such is the reputation of LTI. Jay explained, though, that despite these more progressive policies, that I shouldn’t come away with the impression that KPJDC was not strict. Just because this site might extend more privileges to those youths incarcerated did not mean that they didn’t have strict rules that weren’t enforced.

And despite the relative safety that most students felt here, there were elements of peer subordination that I witnessed and some of the participants described. Just as elements of power existed within staff-juvenile relations, so did they in intra-juvenile interactions. Most of the overt displays of abuse were rhetorical as opposed to physical and the comments revolved around another youth’s physical appearance, intellect, or race. One of the first verbal exchanges took place on the basketball court when Bambam referred to another youth as a “Pakistanky” because he was part Muslim (and part Hispanic), knowing it would anger the other youth, who responded by demanding, “Stop calling me Pakistanky!” To which Bambam replied, “Fine . . . wetback.” The other youth didn’t object to this slur at all, saying, “Fine, call me a wetback. Just don’t call me a Pakistanky.” The juvenile explained to me, later, that he thought it was worse to be insulted with a reference to being Muslim, but didn’t see much offense in a derogatory term based on his Hispanic ethnicity. Such slurs were quite frequent and the uses ranged from the familial to the hostile; I heard a range of slurs with varying intent used.

Jay talked about the racism, specifically, that he perceived in the facility and Bambam mentioned that he’d seen fights between juveniles break out over the use of the racial slurs. Jay said that he’d witnessed hostility between White and Black youth based on their skin colour alone and believed “They got a lotta racists over here, man.” He’d
heard White kids call Black kids “nigger” where it was meant offensively and times when it wasn’t meant offensively. The facility enforced a policy in which “nigger” and other slurs aren’t supposed to be used at all, whether meant with malicious intent or not, but they’re still used. His roommate, a White youth, used it when they talk to one another and even though Jay said there’s nothing wrong with it, some of his Black peers have asked him, “why you let that White boy call you nigger?”

In Chapter 4 I discussed the Black youth who was a rodeo fan; he was bothered by the subordinating, race-based discrimination that he experienced from other Black youth because he wasn’t “Black enough.” Following our casual conversation that day, I made the following entry in my field notes:

> When he’s at home, with the horses, or at school, with likeminded (and mostly White) kids, he gets along well enough. At the detention center, though, it wasn’t the same. He’s Black and the other black kids expected him to subscribe to their definition of acceptable “Blackness”—this led to the friction and teasing that he didn’t appreciate at all, driving him to tears. He said he couldn’t play basketball and didn’t really understand the rules; he only knew that the ball had to go into the hoop and that was about it. He couldn’t shoot, couldn’t play, couldn’t dribble. He wasn’t good at football, either. But because he’s Black they expect him to be good at these things. When he explains that he likes horses and rodeo, he’s derided, even by family members.

For some of these incarcerated kids, being locked up was part of the “pathway to adulthood” (Wacquant, 2009, p. 207) and Nemo talked about the “street cred” that lockup gives the youth, and following rodeo wasn’t part of this accepted, tolerated ideology.

Aside from Jay, only Bambam talked about racism among the incarcerated youth and his responses were framed around his own racism or being racist, himself. He claimed he wasn’t, but he admitted to using slurs in his own speech and I’d witnessed him using it derogatively (i.e. “Pakistanky” and “wetback”). When perceptions of racism
appeared elsewhere in our conversations, it was in a staff-juvenile context, discussed in the next section of this chapter.

In a mixed-gender facility, I asked my participants about any gender-based discrimination that they perceived. Katie was the only one to answer affirmatively, but contextualized her response with a staff-juvenile referent and didn’t talk about any subordination she’d experienced with regard to the male inmates. In the course of the movie-viewing sessions, she and Jay had the most vocal exchanges and they would cover topics that were gender related (e.g. scenes of domestic violence between men and women), but Katie didn’t feel that she’d been silenced; in fact, she felt that she’d accounted herself quite strongly. The only overt subordinating and alienating exchange I noted occurred when the female youth who was rumoured to have herpes was isolated from and ignored by the other girls, who made fun of her and spread the rumours. For their part, the male youths cracked jokes about her and how “nasty” she was. The staff, aware of the rumours and oppressive effect of the accusations, were directed to write up any youth who made a comment or spread the rumour. The youths responded by finding other means to isolate or comment on her alleged STD; one example occurred while watching the cartoon, Powerpuff Girls. As the doe-eyed, innocent heroines mistook a game of tag for some sort of communicable disease that led others to run away from them, the juveniles began talking about playing a game of tag where the supposedly infected female was “it” and that they should play a constant game of keep away so they don’t become “it” too. Over the course of my stay and before her release, the cumulative effect was increasingly apparent as she became more insular and somber, choosing (or
perhaps it wasn’t her choice) to be alone, isolating herself (or perhaps isolated) from the others, especially the girls.

There was one other subordinating element among peers that Jay mentioned: territory. Nemo referred to the violence it caused at LTI, but Jay said that the same geographically-based animosity existed within KPJDC. Neighbourhood “beef” wasn’t checked at the door and inmates from enemy communities, thrown in together, created much violence; he compared it to the violence he saw at his school campus after a school was closed in one part of town, forcing kids from that area to move to a rival area and the incidence of altercations skyrocketed. In the same way, locking kids up behind bars, from rival neighbourhoods, would lead to fights and violence. Even within the facility, absent “beef” from the outside, “beef” could be engendered depending on what wing of the facility one was in. East wing versus west wing. In recent years, the hostility had subsided, largely due to the presence of the administration, generally, and Mr. Carradine, specifically. Jay described the nature of hostilities and change:

East side and west side used to fight and this is what they used to do: they’ll take one person on the east side put ‘em in the bathroom with about four people from the west side and he’ll get beat—boom boom boom—he’ll get beat. He’ll get beat up then they’ll take one person from the west side and put him with four people from the east side in the shower and he’ll get beat. Boom boom boom boom boom. And that stuff went on all night, man—to see how hard you is. Nobody never really listened to you. Like they got Carradine now but back then they ain’t have Carradine. Back then they ain’t have Carradine and they ain’t have nobody to really listen to us, feel me.

Guided by allegiances based on territory, rivals outside the facility could become, Jay explained, allies inside detention. His closing comments underscore the primary reason these youths identified some degree of agency and recourse while locked up: they felt that someone was listening to them. That sentiment extended to their attitudes
toward and feeling of staff members and their perceptions of oppression and privilege within KPJDC. In the next section this is developed more fully; there was no other facility-related topic that engendered more discussion and elicited a wider range of responses than did our discussions about the site’s staff.

**KPJDC Staff**

My questions and their photographs elicited a great deal of varied discussion about the staff at KPJDC. The youths talked about the physical and verbal harassment they’d been subjected to, the bias they perceived practiced by the staff and resulting privileges, and the pre-eminence they placed on staff members who listened to them, whom they felt they could trust. Generally speaking, I found staff-related comments trended along the same lines as Michelle Brown’s discussion of “choice” when it comes to working with prisoners:

> We have perhaps an infinite number of ways in which to respond to the violence, vulnerability, and suffering of this other, but most reactions will follow one of two paths. One is a choice to care…. The other is a choice to dominate [emphasis added]. (2009, p. 204)

Similarly, the juveniles talked about the responses of the staff members along lines of caring and domination, instances of the latter contributing to their carceral (physical and emotional) subordination.

**Verbal harassment.** During one of my first days at the facility, I was observing a game of volleyball in the gym during one of the periods of physical education, the daily provision of which is mandated by the state. There was a series of verbal exchanges between one of the juveniles and one of the security staff members. The conversations became increasingly hostile, climaxing in the staff member’s direct question to the youth, “Your dick get hard?” He repeated the question more than once and began making
claims and asking questions about the youth’s maturity and manhood, which effectively ended the conversation. The series of exchanges was punctuated by this staff member gesturing as if he was juggling his own testicles and telling the youth to play with his “own balls instead.” I wasn’t sure if the intent was meant to be in jest or made seriously or a mix of both and the reactions of the juveniles didn’t clarify it, either. Everyone laughed at the comments, except for the juvenile to whom the comment was directed; instead, he glared at the security staff member and stalked away from the game, clearly angry.

This was the first instance of verbal harassment I’d witnessed, later Bambam and Jay would both discuss examples of verbal harassment they’d either identified or been victimized by. Bambam’s example was more specific and personal and he appeared more offended than Jay when he discussed what he’d seen. Following our last discussion as Bambam reflected on the fallout from his fight with the staff member, he shared with me the reason he suspected the altercation escalated and it went back to a hostility engendered by racial slurs directed at him by this staff member:

I pissed him off for some reason or something and he started callin’ me a nigger and all kinda stuff. Well I started goin’ in my room. They told me to sit down on the chair so I sat down and he kept on—and I said, ‘Look, quit callin’ me a nigger, I’m not a nigger,’ and he kept on, kept on. And I was sittin’ down in the chair. Well he took off his jacket, laid it over this chair and he stood up, stepped up to me. I stand back up; he ain’t much bigger than me even though he’s 21, 20 years old. He ain’t much bigger than me. I stood straight up to him—I said, “Quit callin’ me a nigger,” and about that time another security guard grabbed me and pushed the one cursing me and told him to go. They put me in my room and said, ‘Don’t worry about that. You ain’t getting no write up and you ain’t goin’ on lockdown. I’m gonna talk to Mr. Carradine about that,’ and they wrote the guard up. Mr. Carradine don’t like the word “nigger” anyways.

Having been written up for calling Bambam a “nigger” and turned in by his peers led to a series of verbal altercations between the staff member (not that much older than
Bambam) and Bambam, culminating in a physical exchange that ended up leaving Bambam bloodied and bruised, discussed in the upcoming section on physical encounters. Bambam added that he hears the slur often, sometimes by staff, and if he was looking to get staff in trouble he could because of Mr. Carradine’s intolerance for the word, especially if used by staff members.

Jay said that he’d heard it used by security staff, as well. He said that the staff liked to “mess with the inmates” by calling them names like “ugly.” Even though the staff member might be joking it doesn’t matter, according to Jay, because it “makes the [youth] mad.” And the result sometimes compounded the unfairness because if the juvenile responds, he/she risks being punished. His frustration was apparent as he said, “Some people are on lockdown—on lockdown—for staff messin’ with ‘em. They can’t do nothing—they ain’t got no authority. And sometimes it’s the staff fault, man.” The relative powerlessness and lack of recourse troubled Jay because the youths were left with little or no choice except to endure the comments without retaliating because once they retaliate and are put on lockdown or cooldown, they have to serve their time regardless of what any outcome might be should they file a grievance.

Fisher did point out, however, that these verbal exchanges offered opportunities to invert the power structure if the juvenile was clever enough and managed to get the staff member to respond, eliminating their own ability to punish because they’d been complicit in the “clowning” themselves. In his first few stays, he’d get “pissed” and maybe “flip tables” in anger but after realizing how useless a display of resistance that was, he decided he’d “play it smart.” That included trying to get one over on a staff member, verbally, without him or her realizing it. He pushed the proverbial envelope, rhetorically,
trying to bait the staff member to respond. If he was successful, he knew he could continue the verbal insults (masked as if a game) because the staff member can’t report him. He said he risked getting in trouble because “when they don’t clown back then they basically got a reason to write me up.” If he succeeded in pressing them to “clown back they can’t write me up because you clownin’ with me, know what I’m sayin?” Thus, Fisher employed verbal interaction as a means of resistance in such a way that he became immune to punishment while being able to insult or tease a staff member.

I also witnessed regular exchanges between the staff and youth that demonstrated a sincere concern for these kids and their welfare and future. When I spent time in the control room, I noticed that it was common for a youth to buzz in to the control room to talk to whoever was there. Sometimes they’d have a reason, but many times there was no point in particular aside from the desire to talk to someone and more often than not the staff member accommodated the request and humoured them by chatting for a few moments. While it’s true that the majority of conversation between staff and juveniles was harmless, there were times, through my observation and participant response, when discourse’s primary purpose was to subordinate, offend, and antagonize.

Physical encounters. Early in my second visit, I saw the first example of physicality between a staff member and a juvenile one morning as I was working in the high school classroom. Next door, in the junior high classroom, a commotion suddenly erupted and when the adjoining doors between the two classrooms were opened, I could see a juvenile on the ground with two staff members holding him and I wrote the following in my field notes:

*While the students were quietly working on the survey a series of loud noises emanated from next door and the security guard opens the door to the room and*
yells “CODE RED!” into her radio and the whole high school classroom rushes to the door to see. Without missing a beat, the guard in our room takes control and orders the students to their seats or they risk being put on lockdown, too. The students complied in short order and got back to their seats. Security guards rush in to the junior high classroom and get the situation under control. Apparently there was some jawing between Terrance and one of the security staff and it ended up with the two going at each other, with Terrance in a headlock and a second security guard pinning his legs to the ground. After the dust settled I walked over and got Terrance’s survey. He’d only answered a few of the questions and the papers were torn and in poor shape, after having got caught in the mix.

The policy at the facility is that a staff member is never allowed to put his/her hands on a youth unless it is absolutely necessary. Was it in this instance? That was the first question that I asked one of the security guards; she answered that she didn’t think it was, but assured me that I could look at the surveillance tape with her to help her assess what happened and compare it to the stories both Terrance and the guard offered. The grainy black-and-white video didn’t show anything incendiary, at least physically. One moment Terrance had his head down working on a survey and apparently exchanging words with the security guard. The next moment the guard fired out of his chair and grabbed Terrance from behind and began choking him as the headlock was applied. The guards with whom I watched the tape said that there would be a lot of explanation needed because nothing on the tape suggested that physical intervention was necessary. It was a jarring scene to witness and I heard a couple of the guards say that they wanted to extricate Terrance from the hold because they were worried that he couldn’t breathe. In my time at the facility, this was the only violent episode I personally witnessed; security staff said that while not common, they did take place. During one visit, a security staff member had been hospitalized in the fallout of an altercation in which a juvenile attacked him.
As for my participants, there were instances of physicality between staff members and only two of them: Rider and Bambam. Rider was a relatively quiet participant, generally, and only occasionally offered up opinions or stories without being prompted by a question or comment from me. He was never as talkative, however, as he was when he related his story of an altercation with one of the staff members, the only time when he had such a “run in” with any of the staff members. It started with his request to make a phone call and one of the staff members on duty refused to let him use the phone and Rider, angered, responded by “cussin’ him . . . kept cussin’ him out. He’d walk, then turn around to me, then walk. The last time he turned around, he just came after me. He snapped.” Rider described the escalation that ensued once the staff member reached him:

He choked me and then after that he let me go. Then he told me to get up so I got up and I barely push him and then he gave me a big push—and I, like he pushed me and I hit the door then came and him against the wall and then another guard grabbed me by the arm and just twisted it.

Rider admitted that he was “kinda mad” at what happened, but his anger paled compared to the surprise and shock at this security staff member reacting this way, because it was someone that was normally trusted by the youths as someone who was patient and calm and took extra time to listen to the juveniles when they had a problem they needed to work through. He described the staff member as follows:

He’s like the only person—you kick on the door or do stuff like that, holler down the hallway, he’s the only person who won’t write you up. He’ll come to your room, talk one on one . . . He’ll go in the room with roommates and he’ll talk to ‘em. One or one or just talk together and calm ‘em down and don’t write ‘em up.

Bambam singled out the same staff member as someone who “really listens” to the kids. Rider said that the staff member felt bad about what he’d done and walked with Rider to the gymnasium to explain himself and how what he did was wrong and
apologize for his behaviour. Rider said he didn’t ask not to be reported, but Rider
decided not to on his own because this staff member, over the course of the few months
he’d been locked up, had been one of the ones he respected the most and felt he could
trust. He was satisfied with the apology and subsequent behaviour by and treatment from
the guard, so the incident went unreported.

As calm and accepting as Rider was over his incident, Bambam was equally angry
and defiant about what happened to him. I could tell from the first moment I saw him
during my last visit to the facility that something had happened to him. Physically, he
was beaten up and I noticed bruises, abrasions, and a chipped tooth and emotionally he
was angrier and more somber than he had been previously; I learned later it was a
combination of being “slammed” by two staff members on the concrete as well as his
being “played” at court during his sentencing. As soon as he saw me, he invited me into
his cell to talk and join the conversation he was having with Mr. Carradine over the
event. We followed up that informal, extemporaneous dialogue with a recorded
interview where he talked further about the incident.

From the beginning, Bambam was adamant as he spoke with me and Mr.
Carradine that what he had done didn’t warrant being grabbed by two security guards and
slammed; the entire episode escalated because the security staff member (with whom he
had an adversarial relationship after being repeatedly called a “nigger”) unfairly
provoked and attacked him. Mr. Carradine admitted his surprise at getting a call about a
code red between staff and youth involving Bambam because he had been, in many ways,
a model inmate. Mr. Carradine vowed to investigate the incident fully, reiterating that
there was “no quicker way for staff to lose their job than to put their hands on a juvenile
unjustly.” And he left.

His departure gave me a few minutes to scan Bambam’s cell and move closer to
Bambam than I was previously. What I wrote in my field notes described the scene in his
room:

_We have the room to ourselves and Bambam’s demeanor changes slightly. He’s
less aggressive and appears to feel less “wronged” and admits that he didn’t tell
Carradine the entire story of what happened, putting on a bit of an act for the
administrator’s benefit, but still feels that they shouldn’t have acted as they did.
As I move closer, I see the bruises and abrasions on his face and hands much
more clearly. He has a few cuts on his face. His lip looks busted up. He has cuts
and scrapes on his arms. He told Carradine about how there was blood
everywhere in his cell, on the floor and that he cleaned what he could himself,
keeping the bloody shirt aside as proof. Carradine indicated this was not how it
should’ve been. There was still some blood in the sink. It looked like it must’ve
been some mess._

Battered and defeated, emotionally and physically, Bambam was more resigned than he’d
been previously. He was as willing to talk as the first time I met him in the Lab as we
watched *Powerpuff Girls*, but he was less enthusiastic in his demeanor. Since my last
visit, a couple of weeks before, he’d been to court and transferred to state custody (a
sentence he was hoping fervently against), been slammed to the ground by the security
staff (the result of an altercation he insists wasn’t handled fairly to begin with), put on
lockdown (a status he’d objected to but had to wait for administrative measures to run
their course before anything could be done to change or rescind the punishment), and
taken off of dog duty (the most beneficial, gratifying aspect of his incarceration). The
toll these took, cumulatively, was apparent in the conversation and later in the interview.
When I sat down with him the next day to conduct our final interview, Bambam wanted first to reflect on the fight with the staff members and the events leading up to it.

His version of events:

We was playin’ volleyball and [one of the security staff members on duty] said he was gonna make me sit down if we got in a argument —me and Trey. But Trey was wantin’ to fight me and I wasn’t even arguin’ with him. I just kept playin’ volleyball. I wasn’t even arguing but [the staff member] said “Well sit down!” and I said, “Nah I’m in the middle of a volleyball game. Why don’t you just stay on the sidelines?” and he come up and grabbed me—slid back like this and he grabbed me and slammed me on the ground and started choking me and crap. Then the other guard comes in and tries putting me in an ankle lock and they picked me up, started walkin’ me out of the gym. And once we got outside to the breezeway area and we was right there by Gate 2 the supervisor on duty came up and was like ‘SLAM HIM!’ Well they had me by both arms and they just [slaps table] BOOM! On the concrete. My head—I got a knot like this on my head [shows size of knot with his fingers], my nose all scraped, all my head was scraped up. My nose busted, started bleedin’. They—I was cussin’. They picked me up, I grabbed my T-shirt and wiped my face and it was just blood all right here in this area and I took my gym shirt off and stuck it in my pillowcase and put on my t-shirt until the night shift supervisor got here. When I come in here [his cell], in that silver trash can right there I spit at least a loogie of blood and blood poured out my mouth. I spit in the sink, some more blood. My nose bled a whole lot more than anything else.

I asked him why he was slammed, if he had done anything to provoke being slammed and he confessed that he was resisting being held. He’d been restrained like that before and talked about his anger issues that lead to him wanting to resist being held like that, where he thought he had an opportunity to wriggle out of their grasp because he had been sweating. The attempt to wrest himself from their hold and defiance at being restrained led to the call to “slam him!” He kept repeating that his goal was to get off of lockdown; the slam, in his case, had the desired effect of his compliance as a result of the punishment. Bambam said he hadn’t caused any trouble since and acquiesced to the demands of authority, but I pointed out to him that Mr. Carradine believed that’s what he was doing before. He shrugs his shoulders and simply says, “I dunno.” The “subject”
was more “docile” as Foucault puts it, but I’m not convinced that the result is more desirable to how Bambam was during my previous visits. He is pissed at what happened and had told his mom, who was also upset. There was nothing they could do, however; pressing charges was useless so he and his mother did nothing, except he said, be “pissed.” And so he was.

Privilege. All of the juveniles spoke about the preferential nature of incarceration with regard to staff members. There were some juveniles who perceived that they or others had certain privileges and held standing with some of the staff members; this structure of privilege intensified the oppression and subordination that they experience (Mallory 2007; Cudd 2006) but the privilege was relative to the juvenile and/or staff member(s) and most of the participants spoke to the somewhat arbitrary nature of perceived privilege. Some felt like beneficiaries of privilege while simultaneously experiencing the sting of bias and exclusion. Bambam, for example, recognized his own preferential treatment from some staff, even though he believed other guards discriminate against him unfairly (from an earlier interview):

Some staff treat some better than others. Like some staff will bring some food from outside, like Taco Bell. They’ve found wrappers from Taco Bell in drains . . . They have a lot of favouritism, this staff. I mean I am kinda one of the favourites in here. I mean I’ve been here a lot—they know me very well.

The perception of privilege and unfair treatment was something each of the youths addressed in their discussions, reflecting on the seemingly arbitrary and whimsical dynamic that privilege played while expressing their frustration when it negatively impacted them. Scott identifies the same phenomenon with adult prisoners: “What the prisoners resent most about daily prison life is their powerlessness before the seemingly
capricious and unpredictable distribution of privileges and punishments by administrative personnel” (1990, p. 94).

For Rider and Fisher, the “O.R.” represented a large part of their privilege. The O.R. refers to an open area connecting the recreation rooms to each of the wings (as a sort of open lobby area), east and west. In the two O.R.s there are two beds set up for juveniles and often used when there are too many prisoners for the cells or to reward those inmates who have exemplified good behaviour. This area allowed them to see the television in the rec rooms and they weren’t locked in behind a steel door. It also afforded them the opportunity to assist with any cleaning chores in the rec room and cafeteria which could lead to a reward of food brought from outside. Rider, especially, took pride in being assigned to the O.R. so often and made sure to photograph his O.R. bed (Figure 19).

Figure 19. The east wing O.R. beds. (Photo credit: Rider)

The photo was taken as he stood in the open doorway between Rec 2 and the east wing’s O.R. and on the left side of the picture is the window separating the O.R. from Rec 2. The area was more open and had more space than the cells and also felt more open
because the window opened out into a more expansive area. When Rider and I discussed the photographs he took, this image was among the most important. Locked up for over five months, he thought the time served had been much more endurable because he’d been able to spend some of that time in the O.R. He said that he’d been in four or five different cells but liked the O.R. best. When I asked him what he liked best about it, he said, “Because I get to clean up at night and stuff. Like some night shift they give us some extra food or like bring us something to drink or some chips or something.” He also appreciated the fact that he was able to watch television and sleep somewhere other than his cell or even the O.R.:

The guards, some of em’ll let one of us or both of us go sleep in the rec area. They’ll turn the big lights off, turn the lights off and let us sleep out there and watch TV all night until we fall asleep.

This was a comfort he enjoyed at home and helped ease the anxiety surrounding his incarceration. He also spent a lot of time talking with the staff, which was more easily done from the OR rather than through the intercom system in one of the cells. This communication with and privilege afforded by the staff helped ameliorate the subordination he experienced, making the time served easier to deal with.

Fisher was the recipient of the same privilege, time in the O.R. as opposed to a cell for part of the time of my data collection and work at the Center. He explained why he enjoyed the time in the O.R. as opposed to a cell:

I get to watch TV. Basically all day they got the TV on and they not just gonna cut it off just because I’m lookin’ at it from the O.R. And like I said they give you a little extra food when the staff don’t wanna eat and plus if you help clean up or whatever, like folding the clothes and stuff like that, they’ll give you a snack or whatever. And most staff don’t eat their plate at night and that’ll be like your reward for foldin’ the clothes or whatever. Sometimes when the shift ends we sweep the walkway like every other day, sometimes three times a week. Then we go to the bathrooms in the gym and clean up.
He recognized that being assigned to the O.R. was the product of the staff's decision. “If you got somebody doin’ good,” he explained, “they'll pick you. They wouldn’t just randomly pick you; whoever’s gonna get picked that person gotta be picked by the staff.”

The juveniles offered their labor for some of the lighter duties because it meant time they can spend outside of the O.R., even if it was cleaning in the gym, and can pay off with rewards such as candy or food from the outside, traditionally associated with incentives (permitted) or contraband (not allowed).

Even though Fisher was liked by some of the staff, he was quick to point out that not everyone felt the same way toward him; there was one staff member in particular on whom he singled out his displeasure. When I asked Fisher the last question in the final interview, he revisited this point, demonstrating the importance he placed on this notion of bias and privilege, and the resulting unfairness, on the part of some of the staff:

Jonathan: “Because this is gonna be the last interview that we have, if there’s something that you wanna make sure gets in the book, speak up now.”
Fisher: “I know I already told you how the staff, if they like you, they'll cut for you but if a staff don’t like you they'll bend the rules, you know what I'm saying?”
Jonathan: “To make it harder on you?”
Fisher: “Yeah, make it harder on your because a staff been doin’ that to me lately. I came to him and told him, I was like, ‘Real talk—I don't like you, but I’m not gonna mess with you and you can just leave me alone.’ But he be tryin’ to talk to me and stuff and I just ignore him. But he wanna make it a big deal, talkin’ ‘bout, ‘Oh, you gonna respect me’ and stuff. And I'm like, ‘I do respect you but I just don't like you. You don’t talk to me, I don't talk to you.’ ”

He said he didn't bother reporting it because he didn't think anything would come of it because it would be his word against the staff member’s word. Other staff members knew about the animosity that existed between Fisher and this staff member, but they stuck together. The suspicion and lack of trust he had toward police extended to the enforcement and security personnel within the facility when he compared the two groups
saying, “The staff got a position like I say just like police. They gonna stick together. They not gonna go against each other, so when a staff don’t like you, you just gonna get done wrong like that.” Even the weeks spent in the O.R. and the privileges he’d received were not enough to overcome the frustration he felt in recourse options available to report behaviour he felt was harassing. And he wanted that sentiment to be the final comment and recommendation he wanted included from his interviews.

There was also a partiality and hypocrisy that bothered Fisher, Jay, Nemo, and Katie. For Fisher, the discrimination seemed arbitrary; in some cases, Jay felt it was racially motivated; Katie believed she experienced it because of her gender; and Nemo cited nepotism. The “capricious nature” of privilege and punishment bothered Fisher because it wasn't something consistent enough that he could understand. Two juveniles could be busted for doing the same thing and yet receive totally different punishments, or one youth could be punished while another receives none, even though they’d committed the same offense. When pressed for an example, Fisher shared something that happened the night before. When a girl was let out of her cell to get her medicine, she passed through the O.R. and Fisher admitted to “clowning with her,” along with his O.R. roommate. Fisher was told to be quiet and threatened with a write up while the roommate received no such warning, despite the fact that Fisher claimed only to have made a single comment whereas his roommate made several. After the warning, Fisher said nothing else to the girl while the other kept making comments and never received a warning, much less a write up. “That’s just favouritism,” he concluded.

Jay didn’t offer anything in the way of example to back up his observations that some of the past staff were racist. Before Mr. Carradine had assumed a leadership role
and became more involved with the daily routine and goings on in the Center, Jay felt the staff was more visibly and overtly racist: “Some of the staff, well, I don’t say the staff that work here now but the staff that used to work here, they liked the White kids more than the Black kids.” He couldn’t cite any specific examples that he remembered but the frustration and the discrimination he perceived had lingered.

Katie, meanwhile, stated declaratively that she, along with the other three girls incarcerated at the time of this interview, “feel like they get treated better, the boys. We feel the boys get treated better.” When asked for any specific instances of the preferential treatment, she said that the boys have longer than an hour for their recreation period in the evenings; the girls had watches in their rooms, so they knew when the boys came out of their rooms before the girls did and yet everyone had to return to their rooms at the same time. Aside from the recreational issue, Katie said that she and another girl were written up a few days before because of an argument with a male inmate. He was “running off at the mouth, sayin’ this and that but he still ain’t got wrote up and the only thing we said was that we wasn’t about to move. And we got wrote up.” I asked if she could explain further and she accommodated, replying:

We was in the classroom and we was talking. And like, the security guard was like, ‘Y’all need to be quiet’ so we stop talking for a little while and then [the other female inmate] asked me somethin’ about the movie and I was telling her. So they was like, ‘Oh y’all bein’ disrespectful, so y’all need to move.’ And I was like, ‘I’m not movin.’ And my friend said she wasn’t movin.’ So he got mad and he wrote us up. But the boy, he started goin’ off on me . . .” and yet he wasn’t written up. Katie found this to be unfair as she believed that she was written up for talking rather than defying an order to move and because he had talked back, too, the boy should have been written up as well.

The final example was offered by Nemo. As with the rest, he resented the preferential treatment afforded to some of the inmates, one in particular who happened to
be related to one of the security staff members. Their relationship protected him from
punishment and administrative reprisal, even when he was wrong. Nemo accused this
juvenile of “cursing, throwing stuff at people, picking on people” and being otherwise
generally antagonistic. However, “you can't do nothing,” he claimed, because a fight will
only extend your time locked up and he won’t end up written up because he's family to
one of the guards. And those are really the only two options, as Nemo perceived them,
for holding the youth accountable for his behaviour: it's either juvenile initiated (a fight)
or administratively initiated (a write up) and neither ended up happening.

The dynamics surrounding privilege were among the most difficult for these
participants to understand and explain. They wrestled with competing notions of their
own privilege within the facility while simultaneously trying to express their frustrations
when they were discriminated against. None of them saw themselves as uniformly
harassed by staff, nor did they feel treated fairly by all staff. The confusion they
experienced trying to reconcile their own behaviour and treatment, comparing their
behaviour to others, and guessing at the staff members’ motivations left them confused
and bewildered. There existed instances of privilege that assuaged the oppression they
felt but more often they spoke about how preferential phenomena compounded their
confusion and added to their feelings of subordination as staff members exercised their
authority and domination.

The yard. There was one specific privilege that most of the students talked
about, often frustrated: the yard. Described in more physical detail in Chapter 3, the yard
is the large, fenced, outdoor area which was used primarily for dog training while I was
there. Not once did I see the youths go out to the yard as a group. Most of the
participants expressed a desire to go out to the yard, but were routinely disappointed because even though the state mandated daily periods of physical activity, there was no provision that it must take place outside.

Bambam spent some time outside every day, participating in the New Leash on Life program. When we sat down with the photos between us, one of the first things he did was grab three of the photos (See Figures 20, 21, and 22) and arranged them on the table. He then stood them up, as best he could, to form a square (missing its fourth side). He then told me to stand up and look down, inside the square he had made. What I was looking at was a miniature reproduction of the yard, a sort of rough panoramic with the picture of the fences and building that circumscribed the Yard’s boundaries. I asked him why he’d taken the pictures that way and then arranged them as such. He said to give my readers “an idea.” An idea of the “full area” of the yard and what it was like for them when they were outside, but still fenced in. He insisted that all three pictures be presented in the book.

Figure 20. The southwest corner and western fence of the yard. (Photo credit: Bambam)
By placing these images side by side, the reader, Bambam believed, will have a much better idea of where they spend their time outside, where he spent so much time working with Crystal. For him, the goal was to make the reader feel what it was like to be fenced in the yard as well as to see the space which he enjoyed more than any other at the
facility, being outside of his cell and with the dogs. He was also proud of the idea, artistically and conceptually.

Bambam said that aside from working with the dogs, they went out to the yard “very seldom” and said it’s because of the escape threat. Looking closely at the second photo above (Figure 21), Bambam pointed out the added fencing which was meant to prevent potential escapees from gaining a foothold and climbing over. This second layer was added following the successful escape of two juveniles.

Nemo, Fisher, Katie, and Jay disagreed that an escape risk was the main reason they didn’t go outside often, preferring to believe that they didn’t go outside very much because the decision is made by the supervisors. Katie described the yard as “like their playground.” It was a space outside the building, out of their cells where they can hang out and relax. Even though she didn’t participate in the sports that the boys would normally play, she’d go look at the dogs in their pens or just sit down and talk to the other girls. When I asked her how often they go outside, she answered succinctly, “Not often. Whenever they feel we can go outside, we go outside.” Jay also blamed the staff members but phrased his criticism more harshly, saying he wanted to go out into the yard, but the guards never bring them outside because they are lazy and don’t care. “They just want to sit around in the air conditioning because they are free and don’t know what it’s like to be locked up. If they were locked up, they'd know how it is.” In the joint interview with Nemo and Fisher, they both looked at Nemo’s photos of the Yard (Figure 23)
and began a long discussion about going out to the yard. Nemo said he took the photo so that people outside can see “that we're caged in here like caged lions,” comparing themselves to zoo animals. I asked them the same question I posed to Katie and Bambam: “How often do you go outside?” Both Nemo and Fisher provided the same answer, simultaneously: it depended on who’s working the shift. They explained the difference between two of the supervisors and the reasons offered why they don't go outside:

Fisher: “They give us like—they’ll just give us the maximum that they gotta give us or the minimum they gotta give us, like we supposed to get just like a hour of PE but Mr. Burton, he’s cool. He could put all groups together and combine the time so that way we get like two hours and a couple extra minutes.”
Nemo: “Like a extra 30 minutes or somethin’ like that.”
Jonathan: “So y’all like that better?”
Nemo: “The other supervisor only lets the two different groups.”
Fisher: “Two groups—that’s one hour at a time. Some staff do that so they wouldn’t have to be bothered with everybody.”
Jonathan: “Do you find that whenever you’re out there as a group—is there more trouble get into outside because there’s more of you out there?”
Nemo: “I don’t think so . . .”
Fisher: “Somehow they use that as an excuse but it’s not.”
Jonathan: “Because that’s what I heard 'em say.”
Fisher: “It’s rarely that, though, ya know what I’m saying? Cuz you know they always gonna have somethin' to back themselves up with. That’s what they use—but it’s not really true because—”
Nemo: “It’s just a excuse.”
Fisher: “Any day or time something could just happen, know what I’m sayin? We had two groups of PE yesterday inside and we had some kids about to fight.”

Spending time outside meant enough to the participants for them to discuss their desire to go outside more. Rider was the only juvenile who didn't refer to the yard but all five other participants had been outside rarely enough to see the yard as an incentive, despite the fact that they were still “caged.” It was a different sort of cage that the supervisors or staff didn’t understand, because they weren’t locked in their cells all day and could come and go as they please, so they took being outside for granted. Never knowing when they were going outside and never fully understanding why supervisors decided they way they did made the Yard another instance of the arbitrary nature of supervisory decisions with regard to privilege and the resulting frustration for kids who just wanted to go outside.
To, as Katie put it, their “playground.”

Caring, concerned, and invested. Throughout this section on staff interaction, I’ve alluded to examples of staff members and their attitudes, behaviours, and willingness to listen which meant much to these incarcerated juveniles. Jay referred to Mr. Carradine specifically, praising his willingness to listen and the changes he made to policy and procedures since he arrived:

Carradine listens; he listens to the kids. Back then they ain’t have nobody to listen to us. Back then they’d be like ‘Oh no, that staff member ain’t gonna do that, he been here so and so years, he’ll never do that. Y’all just tryin’ to get him fired.’ People used to write a grievance and the grievance never go to the right people.

Further, more than one staff member admitted to “loving” these kids and I have no reason to doubt their sincerity. In one of my earlier visits, I walked with one of the
female supervisors to a juvenile's cell after he’d been placed on cooldown because of a fight with another youth. When we walked into the room, the inmate had his head in his hands and was crying. The supervisor asked why he was crying and inquired, “Is this place getting to you, sweetheart?” She was not at all threatening and continued to speak in a calm manner. The juvenile offered no response and kept his head buried, crying quietly. She warned this first offender that he needed to avoid being baited by those kids who were going to be there for a long time, whose dates of release were much further in the future than his own. If he should give in to them and respond violently, all that does is hurt him and extend this, his first stay. She explained that policy for fighting dictates a lockdown punishment, which he’d serve for the next four or five days, with lots of time (as Foucault also points out) to think about what he’d done. As we walked out of the cell, back to the control room, she explained to me how some of the longer term youth will harass the newer inmates, another form of peer subordination, trying to challenge them or threaten them or, as in this case, antagonize them so that they’ll jeopardize their release dates.

As I listened to the transcripts of an interview with Jay and another with Katie, my recorder captured interruptions from two staff members and one parole officer who demonstrated a concern for these kids, either through warning or gifts. As mentioned earlier, in the final interview with Jay, just prior to his release, the same female supervisor from the previous paragraph stuck her head into the room and spoke to Jay about a plan she’d heard that involved him ganging up on another juvenile. She initiated the warning saying, “I was told by a very important person that you and your roommate plan on touching that little boy before you go.” At first, I thought she was talking about a
sexual assault because she said “touching” but it was, she explained, a euphemism for fighting. She told Jay that all she needed to do was call Mr. Carradine, who could call a judge at home, to issue an “Oral in Standing” which could keep him in KPJDC for another 15 to 30 days. The one boy wasn’t worth it, she said, because something was wrong with him and she couldn’t get through to him, but she felt she could get through to Jay, telling him:

My plea to you: I can’t control him, but I can talk to you. That’s the difference. And you know me and you have talked about that before. Don’t waste your time; you’re better than that. Go and get outta here. For some reason I feel that this is your last chance. I dunno why and I really do believe if you can make it through there, you gonna be a good man . . . Don’t waste your time on that—get outta here. You know how much that would break your momma’s heart for me to have to call and tell her that?

After she left the room, Jay insisted that he wasn't going to do anything, even though this “little dude” was “talking shit” to provoke them, telling them, “Suck my dick” and “Fuck all y’all.” The plan was eventually decided on by Jay’s roommate, a white male, because the diminutive antagonist had gotten in Jay’s roommate’s face at rec one night and said, “I never let no white boy beat me up,” and repeated, “No. I never let no white boy beat me up.”

Later in the same interview with Jay, there was another knock on the door and his parole officer’s head peeked into the room. He apologized for interrupting but wanted to tell Jay “something right quick.” He asked Jay if he “wants to leave out here smooth” to which Jay answered affirmatively. “Okay then,” he replied, “don’t make no dumb moves. Because you ain’t gotta go nowhere; we could change our mind real quick.” This echoed the Oral in Standing to which the supervisor had referred moments before. The threat, repeated, was one Jay acknowledged with an “alright.” He asked a few
questions about Jay’s family and the plans for the cookout following his release before he said he was going to be keeping up with him to make sure he didn’t do anything dumb, telling him to handle his business. Jay reassured him, “No problem.” And the parole officer left.

There was one other, shorter comment my recorder caught during an interview with Katie. We’d been relocated from the intake room to the cafeteria table in Rec 2, when Karen walked towards us with three large gift bags in her hands, festooned with ribbons and bows, with tissue paper exploding out of the top of each one. Katie broke from her discussion with me to ask Karen, “You got me something in the bags?” Karen responded, “No, that’s for my three kids going to YCP. I got ‘em a little something to say goodbye. You know me by now, girl. You know when you leave, I’m gonna give you a goodbye gift, too.” Katie cocked her head to one side and told Karen, “Alright.” Karen stopped, looked at Katie, and added with a grin, “But yours is gonna be an ‘I’m-glad-to-see-you-go’ gift.” And Katie laughed. An example of verbal harassment that’s much less ambiguous in its sarcastic humor than the episode that opened this section.

Resistance

Juvenile defiance was not only manifested in a physical or verbal tête-à-tête between staff and youth but can also take the form in other acts and gestures that aren’t as overt, hostile or violent. Macleod presents a brief discussion of resistance analysis in his work, explaining

student resistance represents a fertile area for academic study because it offers the possibility of transcending the structure-agency dualism. Resistance theory examines the ongoing, active experiences of individuals while simultaneously perceiving in oppositional attitudes and practices a response to structures of constraint and domination. (2008, p. 21-22)
While I didn’t witness many overt acts of resistance and wasn’t privy to many of the subrosa defiance (Scott, 1990), the discussions I had with the youth resonated with Macleod’s identification that resistance is one way to transcend the “structure-agency dualism.” Without many ways to express their frustration or find some agency and pursue recourse, my participants talked about how they resorted to resisting, acts that ranged from relatively harmless and unnoticeable to overt displays of defiance. This area of study certainly merits more discussion and analysis than I’m able to give it here, for I agree with Macleod that it’s undoubtedly a “fertile area for study.” My participants engaged in such acts of resistance out of tedium or boredom at times and, at others, the acts signified much more as they reacted against the “structures of constraint and domination.”

The most extreme display of resistance was focused on the surveillance infrastructure when one youth whose anger, following his sentencing which he thought was unfair, persisted through the bus ride from the court room to his facilities. Once he was back in his cell, he managed to climb high enough in the room to reach the corner of the cell where the surveillance camera was housed, protected by a pane of tinted plexiglass. I understand that it took quite the effort to bust through the plexiglass; once through, the juvenile grabbed the security camera and yanked it from the wall and the cubby hole vomited all manner of electrical wires and cables. The act resulted in the death of the video feed for his room and several other rooms on the same side of the wing. The viewing monitors in the control room displayed a flashing icon of a video camera behind the international “No” symbol. The act compounded the juvenile’s punishment, providing an example for Rios when he writes, “As Paul Willis (1977) has
demonstrated, in resisting their oppression, working class youth often dig themselves deeper into a hole, perpetuating their subordinate status in society” (2007, p. 26). The youth was transferred to LTI in short order.

Resistance within the facility, however, didn’t always, or even often, take such extreme forms. The most familiar sound of the facility that stays with me to this day are the reverberating, throbbing echoes up and down the halls as feet and fists beat on the inside of steel cell doors. During an early visit, one of the supervisors asked me to come with her to the cell of one juvenile who had been kicking the door because he had been placed on lockdown. As the key began to click inside of the lock, we could see the youth run from near the door and hop on top of his slab, jumping on it as my daughter does her bed. The kicking was his way of expressing his frustration at being placed on lockdown, so the discussion turned toward his punishment. The supervisor explained that he was put on lockdown because he had procured, somehow, too much toilet paper (too much of which is considered contraband) and used it to clog up the toilet which caused the room to flood (a relatively common form of resistance at this facility). He said it wasn’t fair that he was put on lockdown for clogging the toilet. The supervisor was thoroughly unconvinced, telling him that the evidence took the form of water seeping out from under his door and only his door. Adamantly, he said, “NOT the toilet! . . . It was the sink.” He then smiled and the supervisor informed him that this is not the type of technicality that would result in his being removed from lockdown, so he remained. She warned him that any further kicking on her door would result in a longer punishment in the bar room. She locked the door behind us and the door was given a temporary reprieve from the merciless thudding of the juvenile’s soles.
During an interview with Bambam, I asked him about the flooding and if he had ever done it. He insisted that he had not but he had roommates who had. The youths took special satisfaction when it happened enough that it necessitated a professional plumbing service to come out to the facilities and empty the lines of the accumulated detritus, at a cost to the facilities. Bambam said that he heard it cost $6,000 one time and upon hearing that, some of the offenders responsible were proud. But it was a foul manner of defiance that Bambam objected to because the toilets at one end of the hall, if backed up, could lead to the toilets not working properly at the other end of the hall. The resulting mess and smell was intolerable and Bambam said that these kids were wrong because they were trying to get the staff mad, but were really only angering their incarcerated peers. I asked Bambam how they were able to affect such a stunt considering the contraband stranglehold and monitoring of personal items in the cell. He provided a list of items that he’d known have been flushed:

People flush sheets; they flush their puzzles—we don’t get no puzzles no more because of that fact. They flush rags, they flush combs, they flush our lotion cups, they flush wads of toilet paper, they flush candy wrappers, they flush all kinda stuff. Somebody was eatin’ in their room—people on lockdown when they’re in their rooms, they bring their trays to their room. Well, people—they had a bunch of finger-sized steak sticks—they flushed like ten of ‘em like down in the toilet and they was stopping up the toilet. They stopped up the drainage—just filled with ‘em. Nothin but steak sticks.

Toilet paper, as a result, was rationed and the youths weren’t allowed any more than their allotment because they ended up clogging up the toilet. One juvenile saved his toilet paper and over the course of several weeks formed a very impressive, nearly perfectly spherical ball out of toilet paper that he would wet, shape, and then allow to dry and harden. Having a ball in the cell is considered a privilege; one guard told me that he felt having a ball to play with “keeps them from going nuts.” This juvenile, however,
hadn’t accumulated enough incentives for a ball (again the concern was that the youths
would usher the ball into the plumbing system) but still wanted one, so he made his own.
The staff member who discovered this item of contraband didn’t seize it, in part because
he was so impressed at the ball’s structure. Eventually, though, the ball found its way
into the secure custody of the control room.

Resistance also took the form of graffiti in the walls and every room sported
several names scrawled into the paint and cinderblock walls and the steel doors. As we
photographed the facility, Nemo took a picture of the inside of one of the steel doors to
show the graffiti to readers (Figure 24).

*Figure 24. Graffiti scratched, etched, and inked to the inside of a cell door. (Photo credit: Nemo)*
As they looked at the photograph, Nemo and Fisher offered different explanations why juveniles would etch their names into the door and walls. Nemo believed that the youths did it out of boredom; there was simply nothing better to do than to occupy their time than by creating graffiti with the sharpened end of a comb. Fisher disagreed, saying, “But it’s not cuz nobody bored—it’s just basically to let ‘em know well, this person been here and that person been there and where they from” reflecting pride in “reppin’ ” their neighbourhood. Inmate names weren’t the only ones to grace the walls. There were plenty of names of and references to neighbourhoods and communities within the city and I saw some of the same neighbourhood names several times. If all of the geographical areas indicated by the graffiti were indexed, I believe it would reflect a proportional relationship between incarceration and patrolled communities discussed in Chapter 6. There were a lot of names for low-income, primarily Black neighbourhoods and public housing projects. References to more affluent communities, within the same town, were absent. When he first arrived at the facility and found himself staring at the walls and inside of the door, Nemo was struck by the abundance of names found on a single door cell and wanted to shock my readers in the same manner. Both Fisher and Nemo said that getting caught creating graffiti was a punishable offense but monitoring it was difficult. In a room or on a door full of graffiti, how can the administration and staff keep track? So the youths did it anyway because, they felt, it was simultaneously against the rules and something they could get away with even if it wasn’t as dramatic as pulling a security camera out of the wall or even if the intention was explicitly defiant, because “whether deliberately or only tacitly, youths’ resistant behaviours can be seen as responses to relations of domination and subordination” (Conrad, 2006, p. 4).
Resistance also took the form of contraband and included items from the completely banal to the potentially harmless. The first reference to contraband took place as I walked down one of the halls with a security staff member to conduct a visible inspection of a room for a juvenile who was on suicide watch. I recorded what I saw and heard in my field notes:

*The kid was locked up as a suicide case—self-mutilation. He had managed to give himself a tattoo on his hand. When we went by his cell to check on him, he was looking out the small window pane on his door, like so many other window panes on so many other doors in the facility. I found that the square windows on the cell doors were often filled with the faces and gaze of the juveniles. Sharing the window with his face was a small paper crane that he had made origami-style out of toilet paper. It was an impressively intricate piece of work. As we looked in, the security guard told me that he wasn’t supposed to have that crane because anything fashioned out of toilet paper could be considered contraband.*

The first thing that came to my mind when I saw this crane was a book that I’d read years ago, *Sadako and the Thousand Paper Cranes* (Coerr, 1977), a story about a dying young girl who endeavored to make 1,000 paper cranes in order to make her wish, a symbol for hope and peace. Conversely, the last thing that came to my mind when I saw this artistic crane was that it would be considered an illegal item for a youth to possess or have created. And a couple of days later, I heard, for the first time, a contraband warning accompanied by a threat following a night of guest speakers in the gymnasium. The New Leash on Life volunteer coordinator brought candy as a reward for the youths’ behaviour. They ate and traded candy, quickly, because the security staff told them that everything needed to be eaten before they got back to their rooms. After a few minutes of visiting between the juveniles and the guest speakers, they were ordered to line up, get quiet, and place their hands behind their backs in accordance with “walking policy.” One final time, the escorting guard warned them that a write up awaited anyone whose cell turned
up candy or empty wrappers later and confectionary contraband began to materialize from pockets and surface from socks.

Candy was one of the most common forms of contraband and just before I arrived at the facilities, one of the youths had been busted for contraband, in the form of Starburst candies that his sister smuggled into the detention center and slipped to the youth during visitation hours one evening. Although it was “only” candy, the staff took such attempts seriously because, they explained, it could easily have been something else that was potentially much more dangerous or illicit than candy. The youths, nevertheless, treated this type of contraband much the same way that Luttrell’s pregnant teen participants treated

the food items they routinely (but secretly) brought into the classroom. Items like soda, chips, and candy bars were contraband that served as social glue between the girls. These food items were exchanged with both a playful and a more serious nose-thumbing at the powers that be. (2002, p. 77)

These items, though relatively harmless, could represent for the youth successful contradictions of facility policy.

Bambam pointed out, though, that the candy wrappers could be used to clog up the toilets. “Some people flush candy wrappers,” he points out. Thus, “candy’s contraband. Broken combs—they’ll flush broken combs cuz it’s contraband—it’s also considered a weapon.” His comment serves to segue from the more benign examples of contraband to the potentially violent. He talked about how broken combs can be turned into sharp shanks and used as a weapon, a process that requires much time and patience:

Well, you grab the handle on one of the combs I showed you that we use. The first little notch—break the rest of the things off and just leave the first little notch and sharpen the point. They’ll use it to stab people or whatever. They consider—I mean they watch that. If you have too much toilet paper it’s considered contraband. All you can have is one tube of toothpaste per person in each room.
Bambam’s description here of the shank juxtaposed with toilet paper and toothpaste highlight the inclusive and broad nature of “contraband” as a reference. Jay talked about how toothbrushes can be filed down and used as weapons. He also guessed that might be how the youths were carving their names into the cinderblock walls. He’d never etched his name onto the bricks but knew that it had to be done with something sharp so perhaps, he suggested, that the inmates were making shanks to create graffiti as opposed to creating a weapon. They were able to get a sharp point on the toothbrush from the following method:

Shanks, that’s contraband. Niggas be makin’—they prolly made it out of their toothbrush. Their toothbrush can get sharp, sharp, sharp. Like this is how they make the shank with a toothbrush. They put water on it and they find a hard metal spot. People say scrubbing on the sink but the sink ain’t nothing you can scrub against. So they find like somewhere on the wall that’s sharp or on the door on the side of the door. And they scrape. And scrape. And it takes about a hour to make it real sharp. Real, real, real sharp like. You can stab yourself like that—it’s like a pin needle.

One inmate allegedly managed to get his toothbrush handle so sharp that he used an ink pen and the improvised shank to give himself a tattoo. And I thought about the origami artist that I’d seen weeks before and wondered if his artistic skills included creations on his own skin, but Jay never did say who he’d heard done it or knew who it had been.

Despite the prohibition and the searches, the youths constantly tried to bring items into their rooms they shouldn’t have. I asked my participants if they wanted a copy of the consent form to keep in their rooms and they told me that they probably couldn’t, because it would be considered contraband. Bambam asked me for a copy of the pictures of the dogs that he’d taken but instructed me to put it in his box of personal items in the control
room because even though he’d like to have it in his room, he couldn’t as it would be considered contraband. I asked him just how many things were considered contraband and he said there were “a lot,” and every day there was probably more entering the facility.

“It’s supposed to be a very secure place. You’re not supposed to be able to smuggle no drugs, no cigarettes, no nothing. But people smuggle drugs and cigarettes and all in here. Contraband gets in here. You can get criminal charges, possible criminal charges. If you have tobacco products in here, you have weed, you have any kind of drug or anything that’s illegal for a juvenile to have, it is a charge. They will charge you with it, if you get caught with it. Some people are slick and they will hide it somewhere like let’s say the gym or the classrooms. They gonna hide pills, cigarettes whatever in there so if a staff finds it there, they can’t charge nobody with it.”

The policing of contraband continues. And so does the accumulation of contraband within the walls and inside the cells of the facility. The prohibition of such items as candy to sharp shanks to illegal drugs aren’t enough to prevent some juveniles from “nose-thumbing” the powers that be.

**Surveillance**

During the interviews and while accompanying the youths as they photographed the facilities, the discussion of surveillance and the telegraphic means (specifically, video camera ubiquity) came up often. Each participant spoke about the surveillance aspect in the facilities, hyperaware and very sensitive to always being on camera. And the cameras positioned in their rooms created the most objection as the immediacy demonstrated Scott’s contention that “the closer the surveillance, the more incentive subordinates have to foster the impression of compliance, agreement, deference” (1992, p. 89-90). The weight of this compliance was a subordinating factor but it also fostered, within the
juveniles, severe privacy concerns. Discipline could be enforced through the surveillance omnipresence because it is

exercised through its invisibility; at the same time it imposes on those whom it subjects a principle of compulsory visibility. In discipline, it is the subjects who have to be seen. Their visibility assures the hold of the power that is exercised over them. It is the fact of being constantly seen, of being able always to be seen, that maintains the disciplined individual in his subjection. (Foucault, 1995, p. 187)

All of the juveniles took photographs of the cameras that were, at that moment, photographing them, carrying their images to the control room digitally, for monitoring and storage. In the interviews following the discussions it was clear that the video intrusion into their lives had achieved the “major effect of the Panopticon” as it

induced in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power. So to arrange things that the surveillance is permanent in its effects, even if it is discontinuous in its action; that the perfection of power should tend to render its actual exercise unnecessary. (Foucault, 1995, p. 201).

Katie chose to photograph a policy sign on the wall (see Figure 25) because it encapsulated, for her, the perpetual supervision they experience.

Figure 25. Signage reminding inmates of mandatory surveillance. (Photo credit: Katie)
When asked about this photograph she explained, “It feels like we gotta be watched at all times, you know, you got a camera in your room. That’s just—like you bein’ watched at all times.” When I attempted to summarize her explanation to me and I said her primary complaint is that she’s supervised, she cut me off before I could finish and emphatically added, “all the time.”

She then turned her attention to the next photograph she took (see Figure 26)

![Figure 26. Security camera affixed to gymnasium wall. (Photo credit: Katie)](image)

and said: “This is how they see us. This is what they use to look at us—and it’s the whole time we in there. Somebody’s always in the control room, taking a pic, like watching us. Everytime, everywhere we turn around, somebody watchin’ us.”
She made a reference to the control room, which sits in the middle of the east and west cell wings, much like the single observation structure of the Panopticon. The juveniles had no idea what the inside of the control room looked like; Nemo wanted to photograph the control room but was not allowed inside and had to satisfy himself with a shot from the outside (Figure 27).

![Figure 27. Outside the control room. (Photo credit: Nemo)](image)

explaining that he wanted to take it “to let [readers] know how they open the doors. How everything’s operated around here—from one room. Everything is operated by that one room . . . And everything you do, they gonna look at.” He couldn’t photograph inside the control room because it was one departure from the traditional Panopticon, not arranged so that “everyone to come and observe any of the observers” and remained a sort of “seeing machine” in a “dark sort of room” (Foucault, 1995, p. 207). Nemo felt very conspicuous at the facilities. It was his first time being locked up and the amount of surveillance that took place at the facilities surprised him. Once again, as with the graffiti
on the inside of the door, Nemo wanted to make the reader realize some of the things that surprised him because the readers might then be surprised, too.

The juveniles felt the intrusion in the most private, personal acts such as going to the bathroom; the toilets (Figure 28) sit in the room with nothing blocking them from the eyes on the other side of the video camera.

![Figure 28. Cell toilet and sink, with short privacy wall next to the toilet. (Photo credit: Jay)](image)

Nemo’s biggest concern was that this part of his life would be broadcast:

> When you’re at home you got freedom to just use the bathroom. You ain’t gotta worry about nobody lookin’ at you or whatever. And you gotta kinda turn your back so they don’t look at you—you gotta cover up even if you by yourself—gotta cover up so nobody look at you on the camera or nothing like that. That’s how I look at it. I don’t like bein’ on camera all the time.

It also bothered Katie; she noted, “Like, man I really wanna use the bathroom right now but can this camera see me? Like man—it’s crazy. I really wanna go home. But you can’t go home. So it’s just somethin’ that you gotta deal with.” Such an “onstage, public transcript exhausts the whole of social life” for these kids, as they worry
their most basic bodily functions are being broadcast; the effect is accomplished through “a more or less complete pattern of surveillance to monitor any potentially subversive discourse. (Scott, 2002, p. 128) The juveniles were unaware of it, but the reality was that the cameras have been occluded so that the toilet areas of the cell are unable to be seen; the youth aren’t informed of this because the administration believed it could lead to more serious security and safety issues if they are aware that there’s a spot in the room where they might be off camera.

A larger concern, vis a vis surveillance, moving forward is that secure custody facilities aren’t going to be the only sites of surveillance in their lives. Their schools feature surveillance hardware and techniques (discussed in Chapter 7). And Bambam and Katie talked about being on camera at health care facilities. Wacquant points out the growing surveillant aspect of youth in their homes and neighbourhoods as a result of public policy and legislated permissiveness:

During the 1980s, with the support of the federal Department of Justice, most big American cities established computerized registries called “SHODI youths” (the acronym means “serious and habitual offender/drug infraction”), which catalog teenagers believed to be real or potential delinquents—a convenient pretext for placing segregated neighbourhoods and their residents under reinforced police and penal surveillance. (2009, p. 136)

The surveillance at the facilities makes for an effective, microcosmic case study for the investigation and analysis of juvenile attitudes toward surveillance and surveillance technology, both of which are growing at tremendous rates. The overt omnipresence of video cameras provided my participants with a surveilled reality that was part of an intrusive structure that might not exist, or be as easily identifiable or immediate, in their lives at home and school. The responses and anxiety about having their lives monitored to such an extent provides valuable commentary on the emotional responses to these
methods as well as intensifying the urgency with which such means are interrogated and monitored themselves, for “punishment, incarceration, and surveillance represent the new face of governance. (Giroux, 2009, p. 22). Inverting the surveillance structure through giving the juveniles cameras is but a first step, though a crucial one for understanding how youth respond to and feel about being monitored so often.

Cells

The security cameras were not the only issue related to their individual cells that the inmates discussed. Because they spent most of their days and, to their dismay, most of their weekends (several inmates mentioned how the weekends were much worse and felt noticeably longer than the weekdays) in these rooms, they were a focal point of discussion and central to the constricting feeling of the youths’ subordination. When the students spoke about being in their cells, it was, as expected, without affection. Earlier in the dissertation, I mentioned Bambam’s comparison of himself in his cage to the dogs in theirs saying that they had “similarities” because “They don’t wanna go in the cage, we don’t wanna go in our cage—I mean our cells.” This cage metaphor came up in discussions with other juveniles as well.

When I asked Nemo about his cell, he talked about being “caged in” and the results of the lack of privacy and immediate proximity when he had to share such a small space with a roommate:

Everything you do, you caged in, you can’t really open your door. You have a roommate and every time he go to . . . you know . . . do number one you gotta listen to it because you have no choice. He do number two, you gotta smell it, you don’t have no choice. You can’t just be like, ‘Aw this stinks, I’m ‘bout to walk out the room til you get done.’ Basically it’s like you sleepin’ in the bathroom—to me that’s how I look at it—you sleepin in the bathroom.
Living in the cell was subordinating enough, the walls a reminder of the absence of freedoms, denial of liberty (Foucault, 1995) they have outside. Rider reiterated the compression of the walls as time goes on, intensifying the isolation and lack of liberty when he says, “You got them blue walls. They just seem like they get closer and closer in to you.” For Nemo, that claustrophobia intensified because of the public scatology and the room seems to shrink further when his roommate had to use the toilet or as he sought privacy (discussed in the previous section) as he used it himself.

Nemo also took a picture inside the cafeteria (Figure 29) to reinforce, for the reader, the perpetuity of cages within the facility.

![Figure 29. Serving window and area in the cafeteria space of Rec 2. (Photo credit: Nemo)](image)

As he looked at this image, Nemo explained why he took this picture: “To just show ‘em how they feed us—feed us behind cages and all that. How we everything we do is basically behind a cage. Caged in. Basically everything we do is behind a cage.” More than any other participant, Nemo referred to an audience when he spoke about why he took the pictures. As he photographed, he made similar comments verbally; for him the
act was one of exposition as he wanted to make public this particular hidden transcript. And though the image of the bars in the cafeteria weren’t of his cell, the photograph reinforced the confinement of all these “cages” surrounding him which highlighted the constriction he feels in the most personal of cages, his cell.

Katie also used the word “cage” to describe her penal existence and talked about the window in her room and the fences surrounding the yard when she says, “It’s like we caged in, but it’s like—hey, if you wanna go outside, if you like outside, that’s as close to outside as you gonna get in here.” As her focus turned to the cell, specifically, she agreed that she should be punished for her actions but concluded, “I don’t feel nobody deserves to be caged.” Her comment invited a discussion of the punitive and what’s “deserved” by youth offenders, if not imprisonment. Discussions of penality and incarceration, their histories and genealogies now have another perspective added; Katie’s experiential comment compounded the doubt she placed in incarceration as a justifiable or “deserved” form of punishment.

The lack of space and privacy as they related to the scatalogical bothered Nemo more than the other punitive aspect he identified with the cell, but he mentioned another when I asked him what else was worst about his cell. Without hesitation, he answered, “boredom” from “sittin’ in your room. All the time you gotta be in the room” and reinforced his disdain for the boredom by adding:

We talk but after a time—after a certain amount of time it gets boring. And you can’t sleep the whole time in here; that gets boring too. And the only thing you gotta do when you’re up is look at the walls in your room. Me and my roommate got so bored one day we counted all the walls—all the bricks in our room. We counted all the bricks in the room we was so bored. It was 414 of ‘em. We was so bored we just counted the bricks—that’s how boring it is in here. That’s why I wouldn’t wish this on nobody—it’s boring.
The pervasiveness and weight of boredom resembles the Boredom monologue authored and performed by incarcerated juveniles in Conrad and Campbells’s study:

**Bored:** This place sucks. I am so bored. I can’t believe I’m stuck here for six months. I’ve only been here three weeks and I’m already going crazy. There’s nothing to do. Same thing day after day. I’m ready to do anything for a little excitement. Even basketball gets boring after a while. (2006, p. 382)

Bambam echoed the frustration borne of boredom and the lack of worthwhile things to do. He thought that some of the inmates clog up the sink for a little excitement and that there might not be any defiance associated with it at all, that it’s “just something to do.” He’d admitted that he never clogged up the sink or toilet so I asked him what he did, then, to pass the time if not by causing trouble or breaking the rules. There weren’t many options, so he usually just lied down and slept or he’d lie down and read a book or maybe talk to his roommate. I asked him what the worst part was about being locked up, being in this place and his short reply was, “bein’ in our room” before pausing and then adding, “Weekends are the longest. The weekends we don’t get much time out our rooms because we have no schooling. The weekends are, I’d say, *harsh.*” There’s no physical labour taking place and no exerting physical demands made on these juveniles, but the time sitting in their cells, alone or even with a roommate, boredome becomes a tedious torture. Jay used his time to think, calling his cell a “thinking spot” because that’s all he can really do in his room. Think. And rap. But sometimes that got him into trouble. So he’d go back to thinking. He didn’t share what he thought about or if he found these periods of time to reflect to be personally edifying or illuminating; rather, it was, again, “something to do.”

Fisher wondered if all this time spent in his cell was making him a “jail person.” He’d never thought of himself as a “jail person” because he saw himself as a strong-
willed individual who can resist peer pressure and getting into trouble, if he chose to. But finding himself in these cells so often allowed some doubt to creep into his mind. He worried that if he came to accept this place as somewhere he doesn’t mind being or even found some happiness in being, that he could end up becoming a “jail person.” He’d repeated the phrase several times and, after I’d asked him what he meant, he provided this definition:

It’s like when your mentality is that you could sit up there and honestly say, ‘I like this place. I’m good—I’m happy with it.’ You know what I’m sayin? I might be feelin’ good, I might be happy but at the same time it’s not a place I wanna be and they got some people that do stuff knowing they gonna come here and when they get here they like, ‘Forget it.’ You know that person don’t mind bein’ in here. I’d rather be in that world doin’ something constructive even if it’s shootin’ basketball, chillin’ with my girlfriend, cookin’, cuz me, I love to cook.

Fisher struggled with finding himself in an area between being a person who wanted to be outside, doing something constructive—a not-jail person—and being a person who came to the facility so much that it didn’t matter to him, who would arrive and think “Forget it” and can honestly be happy in jail. He continued, talking about how important his cooking was to him which spirals into a story about his family: his baby niece for whom he cared a great deal, his sister with whom he’d done prison time, his grandmother whom he cooked for, and his dad with whom he hoped eventually to open a restaurant when he gets out of prison. This person, with a family and obligations and desires outside of his cell, was not a jail person but he began to wonder whether or not prison could make him one.

The hallway spaces and places leading to and between cells were seen as extensions of the cells, themselves. The hallways were areas that existed only to conduct
them from one cage to another. Bambam wanted to capture the experience of walking to
the cells by photographing from the end of the south side of the west wing (Figure 30)

![Figure 30. Hallway leading to cells, west wing, south side. (Photo credit: Bambam)](image)

He singled this picture out for inclusion because he wanted readers to see what he saw
every time he walked down the hall to his cell; he also liked the picture because “it does
look like a prison.” As he looked at this picture, his discussion began to focus on other
aspects of his incarceration. He then focused on the door at the far end of the hallway
and realized that as many times as he’s seen it, he’s not sure what’s on the other side. He
guessed that maybe they led “to the open area or it might lead into a fenced in area. But I
think they lead into an open area. And um they keep them locked shut—they never open
‘em.” The areas inside the facility he admitted to knowing “like the back of his hand” but
a door so close to him was also, in a way, very foreign to him. He then talked about the
regimented way that they were required to walk down the halls, observing “walking
policy.” This policy was the same reason that Nemo took a very similar picture of one
wing’s hallway. Again, he referred to the readers and how he wanted “to show them how
our hallways look.” Even these hallways were a space of rules and regulations even though it’s just a simple hallway: “There are pieces of tape to show how we gotta walk in a straight line and the tape is there for us to walk on.” Fisher chimed in, adding, “And you can’t be in the brown area of the floor either. You gotta go on like this, through there [motioning with his fingers along the floor of the Rec room where we were interviewing].” The prevalence of order and regulations weren’t lost on these kids and these hallways shared meaningful analogs with the cells to which they lead.

The Bar Room

For all of the participants in the study, the strongest representation of subordination and punishment (in terms of cell space) was the bar room, a cell at the end of the hall that differed from the rest of the cells. Unlike the normal cells, the bar room had an additional wall separating the juvenile from the rest of the room, a cell within a cell, and a space reserved “for certain prisoners . . . who deserved special punishment” (Foucault, 1995, p. 124). After unlocking the steel door, there’s another door waiting, one made up of bars just like, as Fisher put it, “adult jail.” He took the following picture (Figure 31) of the bar room:
Figure 31. The bar room with its interior bar door open, allowing access between the two areas. (Photo credit: Fisher)

Prior to taking the picture above, Fisher walked up to the slab and arranged the blankets to make it look like someone was lying down on the slab, so that it looked “more real” so that when people looked at it they could imagine a kid being locked up behind those bars. The bars swing closed and can be locked, with the sink and toilet on the other side from the youth. When I first explained the visual component of the study with the cameras and how they would be allowed to photograph the facility, Fisher’s immediate question was “Like I could go to the bar room and take a picture?” Later, as we looked at the photograph (Figure 31), I asked him why he wanted to go there first and why he took this picture, he began with a reference to readers:
Because I know people gonna read this book and they might not know exactly what a detention center is but they gonna get a good idea [with this picture] and be like, ‘man . . .’ [shaking his head]. I make sure I catch like how it’s messed up, up in there. I mean, that’s not a pretty sight to see. I’ve been locked up in there like two weeks one time.

He then proceeded to talk about the flood lamps outside the window of the cell that were always on, even at night, and how that affected his ability to sleep. He then used the same cage metaphor that the other juveniles referenced as he described the lack of space behind the bars:

Yea, like bein’ behind a cage, you can’t do—I can’t just tell you exactly how many feet it is, but maannn . . . if my arms was a little bit longer I could prolly touch the walls and the cage together. You just behind that, caged the whole time. You can’t use [the bathroom] when you want to. You gotta yell, yell, yell down the hall just to get somebody to come down there and unlock it.

This threat of the bar room was omnipresent in the facility. Inmates would tell one another about their time in the bar room or what other students had done in the bar room. Jay compared it to “the hole,” the term used at many prisons for the worst punishment that could be inflicted via solitary confinement; the threat of the bar room greater than any other at KPJDC. Foucault points out that “imprisonment—mere loss of liberty—has never functioned without a certain additional element of punishment that certainly concerns the body itself” manifested in this “solitary confinement” (1995, p. 17). “When you get in trouble everybody says, ‘I’m a send you to the bar room.’ They threaten you with the bar room” according to Jay, “so the bar room is like the hole.” Jay spoke of the bar room from experience, having served out punishments in there. When I asked him what he’d done to be sent to the bar room, he said he’d been “rappin’ too loud.” He explained that he was rapping a lot, and loudly, and it was getting on the nerves of the staff so they warned him that they’d put him in the bar room if he
continued. He continued. True to their word, he was escorted to the bar room. He said it was tough, but he was able to handle it. I asked him what he did to handle the time alone. His reply: “rap.”

Jay was also bothered by the separation in the room between the slab behind the bars and the toilet and sink on the other side of the bars, locking them out of the facilities making the juveniles “yell, yell, yell” as Fisher put it. Such an arrangement can lead to an unsavory reality. Jay thinks it is the “ nastiest room”:

   Jay: “Can’t use the bathroom, can’t get into the sink.”
   Jonathan: “So what do you do – you just have to hold it?”
   Jonathan: “You gotta do what you gotta do?”
   Jay: “Yep.”

Jay’s confession here offered an explanation why Fisher said the bar room “stinks, it smell like feces and urine.”

   The bar room represented the culmination of confinement in the facilities. The physical subordination of the four walls in each cell was intensified in the bar room and their concerns over privacy, confinement, solitude, and the bathroom became more acute as they photographed the room and talked about it. They experienced marginalization many times before their arrival to and their time spent in KPJDC but the subordinative manifested itself in no place greater, in the minds of these juveniles, than this room. Fisher put it most succinctly with his understatement: “You don’t wanna be up in there—it’s stressful.”

   “This place just make you worse”

   Too many brothers daily heading for the big pen
   Niggas comin’ out worse off than when they went in
   - “Trapped” by Tupac Shakur
Fisher’s comment, “This place just make you worse,” opens this section, allowing for the possibility that kids who enter these facilities might exit worse than when they came in, their carceral experiences having changed them. After all, “the prison cannot fail to produce delinquents. It does so by the very type of existence that it imposes on its inmates” (Foucault, 1995, p. 266). This issue surfaced in the joint interview with Fisher and Nemo when Fisher pointed to the first offender, Nemo, sitting next to him and said, “He . . . basically he here for a fight. Next time maybe he come for like sellin’ drugs, kickin’ down somebody door, armed robbery, know what I’m sayin’?” I asked why he felt that Nemo, who didn’t appear to be a troublesome kid and was committed to never coming back here, would leave the facilities worse. Fisher explained, citing his own experience:

“[Nemo’s] around kids that been here more than once. And he’ll just get influenced like—they teach him worse stuff that they know cuz when I went to the group home I was locked up with a lot of older people. They taught me stuff that I ain’t really know. We didn’t have lighters up there and I didn’t know that you could stick some pencil legs in a socket and wrap another pencil leg up in a paper towel and touch it on the other pencil leg that’s in the socket and it’ll turn it into a lighter cuz it’ll light up the paper. I didn’t know stuff like that. Like you just learn worse stuff. And I saw kids take all kinds of chemicals and stuff to get high—I saw kids take bleach, dishwashing liquid and all kinda stuff like that and get high off it.”

The risk for Nemo, as Fisher saw it, compounded the longer he stays, the more veteran offenders he’s exposed to, and the more frequent any subsequent sentences at the facility. Fisher credited his ability not to be influenced easily with resisting invitations to
participate in getting high or making his own, homemade tattoo (another process he learned in lockdown and explained to me, involving a CD player, wires, pencap, needle and a mix of shampoo, dishwashing liquid, and ink). He did, however, admit to “hooking up” with people he’d met while incarcerated, risking failing a drug test and violating his probation: “I done met people they first time up in here and sometimes we get out like a few days apart and I’m hookin’ up with them like, ‘Let’s go smoke.’ ” These relationships, engendered and nurtured behind bars, exist because “the prison makes possible, even encourages, the organization of a milieu of delinquents, loyal to one another, hierarchized, ready to aid and abet any future criminal act” (Foucault, 1995, p. 267).

When I asked Bambam if he felt like this place helped him or, instead, made him worse, he answered:

I think it’s made me worse. I mean, yeah we come in here—but while we’re in here all it is is just fights, arguments. There’s no construction or rebuilding process of the human mind or what have you. The attitude, okay, we have church, we have groups that come in like church and the art lady. But I mean other than that there’s no . . . self-building. You can’t build up yourself, I mean, yeah you might build it up yourself, your self-esteem. But there’s nobody else helping. It’s like no one really cares what you do when you get out. If you get out, then say don’t come back. Well, that’s like they’re jinxing you and when they say don’t come back, you always come back. I know people’s come in here, they say I ain’t comin’ back. I said it too . . . It’s just—all you are is locked up. You have no—you ain’t around a lotta people so you’re just building up anger or what have you while you’re locked up.”

His comment is directed more toward a rehabilitative aspect but also illustrates the emotional/psychological harm that’s done while being locked up. He didn’t mention anything specific about committing crimes or violating his probation, as Fisher did. For him, leaving “worse” had a distinctive emotional and self-esteem aspect and could have potentially damaging repercussions even though it didn’t directly relate to illegalities. As
I worked through the transcription and retranscription processes, I came across his answer, from an earlier interview, with the added perspective from his final interview and the import of his response had a much stronger impact. By the time we had our final formal interview and informal conversations, the damage to his self-esteem was evident and he certainly appeared emotionally “worse” than the last time I had seen him. This self-esteem referent didn’t have the same presence in the academic literature as the recidivist references to criminality, but signals an area for future work; “worse” is a more inclusive term than I initially would’ve guessed but these other, unexpected realizations are also crucial in evaluating the impact of the subordinative and punitive.

Katie also identified a similar risk, in the absence of any significant rehabilitation or coping strategies provided the youths. The judges and facility administration believe what they are doing is punishing the juveniles, “but there’s also other things that come with this punishment. Like kids come here and learn stuff that they wouldn’t learn outside.” In order to combat these influences, Katie thought that the people responsible for and involved in their incarceration needed to understand the complexities surrounding their punishment and needed to account for those unexpected (but not unsurprising, according to her) dynamics with some sort of rehabilitative component. Unfortunately she, and other participants, believed that such provisions are lacking.

The dilemma for rehabilitation within the facility began with whether or not the process can be truly effected from inside their cells. “Contrary to public policy, healthy rehabilitation cannot occur in detention. The success of our youth depends on our ability to assist them in developing a positive outlook of their contribution to the world” (Williams & Sapp-Grant, 2007, p. 331). Wacquant asserts, declaratively, that prison has
been “stripped of its rehabilitative pretention” (2009, p. 288). None of the youth indicated that they’d experienced anything truly rehabilitative while at KPJDC. Of all the participants, Bambam spoke about the conspicuous and relative absence of anything truly rehabilitative within the facility or required through his sentencing. He summarized his experiences with rehabilitation:

> It’s supposed to rehabilitate but they don’t really help you. You do your time and leave. If you’re in here for drugs, they don’t have no sessions on like drugs or anything. Fightin’? They don’t have nothing. They don’t have no anger management, nothing. You know like most places you would sit and watch a movie or something on anger management? They don’t do none of that.

I asked him if he thought any of those programs would make a difference for him, and he admitted that he wasn’t sure; the best he could offer was that he “thinks it’d be a lot better if they did do it, but I dunno.” Without trying these interventionist strategies, there’s no way of knowing and in order for them to make that determination, he felt, there needs to be, at least, an attempt. I asked him if there was anything he’d experienced that helped him or discouraged him from offending again and ending up back behind bars. He nodded his head, but then said, “It’s not this place. I don’t wanna go into state custody. I wanna get my life straightened up. I wanna get off drugs. I wanna live my life to the fullest and be successful in life. I don’t wanna be a failure.”

Once again, Bambam refers to an intrinsic, emotional desire borne of self-motivation and self-esteem, which he feels isn’t fostered or addressed while being locked up and the isolation is mentally confining. State custody for Bambam serves as the fearsome disincentive that LTI serves as for other juveniles and instead of saying that KPJDC helped him, what he says instead is that KPJDC isn’t a strong deterrent. They were willing to credit these facilities for being safer and having fewer risks than other
secure custody facilities in the state (Bambam compared it to a “daycare”), but none went as far as to say that they perceived much in the way of rehabilitative support here.

Where Bambam identified “rehabilitation” as a primary purpose of KPJDC, Foucault identified in incarceration generally when he wrote, “Work on the prisoner’s soul must be carried out as often as possible. The prison, though an administrative apparatus, will at the same time be a machine for altering minds” (1995, p. 125), Fisher said the main goal of juvenile detention was “discipline”—to produce, as Foucault put it, “subjected and practiced bodies, ‘docile’ bodies” (1995, p. 138)—but did acknowledge that “sometimes kids like need rehabilitation, ya know what I’m sayin’?” Like Bambam, though, those youths who are in need of rehabilitation aren’t going to receive enough while locked up, nor do they receive enough discipline. His proof? His own recidivism and what he’d witnessed as a repeat offender, the fact that he believed “Nine outta ten kids that come here gonna come back more than once, more than twice, more than three times.” Nemo, despite this being his first time and having served a couple of weeks at the time of our interviews, agreed with recidivists Bambam and Fisher. Nemo complied with the rules and regulations and generally behaved because he risked punishment that would intensify the tediousness of his boredom as a form of punitive discipline, as opposed to the offered incentives for his docility or because of anything he’s learned while locked up that’s changed his attitude or actions (via rehab). “It’s already boring,” he says. “If I get on lockdown that mean I don’t leave out my room at all. Or they move me to the bar room and no privileges.” His affirmation here was an example of a “situation” from Scott’s assertion that:

The dynamic of this process, it should be clear, holds only in those situations in which it is assumed that most subordinates conform and obey not because they
have internalized the norms of the dominant, but because a structure of surveillance, reward, and punishment makes it prudent for them to comply. (1990, p. 193)

The lack (and perhaps impossibility) of rehabilitation in the facilities creates a problem for both the incarcerated juveniles and the facilities that house them. The punitive/rehabilitative double bind leads to an emotional inertia or worsening that can be magnified once the kids are released back into society and return home to their neighbourhoods, facing the same temptations with no way of facing and coping with them. Jay, frustrated, explained,

You ain’t givin’ him no time. You ain’t givin’ a kid no time in the world to get it—and when he in here he away from the drugs anyway. You ain’t givin’ him no chance to go in the world and just be like, ‘Man—I don’t wanna be like that.’

Being released is only one component in combating recidivism; Asante Jr. agrees:

Abolishing slavery with no restitution is like opening the door to a prison cell, while leaving all other exits bolted, chained, and locked, and telling an inmate that “they are free.” The cell door, although perhaps the most confining, is but a multitude of forces that keeps the prisoner imprisoned. (2008, p. 37)

Without such changes in practices and attitudes and a (re)cycling of recidivism for these kids, graduating them from youth to adult facilities, prison becomes a space of “pure custody” which “promises no transformation of the prisoner through penitence, discipline, intimidation, or therapy.” Rather, it promises to promote security in the community simply by creating a space physically separated from the community in which to hold people” (Simon, 2007, p. 142-143).

The cells from which they are released epitomize the confining subordination that exists in many areas of this lockdown facility. There are certainly aspects of KPJDC, in terms of space, policy, and procedure, where these youths identified opportunities for recourse and the exercise of some agency, particularly as they related to other Louisiana
state custody facilities they’d known of or had heard about. Nevertheless, from the classroom to staff to surveillance to cell, the subordination they’d experienced in their communities, homes, and schools intensified as their lived space shrunk, while the rules and regulations regarding punishment grew. The accumulation of the subordinating in their incarceration certainly impacted their lives, desired and expected, post-prison. Goals and ideas about the future narrowed, influenced by the discouraging realities of their educational status and prison record.
Chapter 10: Toward Futures

Struggle is my address, where pain and crack lives,
Gunshots comin’ from sounds of Blackness,
Given this game with no time to practice,
Born on the Black list, told I’m below average,
A life with no cabbage,
That’s no money if you from where I’m from,
Funny, I just want some of your sun
Now my rage became freedom,
Writin’ dreams in the dark, they far but I can see ‘em,
- Common, “I Have a Dream”

The cumulative impact of the trans-spatial subordination in the lives of my participant youth was evident even as they considered what their futures looked like, immediately following their release and in the longer term. As we talked and as I studied the transcripts, I kept returning to Macleod’s (2008) discussion of expectation versus aspiration in the minds and lives of his participants. How Macleod differentiates between the two for the Hallway Hangers and the Brothers establishes an approach for understanding and contextualizing those responses and visions for these youth:

I would like to make an analytical distinction between aspirations and expectations. Both involve assessments of one’s desires and abilities, and the character of the opportunity structure. In articulating one’s aspirations, an individual weighs his or her preferences more heavily; expectations are tempered by perceived capabilities and available opportunities. Aspirations are one’s preferences relatively unsullied by anticipated constraints, expectations take these constraints squarely into account. (Macleod, 2008, p. 62)

For these kids, those “constraints” result from their lived experiences in each of the areas covered in Chapters 6 through 9. The aspirations covered a wide spectrum of careers, from music to sports to law while their expectations specified Graduate Equivalency Diplomas, the Armed Forces, and fast food restaurants, preferences drove the former while a tempered sobriety informed the latter. Macleod refers to “available opportunities” as a variable of temperance while Giroux sees opportunisti...
fact that possibilities and “power [are] never completely on the side of domination” but that “power is also born of a realistic sense of hope, one that situates new possibilities and dreams of the future within the realities of current structures of domination and oppression” (Giroux, 2009, p. xiii). Within their historical and these “current structures” of their subordination, most participants still felt constrained even after they were no longer behind bars. There remained, however, a conceptualization of the “good life” for a few of the participants where their capabilities and understated aspirations were closer to their expectations and more specifically articulated, the achievement of which constituted overcoming some of the subordinative in their lives.

**Aspirations**

Two of my participants, Jay and Rider, hoped that sports would be a pathway to a university education and beyond. Jay had a reputation in the city for his athletic ability and prowess on the football field and his athleticism afforded him educational opportunities at an early age. He played football for a predominately Black, urban middle school in the area but had received the attention of coaches at a local private school and ended up transferring to their campus, upsetting his former coach because he was now helping “them White people get wins.” Later, at high school, he benefited from an educationally permissive latitude at times because his eligibility and playing status were very important to the varsity prep’s team success, even as an underclassman. One of the security staff members followed the high school sports scene pretty closely and said that Jay certainly had enough talent to propel him to the next level, some level of postsecondary football (whether junior college or university) if he could only keep his head in the game.
Unfortunately, Jay’s record of run ins with the law jeopardized the possibility of a high school career, necessary to get the attention of postsecondary schools and recruits. He knew he couldn’t return to the public school system because he’d been expelled, but thought he might have a chance to enroll in a private high school that showed interest in him. These obstacles, however, didn’t deter him too much from general athletic aspirations; during my observation period he spoke more than once, and loudly, that he was going to play sports at the University of California at Los Angeles, but never gave any details as to why he believed this. He talked about his successes at the high school level even as an underclassman, which led to receiving letters from interested universities, including the state’s largest public institution, Louisiana State University. He said that football was “something I wanna do” and when I asked what career he wanted, his first response was “like playin’ football” before adding a rap career as another possibility. Jay was typically pretty adamant and definitely confident, but when he spoke about his football future he began discussing his plans and what he would do “if” he made it as a professional football player. There wasn’t a specific, declarative certainty and I was not sure whether or not it was a product of any doubts he might be having, the desire to be a rapper instead, or some other reason. I do believe, though, that he recognized that a career as a professional NFL (National Football League) player was closer to aspiration than expectation.

Even more ambiguity and uncertainty existed in Rider’s responses when he talked about his career as a professional athlete. I watched Rider play basketball in the gym most every day with the other youths and while he was certainly better, relative to the competition, I suspected he would find it a tougher road establishing himself as a high
school athlete vying for a university scholarship because his athletic skills weren’t elite on the basketball court. He did acknowledge that his forte was not basketball but rather, like Jay, football. When we began the discussion on what he wanted to do after he graduated from high school or got his GED (a point of confusion for him), he hesitated a couple of times while answering, “I . . . I wanna go to college and stuff. Prolly play for like a university or something.” The answer wasn’t clear and I didn’t get the sense that he was speaking with much volition about his choice, so I thought perhaps my question was unclear, so I tried stating it another way with a bit broader context and asked him, “What do you want?” His response was initially much more direct as he addressed a more immediate concern: “To get out of here.” It was a well-traveled sentiment for Rider as he spoke often of the five months spent locked up and how mad he would be if he was found innocent. But after mentioning his goal of release, he again became a bit less declarative, “Try to go to college and play football. Play sports.” He didn’t elaborate much on the “go to college” aspect of his answer so I do not know whether he saw college as primarily an educational opportunity or an athletic one. Again, one of my participants stopped short of asserting convincingly his athletic future, perhaps a recognition of the aspirational, by mentioning an attempt to play football (i.e. “try to”). This, rather than a more definitive assertion such as those found with other participants when we talked about their futures—both outside of and with regard to their carceral recidivism. Long-term, career-wise, Rider said he shared Jay’s dream and he wanted to “be an NFL player.” Also, like Jay, he had an alternative plan but the secondary career he was considering was much less glorious and potentially lucrative (for fame and fortune) to Jay’s rapper. Rider said that if he couldn’t be an NFL player then “I wanna
work for the state or something like that.” Rider was also younger than Jay and his ideas about the future were understandably more vague, but the gap between NFL player and rapper or NFL player and state employee is considerable, even given the age difference.

Jay wasn’t the only one who thought he might have a career in music, so did Katie. Unlike Jay’s and Rider’s doubt and relative lack of certainty, Katie felt that she would make it and, with conviction, shared her dreams and confidence with me.

Katie: “What I wanna do? I wanna be a singer.”
Jonathan: “So music’s a pretty big influence?”
Katie: “That’s what I wanna do . . . I feel like hey, I’m here but it’s not the end of the world. I’m gonna make it one way or another, I’m gonna make it. And I know I’m a make it because I put it in my heart.”
Jonathan: “And you know you gonna make it?”
Katie: “I know I’m gonna make it.”

When I asked her about her determination, she pointed to R&B artist Mary J. Blige’s success and example:

I feel like if she can go through all the stuff she went through—she went through abuse, the unneighbourly neighbourhoods and all of this and she still—she still made it. So I feel if she could make it and I done been through probably more than what she been through, I can make it too.”

She then cited Blige’s song “Stay Down” as an inspirational one for her personally because she thought it applied to her. Katie acknowledged the subordinating elements of her past (“abuse” and “unneighbourly neighbourhoods”) but believed she would overcome them and have a successful career as a singer. If that career didn’t work out, her backup plan was to “be a lawyer or something.” When I pointed out the academic requirements of the law degree and asked her how she might reconcile that with her other comments about school and education, she dismissed the potentiality of this backup plan and refocused the discussion back to the musical career. Her optimism, in our discussions about her aspirations, was much more focused on this “idealized future”
than the less than ideal autobiography of her past, reminiscent of Sonya, in Luttrell’s work with pregnant teens, who “was going to make herself [on the collage] in the future, as a singer . . . Sonya’s self-representation speaks not of a hard growing up, but of a yearning for an idealized future” (Luttrell, 2002, p. 64).

As Jay discussed his own dreams of becoming a rapper, he used more definitive diction than he did when he discussed his NFL aspirations. He said that he wanted to be a rapper more than an NFL player and that even if he were to make it as a successful professional athlete, he would use his fame and status and connections and resources to make himself, and friends of his, a group of successful rappers. He, too, found an iconic analog in the industry to compare himself to. Jay declared, “I know I can go somewhere rappin’, ya feel me? Because I just express myself and that’s what Tupac did—he just expressed himself.” More important than the vainglorious for Jay was that opportunity for self-expression as well as the ability to give back to his community. He talked about local rappers whom he admired because they gave back to their community and didn’t forget from where they’d come. His obligation to the community, as he perceived it, was to give them something that they can “love” that’s a part of them and the neighbourhood. He said that he was generally taken care of because he’d had talents for sports and rapping that other people recognized and his success would come with an obligatory requirement to give something back. He was a teenager using money from trafficking drugs to fund cookouts for family and friends and saw himself as a rapper giving back in order to “show love back to my community if I ever go somewhere.” He paused and then clarified, “when I go somewhere.” This certainty was as declarative and specific as Jay got in our discussions about his goals and future. Later, he spoke a bit more generally
about “going somewhere” and the good life, but was never more direct than he was
talking about his aspirations to become a rapper.

Music and sports accounted for the aspirations for half of my participants, but the
other three, Bambam, Nemo, and Fisher, weren’t without idealized goals of their own.
Bambam spoke with the least certainty of these three, with a number of different careers
he’d considered. He opened with the statement that he wanted to do something to show
that he “wasn’t gonna be a failure in life. I’m a be successful.” But beyond that, he
couldn’t articulate much detail and made reference to a few things he’d considered,
ranging from clearly aspirational, discussed here, to expected, discussed in an upcoming
section. Among the more aspirational was the desire to “get a law degree.” When we
discussed what that entailed, however, he wasn’t sure what he would have to do and what
the commitments involved were. When I asked him why he wanted a law degree, he said
that it was because he thought about coming back to work at KPJDC and he “knows it
does take a law degree to work here.” He then amended the statement, wondering if it
could be “any bachelors degree.” There were a number of pauses in his responses and in
the end, the sentiment he expressed most articulately and specifically was a desire to
work in juvenile justice, helping kids and he thought that his own experience as someone
who’d been locked up in these facilities would be an asset rather than a detriment.
Shortly after, however, he said that he might like to have a career in the “computer
business” and talked about a family member who worked with computers and had been
able to work in places like Cuba and Florida, an aspect of the job that appeals to him
because, as discussed earlier, Bambam relished the opportunities to travel with his
football team and travel on field trips, going to places that he wouldn’t otherwise have an
opportunity to travel to. His uncle had “been all over” and Bambam would like to do the same. The “computer business” might be just such an opportunity and he thought there might be some job security associated with it because “that’s what the world is gonna come down to. It’s gonna be all technology. You can see nowadays all technology is goin’ in all new devices.” He’d identified the burgeoning field of computer technology as a landing spot but could offer no further details of what he’d like to do within such a broad field of “computer business.”

Fisher’s aspirations tended toward the culinary and he felt it was also the most likely to happen; as such, his responses closed the gap between ambiguous aspirations and detailed expectations more than the previous respondents. He took pride in his own ability to rap and thought that he was “pretty good” at basketball but did not anticipate he was good enough at either to rely on his lyricism or athletic ability for a sound future. He turned to a passion that he shared in other discussions: cooking. Pressed into cooking at home for his grandmother and other family members, he’d gained an appreciation and enjoyment for cooking and hoped for a future in the restaurant industry. He said, “I’d love to be a cook cuz then it’ll be something I enjoy doin’ and something I get paid for.” It was also important for him because it was an opportunity to do something with his father, after he was released from prison, engaged in something that would help him resist the temptations that would lead to his own recidivism. Fisher spoke optimistically of this time, a few years down the line, when he gets “outta this town—my daddy gonna be home then. Well, he comin’ home in August and he’s talking about startin’ a family restaurant because we all know how to cook. And he told me since I’m his oldest child he told me he’s gonna need me to help run the business.”
He said that he’d talked to his father and in these conversations, his dad has explained that he might have to move to Texas in order to escape the circle of friends and cycle of behaviour that’s contributed to his criminal record and transgressions. Fisher knew that he couldn’t meet his father immediately but held out hope that, in a few years, he’d be able to move out there with him and pursue a career in cooking, in a restaurant for “Cajun or soul food.” Although clearly an aspiration for him, with time and distance separating him from that possibility, Fisher spoke with more optimism and specificity than Katie, Jay and Rider as they considered their own future hopes and plans.

Of all the youth, Nemo was perhaps the most realistic in terms of what he aspired to and what he expected to actually achieve. His response began with the reluctant, frustrated concession that a conventional high school diploma might not be in his future as a result of his unclear status in the local public school system. Since he’d been locked up, and surprised to find out that he’d been locked out of the public schools, he started thinking about what other options might be there for him. He didn’t include any postsecondary education in the form of college or university, but did mention the pursuit of a trade. He’d heard about the Louisiana Job Corps, an initiative of the U.S. Department of Labor which offers educational and vocational trade programs to youth ages 16 to 24 in a drug-free environment styled after postsecondary, dormitory-style campuses. Nemo didn’t know all of the details of the program but knew enough that he thought he could apply for a program. This way, he’d be able to achieve educational goals, through earning his GED, and vocational goals, by acquiring a marketable trade. I asked him if he’d given any thought to a job he’d like to do or a program he’d like to study through job corps. He said he’d considered welding because “my aunt said they
make quite a bit of money.” His response wasn’t driven by a commitment to welding in particular but rather a determination to have a good life, his definition provided at the close of this chapter. The certainty of his decision was stated more strongly than the others. With neither equivocation nor hesitation he said, “That’s what I wanna do. I wanna go there so I can get a good job and I won’t have to come out on the streets and sell drugs. I don’t wanna go down that road.” Unlike some of the other participants, he’d never done drugs and never sold drugs and was determined that remain the case. In the discussions of their aspirations, I admit that that there was no youth more convincing and specific than Nemo was here. Part of that, I suspect, arises from the relative proximity of his aspirations to his expectations.

**Expectations**

There were two recurring expectations in the formal interviews, informal conversations, and overheard discussions that had a structural, institutionalized presence at the facilities: the Graduate Equivalency Diploma and a career in the United States Armed Forces. I was introduced to the reality of these two future plans early in the process during a discussion in the high school classroom with a couple of students. As discussed earlier, the GED workbooks were preeminent among the other textbooks because the youths perceived that it had a direct, explicit, and utilitarian purpose, immediate to their own goals. As we discussed what they wanted to do with their GEDs (discussed as a sort of fait accompli for both students who, at the time, were still enrolled in the public school system and had not been reassigned to the lab as a Lab Kid), one answered he would join the Army. When I asked why the Army, he responded that it was one of the only things he knew he could do with a GED and he couldn’t afford a
college education and he said he had no patience to graduate from high school, so the
GED and service in the Armed Forces were the only plans that he could identify with any
certainty. These same two possibilities recurred across my interviews and during my
time in the facilities.

**Graduate Equivalency Diplomas.** Rider, Nemo, Bambam, and Fisher all talked
about getting their GEDs since all had been expelled from school and they viewed it as
the only way of fulfilling the educational criterion of the achievement ideology. Nemo’s
and Bambam’s intentions for their GED were straightforward and less complex than
Rider’s and Fisher’s (Fisher already lost out on opportunity for the GED, through the
YCP program but expressed no regret regarding his departure from there, only
resentment in how he was mistreated). In the previous section, I discussed Nemo’s plans
to apply to Job Corps which has an educational component within the curriculum for
earning a GED. When I asked Bambam if he had any intentions on trying to appeal to
the school board to be let back in school, he wasn’t sure if it was worth the trouble and
resigned himself, after a moment, to the GED instead. “I’ll probably,” he said and
paused before continuing, “just go and get my GED or go on the Internet and get my high
school diploma.” He explained that his age coupled with grade level and credit confusion
made him disinclined to pursue a traditional diploma because he didn’t want to repeat
classes he’d already taken or be older than the rest of his classmates; the stigma of being
a juvenile convict was already a considerable amount to deal with.

When Rider talked about earning the GED, though, he was confused and unclear
about what the GED meant, how he would go about earning it, and what it might do for
his future status within his school. Immediately, when we talked about his future plans,
he embraced the idea of the GED, without really understanding it. He was not yet in high school and when I asked him about his plans after leaving junior high, he said, “I’m a get my GED or something” with a passive ambiguity that led me to question him further. I asked him why he wanted to get his GED and, like Bambam, he referred to being in a class with people younger than he and that “this ain’t my right grade.” He then explained to me how he’d been held back in some grades, allowed to skip others; it was confusing and I couldn’t make sense of all the details. Ultimately, though, the most important reality was that he was older than all of his classmates and preferred the GED and a quicker exit than staying on his current academic path. He also wondered how his time spent at KPJDC might impact his status and whether or not he was at risk of being held back even further. Thus, the appeal for the GED increased as his time spent in detention increased.

I asked which he’d prefer to pursue and he said he’d like to go back to school but then said he planned on getting the GED but remaining in school to play sports, which he saw as a possible ticket to a postsecondary education. I explained to him that, in my experience as a teacher, once a student earns his/her GED, then that’s it for high school—which for Rider meant no more sports. He slumped back in his chair, put head down, and thought for a moment before quietly saying, “I didn’t even know that.” I asked if this changed his plans and he nodded, saying that he’d probably go to school for all four years because he wanted to play sports. He affirmed that sports were the primary reason he’d return to school after I’d asked him if playing football meant the most to him when he considered high school. We didn’t discuss his GED after that as it became clear that he needed to think his options through, as this was the first time he’d realized that what he
was planning, both the GED and participation in high school sports, was probably not possible.

Fisher also cited the concurrent simultaneity of the GED and his high school diploma when he talked about school post-release. Apparently, he had been in contact with a counselor at his old high school even though he’d been expelled and hoped that there might be some way that he could return to school. He said he’d been told that “I could get my GED and they’ll accept me back at school and I could go back to get my diploma. So I’m gonna work on that.” That didn’t seem accurate to me; as a teacher, I’d known students and taught students who had earned their GEDs but that meant dropping out of school. I was in no position, however, to contradict anything that a local high school counselor might have told him, in the event the policies were indeed different. Fisher reiterated his desire to earn his diploma as his first preference but felt that the GED would provide an academic cushioning: “I’m gonna go get my GED and if I don’t succeed when I go back to school for my diploma at least I got my GED to fall back on.” He pointed out to me that education was important, still invoking the achievement ideology, and he was determined to complete an education program and receive a diploma, because “it’s hard to make it without an education now so you gotta have some kinda diploma or GED.” It just was not clear to me how he would be able to effectively do both and he was unable to offer any details beyond what he’d understood from a conversation with the aforementioned counselor.

The GED as an accepted culmination of their secondary education was certainly common. It was reflected in the resources at the facilities, as well. In the high school classroom, students clamoured to work in GED textbooks. They asked specific questions
about the relevancy of activities and assignments with respect to the GED. The computers in the high school classroom and computer lab featured SuccessMaker software and programs for GED preparation. Thus, it didn’t surprise me that the GED featured so prominently in the anticipated futures of these youths. Worth noting is that this discussion isn’t meant to be a condemnation of the GED; rather, I was struck by the preference that most of my participants (aside from Katie and her disdain for “fuck ass school”) had for returning to their home campuses, preferring enrollment in a local school to receiving their GED. Because of the ubiquity of the GED and the insistence of the students in the classroom to work with GED textbooks as well as the trouble each had at their schools, I did not anticipate their general desire to return to school. Each of these four youths, ideally, chose school over the GED but, practically, considered the GED as their first (or only) option because of factors that had nothing to do with their idealized preference and were, instead, the product of other considerations (e.g. their age and grade level, the uncertainty of getting back into school, and confusion over what their status would be upon their release). Thus, the argument here is not the validity of the GED as a recognized diploma but rather the pursuit of the GED as a result of the various subordinating factors (some beyond their control) surrounding their education.

**Armed Forces career considerations.** Just as the prevalence of the GED within the facility leading to GED expectations didn’t surprise me, the references to joining the armed forces didn’t surprise me after seeing the pamphlets in the lobby and the printer-generated visages of armed forces soldiers standing watch over the Lab Kids. I was also not surprised after reading about the militaristic trends regarding marginalized youth and incarceration. There are even explicit connections to the GED in national armed services
programs. “The Army GED Plus Enlistment Program,” for example, targets applicants “without high school diplomas [who] are allowed to enlist while they complete a high school equivalency certificate, is focused on inner-city areas” (Mariscal, 2007).

Mariscal, a former serviceman in the Marines who served in Vietnam and current educator, discovered that the majority (three-fourths) of soldiers killed in Iraq came from homes that were below the national average for per capita income. He also identified “mounting evidence that they target those whose career options are severely limited” (Mariscal, 2007). I certainly believe that my participants, along with many other marginalized and/or incarcerated youth, qualify as a demographic who see their future career options as “severely limited.” While Wacquant calls the drug trade the “most accessible and reliable source of gainful employment” (p. 61) in the neighbourhoods where these kids grow up, Angela Davis adds one other career possibility that stems from educational erosion:

> Many people in Black, Latino, and Native American communities now have a far greater chance of going to prison than getting a decent education. When many young people decide to join the military service in order to escape the inevitability of a stint in prison, it should cause us to consider whether or not we should try to introduce better alternatives (2003, p. 10)

The military becomes, then, an alternative to drug trafficking. The lack of a viable third (or fourth or fifth or . . .) alternative in the literature and in the narratives of these youth is troubling. My participants’ responses resembled Jinx’s answer in *Ain’t No Makin It* when Jay Macleod asks, “What are you gonna do when you get out?” Jinx answers, “Go into the service, like everybody else.” (Macleod, 2008, p. 65)

> The Armed Forces weren’t the only militaristic options for these youth; Jay and Fisher both talked about YCP which touts itself as a militaristically-styled opportunity for
“at-risk youth” turned “cadets” with the added option of “earning a high school equivalency diploma.” Fisher had experienced, and been dismissed from, YCP and pointed to fellow KPJDJC inmate who’d been physically beaten, her face swollen and bruised, as an example of the potential brutalities of YCP. Jay, meanwhile, was set to leave for YCP following his release, leaving for this youth boot camp after a few days spent with his family following his release. The general increasing intimacy between the U.S. Armed Forces and such pre-service, militaristic programs mirrors, in some discouraging ways, the intimacy between the juvenile and adult prison industrial complex.

Of the rest of the participants, only Bambam talked about the armed services as a distinct possibility for when he gets out. We’ve seen, though, that he’d also considered a career in law, working in juvenile justice, and a job in the computer business. It’s hard to gauge how seriously he thought about actually signing up. Nevertheless, he contemplated both it and YCP:

Bambam: “I can get into YCP which is a voluntary program—Louisiana Youth Challenge Program. It’s a voluntary program that’s a six-month program—it’s all military based. You go through military training. If you wanna go into the military, it’ll help you go into the military”

Jonathan: “Are you considering the military? A lot of people here talk about it.”

Bambam: “I’m considering it. I mean, I’m not sayin’ I’m gonna go and I’m not sayin’ I’m not. I’m not for sure; I been thinking about goin’ to the military.”

He cited the retirement benefits and the potential for military service to help if he were to get into trouble in the future as the primary reasons for enlisting. Even though he was the only participant who talked about a military career, it was a choice that I’d overheard a number of the youth mention as a possibility. As was the case with the discussion on the GED, this is not meant to be a disregard for the military as a career. Rather, the
importance is highlighting the degree to which these youths feel very limited in the choices that they actually have and how these few possibilities have a subordinating and restricting impact on these youths as they discuss their goals for the future.

**Other anticipated realities.** The military and the GED did not account for all of the expected plans of these participants. Katie, Rider, and Fisher anticipated manual labour in their jobs while Bambam considered yet another career path, this one involving dogs and his love for animals and enjoyment in the New Leash on Life program. When we talked about what they actually expected to do, Katie didn’t talk about being an R&B diva and Fisher didn’t mention working with or for his father in the restaurant business. Katie said her “number one priority” when she was released was getting a job, not returning to school. She only considered a return to school if it meant being placed on an alternative campus where “everyone there’s got problems [where] there ain’t no way I’m gonna stick out.” Absent that possibility, though, she needed to get a job. She was not enthusiastic about returning to work at “Taco Hell” (Taco Bell) and, instead, spoke more hopefully about getting a job at Domino’s Pizza. The pressing need for cash outweighed the educational needs provided by school, even at an alternative campus. Fisher also spoke briefly about getting a job when he got out in case he wasn’t able to go back to school. He said that he had a relative in a position of authority at a shipping company and half-heartedly said, “I can go work over there, know what I’m sayin? That’s good pay. Somethin’ like that.”

As Katie and Fisher contemplated unskilled, manual labour Rider thought a bit further in his future and didn’t speak about getting a job with the same urgency or immediacy. But he also lacked the specificity, instead referring to his grandfather who
worked for the state and helped build one of the local bridges. He explained, among a series of pauses and hesitations, that if he got on with the state, like his grandfather, then he could be “working on bridges or . . . uh . . . construction and stuff like that. Whatever . . . I wanna do somethin’ like he did and stuff like that.” This was as specific and ambitious as Rider got in our discussions about the future. He was more interested in high school and sports, which was not surprising. As the discussion became more longitudinal and he thought about options long-term, he didn’t offer anything beyond NFL aspirations and potential manual labour expectations.

Bambam, meanwhile, had indicated an interest in a number of potential avenues. Perhaps the one most expected and most aligned with his current interests was a job working with animals. After having it suggested to him by the coordinator of the New Leash on Life program, Bambam said he’d been considering it more seriously.

I mean, I’m just good with animals period. I love animals and I was talking about it before [the coordinator] even told me about it. I was sayin’ I wanna do this; I was thinking about it. And then finally I just made up my mind and said, ‘Yea, I’m a go ahead.’ I mean, it’d give me somethin’ to do. And I’ll be willin to do it. He wasn’t sure if this meant a job at the dog pound when he got out or some other job, but he sounded most convincing and determined when he spoke about this possibility. Whether or not he meant it as a career, I was not sure. I suspected, though, that as a result of his other considerations, which were more long-term, that it wasn’t something he’d thought about doing indefinitely.

Despite the fact that most of these youths talked about the importance of education and how vital education was in order to secure a job and get ahead, it was interesting to hear them list one job possibility after another that didn’t require much education. Only Nemo spoke about connecting his possible career as a welder with his
education provided through Job Corps. Aside from him, the conversations about education and future goals seemed to be unrelated ones. The deference given to education’s importance was unspecific and seemed to be more a product of the prevalent rhetoric around the achievement ideology as opposed to something relevant, personal, immediate, and useful in possible careers. Education (or lack thereof) once again became (indirectly, in this case) a subordinating factor as these participants envisioned themselves in the future, a discouraging disconnect between their invocation of education and their expected realities.

The Good Life

Three of these participants, Jay, Katie, and Nemo, conceived of and articulated versions of a “good life” as they discussed, however far in the future, what they wanted, ultimately, out of their lives and what they’d consider a successful life. Nemo was the most specific and thorough, but Jay and Katie expressed long-term optimism, too. Macleod cited a similar outlook for his participants, and all three of mine who discussed the “good life” had analogs to Macleod’s Brothers.

When I asked Jay to describe the “good life” after he’d used the phrase, he answered:

Just like . . . stuff, man. Like you could buy you a 6000 dollar coat. Just stuff like that man. I’m like—blowin’ money man, or just flyin’—on first class, ya feel me? Goin’ to a sweet hotel. Man, just—the good life, man. Not worrying about no cops, not worrying about nobody on your back trying to get you, man. Not worrying ‘bout nobody—you walkin’ down the street, not worryin’ about nobody robbin’ you, man. Feel me. Not worryin’ bout some of the girls, not worrying ‘bout nobody rapin’ you, dog. Feel me.

Jay’s answer began with more materialistic desires—expensive clothes and first class plane tickets. But the more he developed his answer and considered things that
impact him now, he started to envision a future absent subordination, absent harassment, absent worry. He sounded like Super who also defined a good life as one without harassment, with “no one bothering me. Won’t have to take no hard time from no one” (Macleod, 2008, p. 76). The weight of his neighbourhood and what he’s had to deal with growing up, discussed in previous chapters, is apparent as Jay hopes for a future free of this oppression.

Rather than calling it “the good life” Katie used the phrase “making it.” I asked her what it would mean for her to “make it” and her response also included the materialistic trappings of success followed by a more understated conception. She first responds that “making it” translated as “I wanna be famous.” After a moment’s thought, however, she backed off that definition, amending and clarifying, “I don’t wanna go through the in and out of the juvenile detention centers, the group homes, the mental health hospital.” For her “making it” also meant breaking the carceral cycles so that she had a chance to “get my job” and “my own house.” Thus, “making it” has transformed from being a famous recording artist to living in her own house as opposed to under the thumb of authority and surveillance in secure custody sites to which she’d been assigned by others. Her answer was reminiscent of Juan’s who wanted “a regular house, y’know, with a yard and everything. I’ll have a steady job, a good job” (Macleod, 2008, p. 7).

Finally, we had Nemo, whose optimism, determination, and specificity was greater than any of the other participants. I cannot guess as to all that informed his perspective, but it’s clear that he’d spent less time locked up and hadn’t become a habitual offender with a recidivist history as some of the others. We first heard him talk about his future in Chapter 6 as he declared his determination to be one of the last people
on the cop’s list of suspected drug offenders, last to have his door kicked in. We also
heard about his intentions to acquire a marketable trade, like his older brothers, who have
provided him with models of success. There was more to his conceptualization than
these, however, as he talked about himself as part of his future family, in his future
profession. When asked what he sees for himself, he answered, “I see getting a good job.
Movin’ somewhere nicer with a family. Stayin’ outta trouble. Teachin’ my kids the right
thing cuz I don’t want my kids growin’ up thinking that [juvenile detention] is cool.” His
aspirations for a vocation are comparable to Craig who wanted a “good job” that he
described as “working in an office as an architect, y’know, with my own drawing board,
doing my own stuff.” (Macleod, 2008, p. 76) Nemo was also the only one who talked
about a family, a wife and kids, like Mike who “might have a wife, some kids” (Macleod,
2008, p. 76).

**Concluding Thoughts**

In a study that so often featured discouragement for my participants, there were
few moments more discouraging for me, as researcher and interviewer, than our
discussions about their futures. The answers were either so ambiguous or vague or so
limited, that it was hard to identify specific optimism and opportunity in their narrated
perceptions. Their communities and autobiographies are sites that Tony Judt describes as
possessing an “endemic inequality” because “they cannot get a good education, and
without that they cannot hope for even minimally secure employment—much less
participation in the culture and civilization of their society” (2010, p. 184). The youths
recognized, explicitly and implicitly, the difficulties and impossibilities of secure
employment without a good education, evident by their embracing rhetoric about
education’s importance (explicitly) and their expectation of jobs that require little or no formal education (implicitly). The schools responsible for their educational endowment are failing them, according to Giroux, simultaneously “subjecting them to disciplinary practices that close down any hope they might have for a decent future” and preparing them for entry “not into universities or colleges but into the juvenile criminal justice system.” (2009, p. 94). When Katie and Jay backed off visions of fame and grandeur, their definitions of success became what most would consider “decent” futures, but they also realized that the hope for one was difficult to sustain, and neither felt that their experience in the educational system had prepared them for it. Feeling shut out, in many ways, before they have even graduated high school is the culmination of an “exclusion [that] always passes through institutions. It is generated through the family, economy, health care, educational, and political systems” (Brown, 2009, p. 210). We’ve seen the impact of these repeated exclusions (in their homes and schools to a greater extent in this research than health care and political systems) in the relative narrowness of their ambitions; the hope is that by having the youths articulate their hopes in their own words, following these successive, subordinating exclusions, the assumptions that they are “self-generated, products of individual action, deserving of punishment” (Brown, 2009, p. 210) are complicated and undermined. We must remember, as Macleod points out, that these teenagers, to some extent, “make their own history” it is also not “under the circumstances of their own choosing” (2008, p. 152).
Chapter 11: Conclusion

Revisiting the Research Issues and Questions

At the beginning of this dissertation, I sought to discuss four items regarding the lives of my incarcerated youth participants. First, I wanted to examine the nature of trans-spatial subordination as they related their narrative histories to me and photographed the facility. Secondly, I sought to discuss the manner in which mass media portrayals of youth and criminality inform our opinions while providing my participants the opportunity to respond to these representations and discuss media important to them. Unavoidably, I also wanted to autobiographically examine my own role as researcher and outsider as well as my own intentions in conceiving and creating this piece. Finally, I wanted to provide a model for inquiry, self-reflection and socioeducational analysis in such a way that it might help preservice teachers and other educators as they consider what and how they know about their students.

Autobiographical

As I spent more time at KPJDC, working with these youths I became more aware of my Whiteness and my privilege and the daily act of leaving the facility and getting into my truck became an event with added gravity. One afternoon, as I left, I could hear Bambam’s voice hollering, “Bye, Mr. Arendt!” and it reminded me of Jay’s belief that they would go out to the yard more often if the staff didn’t take their liberty for granted. My impressions of incarcerated youth and prison, in general, were informed by those media depictions described in Chapter 2 and my mother’s stories from her classroom, neither of which sufficed as an introduction to this place, these youths. Even now, at the close of this dissertation (and at the hopeful beginning of a career continuing this
research), I feel that there’s still much I need to learn and this research has been but a first step. My personal research journal chronicled an anxiety of my Whiteness relative to my participants and my outsider status relative to both juveniles and security staff.

**Whiteness.** Pinar writes, “Whiteness creates itself as a norm to privilege its own power. The White majority or dominant category tends to forget that it is constructed via its process of marginalizing African Americans” and the result is a “cultural apartheid” (1996, p. 353). Normalization certainly operates in a punitive and juridical context (Foucault, 1995) and when looking at the incarceration rates relative to race, a subordinative apartheid seems a plausible description. Such marginalizing subordination is perpetuated through a dominant discourse controlled by media representations that contribute to a misleading familiarity with prison (Brown, 2009) and a reinforced social distance from African Americans (e.g. Gilliam et al, 2002).

From the beginning I felt that I lacked a validation as a relatively privileged, White researcher from the “dominant category” working with poor and mostly minority youth. Following my first discussion with Mr. Carradine, I made the following comment in my field notes:

*I initially felt apprehensive talking about race—as a White guy—to a Black man. But Mr. Carradine was completely at ease and said that because of the neighbourhood I grew up in and the schools I’ve taught at, that I have some legitimacy in discussing it. More so than many others involved in the process.*

Those “many others” were other professors or bureaucrats who had no real experience with these kids or demonstrated a willingness to write about or suggest methods for working with these youths without first attempting to engage the juveniles themselves or spend time developing research. He identified my proposals as a departure from that with which he’d become familiar and assumed of someone from “the ivory tower” (as he
put it) of academics. While I appreciated his attempts at mollifying my anxiety, I still felt that I needed to be aware of my Whiteness, so that I don’t “forget” how dominant discourses shape and limit the lives and futures of these kids. I sought to bring to prominence the voices of the criminally detained urban youth, just as Fine and Weis did as they discussed being White, female, and Jewish while working with people of colour (1996) and problematizing their own narratives within the genre of the “redemptive fantasy.”

I approached the troubling aspect of my subjectivity by designing a methodology that allowed the participants to make decisions so that the research was driven by them as much by their interests and narratives relative to my own intentions; such examples included an open-ended questionnaire and giving as few directions dictating their photographic choice as possible. In the process of conducting the inquiry, I found solace and confidence in Luttrell’s experiences with her pregnant teens:

> My Whiteness and privilege were confounded by my research status, my ability to come and go without being subject to the same rigid rules of school, including not having to give grades or assess the girls’ learning. In part, I am in a position to re-represent the girls’ worlds, identities, and relationships in ways that they and their teachers can not, because I am White. (2003, p. 168)

“Re-representing” is probably a more accurate term to describe what I’ve attempted to do here, the means of that re-reproduction through the emphasis of the teens’ words and photographs, over those of my own and of academics. Though I am not sure I have the same confidence in my Whiteness as Luttrell closes with, I do wonder if my position from within the dominant culture and a legitimation through my “research status” contribute to a position from which I can re-represent the subordination they experienced so often in a way that contributes to the field in a meaningful, significant, and
constructive way. I left the facility less sure than when I went in and I think that doubt operates to strengthen and validate the work, the self-interrogation and unanswered questions providing more useful modes and considerations than a presumptive certainty.

**Outsider status.** Though my mother spent a decade working in the facility, alongside some of the security staff, I still felt an outsider. The juveniles were often more willing to accept me than some of the staff and I can certainly understand the reticence on the part of some to disclose anything to me or make me feel welcome. None of the staff outright excluded me, but there were some who made more of an effort to include me in discussions and practices. I was also subject to their authority, in some of the same ways as the juveniles. During the clearance process, there was some discussion about me getting a card or key so that I could move around the facility by myself. Since I was only authorized as a “Volunteer” though, I wasn’t granted such clearance and mobility. Thus, I had to rely on security staff to allow me into places, unlock doors and gates, and move participants to and from interviews and anything else in between. It could be, at times, very frustrating, and I can vividly recall standing before a locked door, waiting for a click that unlocked it, feeling very conspicuous and on camera, wondering if anyone in the control room was watching to buzz me through. I’d assumed logistical complications from not having the means to move around the facilities at will but I had not anticipated the subordinating feelings associated with my locational liberties being under someone else’s control. The resulting anxiety made me appreciate the efforts of those staff members who took special care to include me.

There were a couple, specifically Karen and Stacy, who were consistently open and communicative with me. They fielded my questions, offered explanations, and
allowed me to accompany them around the facility. It was because of their willingness that I was able to understand many of the policies and procedures at KPJDC and, in that way, I felt as one of the youths did when they discussed their perceptions of privilege or status with staff, associating my comfort and acceptance with their inclinations. Once more, I found sympathy with an academic analog from Luttrell’s work:

I know that at first I was acutely aware of being the only White person at the PPPT, but that this awareness added over the course of my time there. I also know that I felt hostility from some of the Black teachers, while others took me into their confidence because, among other things, they appreciated my bearing witness to “how bad things really are.” (2003, p. 168)

I found that the more supportive security staff and administrative personnel allowed me to work and accommodated my requests because they saw value in the work that I was doing, a desire to work with the youths directly and introduce to the discourse their voices which had been conspicuous in their absence. Tilley (1998) referred to the process as “becoming familiar” with the staff and her incarcerated female participants and though I never achieved the same degree of familiarity, I experienced enough to recognize its value and potential in understanding the juveniles and accessing the closed policies, procedures, and structures of KPJDC.

**Topical Urgency and Social Relevance**

I wanted to return briefly to the point in my introduction that these are kids who have lived much of their lives on social, educational, and economic margins, and have increasingly become the target of the carceral apparatus (Giroux 2009). In order to combat that, the narratives and perspectives of these kids need to be anthologized and recognized alongside of those with more authority (e.g. lawyers, judges, law enforcement officials, parole officers). As Dimitriadis (2008) argues, there is an importance in the
everyday lives of these kids, not just their more sensationalized experiences but in the mundane, the typical. Such as when they watch a cartoon, for example.

In the pursuit of such work, researchers must strive to avoid the reduction of these youths to structural influences or causes; although structural forces weigh upon the individuals involved, it is necessary, in the words of Willis, “to give the social agents involves some meaningful scope for viewing, inhabiting, and constructing their own world in a way which recognizably human and not theoretically reductive.” (Macleod, 2008, p. 141)

Even though there are structural forces which weigh heavily on these kids, their lives, and the subordination they’ve experienced, there is evidence that they’ve participated in the construction of their own world. They’ve identified opportunities for agency, few though they might be, and they acknowledged their faults to the point of conceding that they deserve some measure or form of punishment. And for each of my participants, there are variables and details specific to them. Luttrell was once asked, “So, what do you think is the underlying reason these girls have babies?” And she replied, “I’ve worked with fifty girls, and there are at least fifty different reasons” (2003, p. 6). I feel the same; although there are certainly shared social, institutionalized, and “structural forces” contributing to their subordination across these six youths, there are at least six different underlying reasons why these teenagers end up behind bars. Thus, “we must appreciate both the importance and the relative autonomy of the cultural level at which individuals, alone or in concert with others, wrest meaning out of the flux of their lives” (Macleod, 2008, p. 141).

Such an individualized focus paired with a culturally structural analysis and discussion (Giroux, 1983) extends cultural theories which provide “a sense of texture of
individual lives” but typically fail “to contextualize attitudes and behaviour as responses to objective structures” (Macleod, 2008, p. 150). The implications necessarily reach beyond the carceral when it comes to youth and include all of those subordinating and sociocultural authoritative spheres that lead up to a culminating incarceration. Moving beyond the imprisonment of youth, then, this “task suggests reforming those primary institutions such as schools, the mainstream media, and the criminal justice system” which also contribute to the “punishing state” (Giroux, 2009, p. 105).

The prevalence and authority of punitive iconography needs challenging, then. It contributes to a social distance that impairs progress and codifies knowledge into a totalizing entity where an “essential” (Faith, 1993; Tilley, 1998) prisoner might reside. Its “incredibly privileged and salient role” results from its presence in “films, television, games, and the Internet” and end up serving “as our first access points and cultural resources from which to make sense of punishment and its proper place in the social order” (Brown, 2009, p. 193). The photographs in this research project, taken by the juveniles and endowed with significance because of their words and choices serve to answer authority, contributing a photographic response “originating from below” (Scott, 1990, p. 74) to those productions that emanate and preside from above because penality and poverty have “not receded, but the social visibility and civic standing of the troublemaking poor have been reduced” (Wacquant, 2009, p. 292). Rios issues, however, an important warning for this work:

If we are to support poor youth of colour in this era of mass incarceration and the decline of the welfare state, adult allies should be critical of their interactions with criminalized youth. Otherwise, we may be perpetuating the very force we are attempting to dismantle—the hypercriminalization of our youth. (2007, p. 30-31)

Current Limitations and Future Trajectories
Perhaps the most frustrating aspect of my research was the geographical distance between the University of Toronto and KPJDC; conducting ethnographic research in this manner made establishing rapport and having access to and time with the participants very difficult. One of the most helpful scholars in the early stages of my work, Dr. Ruben Gaztambide-Fernandez, spent years at “Weston” with the academic elite in the northeast United States while he worked on *The Best of the Best* (2009) while another influence, Dr. Susan Tilley, taught within a detention facility for women and was able to “become familiar” to and with her participants as she worked on her dissertation (1998). In comparison, my contact with these participants was quite limited so I endeavored to spend as much time as possible during my visits in whatever capacity KPJDC would have me. Dr. Conrad said not to be too put off by this, however, because the access and latitude I was being granted was not easily achieved in all such places and it would be wiser to take advantage of this opportunity as an initial step in the pursuit of work with incarcerated juveniles. Though it might be preferable, for many reasons, to gain access to a facility that was closer so that I might have extended contact and more time in the detention center, KPJDC was willing to accommodate me, guaranteed, where anything closer was a risk. Thus, I took KPJDC up on its offer and worked hard observing, taking notes, and conducting interviews while being as flexible and available as possible. And in the times between trips to Louisiana, I worked on the research to refine my methodologies so that I was prepared upon my arrival and was able to start work immediately.

I am also aware that the scope of the work is quite ambitious, as I tried to capture subordination across a variety of lived spaces and experiences for Katie, Jay, Fisher,
Bambam, Nemo, and Rider. Each of Chapters 6 through 10 could merit a dissertation of their own and my initial focus was going to be developing the elements found in Chapter 9. After preliminary discussions and my first observations, I realized it would be difficult to discuss their incarceration and subordination by solely focusing on the prison itself; it wasn’t an isolated or easily extricated aspect of their lives but rather the culmination of preceding subordination. Their narratives dictated the change to the dissertation’s horizon, transforming a work on media engagement and response to an analysis of the trans-spatial aspect of subordination and the impact on their lives and futures.

The employment of a visual ethnography added crucial components to the study and reflected the importance Brown places on multimedia intervention for self-reflexivity:

Strategizing ways in which to locate the vulnerability of punishment and the state to images opens up the possibility of an intervention that self-reflexively takes shape via representation. Such efforts will include a commitment and attention to photography, documentary, filmmaking, culture jamming, new media, convergence culture, and deep image ethnographies of everyday life—where contests of inclusion and exclusion are played out across cultural discourse. (2009, p. 207)

The inclusion of these methods and commitment to their usage helps mitigate some of the tensions that arise from the crisis of representation, especially for a White, privileged researcher working with poor, incarcerated, and often minority youth. Such “cultural discourse” can be informed through these means of self-reflexivity, and I would like to expand on the types of media that I use in future projects. The power of film (e.g. Davis, 2003; Brown, 2009; Harlem Diaries) and performative nature of drama (e.g. Conrad, 2005; Conrad, 2006a) enable perspectives and empower participants in ways that the photographic cannot. I think it’s imperative to repeat research with a photographic
methodology but also believe that expanding inquiry to include other representational media will strengthen the contributions and further highlight the voices of these marginalized youth.

One of the aspects of Conrad’s work that I found lacking in mine was the element of advocacy. Yes, the participants were granted an opportunity to be listened to when they hadn’t prior and they expressed gratitude at that opportunity. But I struggled with the realization that my research project was more limited in scope of agency than that of Conrad’s. Her work is pioneering and inspiring and with this research and experience behind me, I anticipate more advocacy in research proposals and initiatives in the future. Her efforts have resulted in policy changes, increased dialogue between stakeholders in youth incarceration, and led to the canonization and anthologizing of youth perspectives in juridical processes. This work has committed me further to the struggles and experiences, in and out of school, of these marginalized youth and future work will necessarily include more advocacy. At the end of Ain’t No Makin’ It, Macleod speaks to a similar limitation in the conclusion of his work. He’d written about the Hallway Hangers and the Brothers, emphasized their words and experiences, but now wrestles with the fact that he profited from their participation and their lives had progressed along discouraging, and not unexpected, lines. Nevertheless, there was significance in the introduction of their narratives to the academic discourse, as it challenged preconceptions about marginalized youth and perceptions of failure and lack of aspiration. On a much smaller scale, absent a more advocacy-oriented approach, I have attempted to do the same for incarcerated youth. And I think the implications of this work reach beyond the
social and address aspects of incarceration and marginalization and include pedagogy and the education of preservice teachers.

**Teacher and Preservice Teacher Education**

With the burgeoning media (including social media) and technologies enabling the multiplicities of representation come a responsibility of educators to foster literacies with these forms.

The proliferation of media culture and spectacle requires renewed calls for critical media literacy so that people can intelligently analyze and interpret the media and see how they are vehicles for representations of race, class, gender, sexuality, power, and violence. (Kellner, 2008, p. 158)

This study, alone, addressed most of the issues Kellner lists: race, class, gender, power, and violence (some to a much greater degree than others) and as inquiry and interest in the individual and social dynamics of culture and education proliferate, so does the need to equip students, teachers, and preservice educators with critical literacy strategies and modes of interrogation and deconstruction. School districts are also developing curricula to address these needs. In my experience and as a result of my work with critical media literacy, I’ve been asked to present at a couple of schools in Ontario as teachers struggled with aspects of the developing media literacy strands within the curriculum. When I was teaching in Houston, Texas, the district administration for English Language Arts recognized the sparse curricular offerings, guidelines, and objectives in the area of media literacy and began trying to augment the curriculum with materials and additional objectives. While we, as teachers and researchers, participate in the construction of these guidelines, we need to be aware to what extent these measures exist or are being practiced in a top-down fashion. The students can interact with media in unexpected though revelatory ways, even something as seemingly innocuous as a cartoon like *The*
Powerpuff Girls, ways that we might not initially understand or have imagined. We need, therefore, to create opportunities for students’ voices not only to be heard, but to contribute to the development of discourse around media in classes. “Teachers and students, then, need to develop new pedagogies and modes of learning for new information and multimedia environments” (Kellner, 2008, p. 162). The Lab Kids, as an example, created an entire subtext in their media metacommentary in such a way that I realized that I, as the “researcher” in the room, was actually in the position of participatory co-learner rather than in any leadership capacity. And this discursive humbling helped shape the manner in which we watched future movies with the kids, in the way that I discussed with them those movies, and in the way I tried to elicit their further views on social injustice in their lives.

Such influential studies [e.g. Macleod (2008), Luttrell (2003), and Rios (2009)] illuminate the lives of our students, particularly those marginalized and add to what we know and understand about “the quality of life, learning, and teaching in schools” (Luttrell, 2003, p. 173). Improving opportunities and increasing educational access, however, is less likely to happen if teachers continue to rely on discourses of educational problems and shortcomings strictly as binaries. These works serve to complicate assumptions about what can be expected of these “problem” kids because such an approach focuses “our attention on assessing individuals, comparing one student’s or teacher’s performance to that of another’s in a ‘normative’ group . . . Indeed, these discourses serve to justify rather than explain differences in learning and achievement” (Luttrell, 2003, p. 173). The youths repeated this sentiment throughout my time at the facilities when they discussed their educational experiences, both inside the facilities and
out. Thus, preservice teachers need to be oriented to methodologies to engage with media representations and learn about and from their students as individuals, rather than resorting to a comparative “norm.” Nemo resented Mr. Trent his first day in class because he sought to “know” him through the completion of a questionnaire that could then be compared to those of other students or a standard of sociability.

Included in the role of educators is the responsibility “to organize a collective challenge against higher education’s irresponsible and morally indefensible wagering of both young people’s futures and the democratic foundations of governance” (Luttrell, 2003, p. 111); studying incarceration brings these elements into clearer focus and much closer proximity, the lessons from which can be applied to other aspects of the educational institution that risks the students’ futures as well as rhetorical appeals to and invocation of educational (and social) democracy. There is perhaps no closer juxtaposition or intimate association between the practical contradictory, institutionalized socialized practices than juvenile incarceration.

A Conclusion for the Conclusion: Closing Statements on Purpose

Macleod, in perhaps the most influential single work to my research here, summarizes his purpose in *Ain’t No Makin It*, writing:

By striving to understand the world of the Brothers and the Hallway Hangers on their own terms, this book has managed to uncover some important mediating factors that influence individuals at the cultural level . . . In asserting the autonomy of the individual at this cultural level, however, we must not lose sight of structural forms of class domination from which there is no escape. (2008, p. 152)

I would describe my intent similarly, as I’ve worked to uncover those subordinating factors in the lives of my participants in various areas of their lived experience. Despite instances of autonomy, (however infrequent from youth to youth) the influence of those
structural forms is inescapable, forming a less conspicuous cage circumscribing the lives and hopes of my participants. While in secure custody, Katie talked about the options that she perceives she has behind bars: “You got the choice to say hey—I’m a act a ass today. And get a write up and be in your room. Or you got a choice to say hey, I’m a do good today, I ain’t gonna get no write up and I’m a make incentive on Friday.”

Those options, however, are already limited before they are even considered; it’s not an absolute choice but rather a choice relative to her incarceration. Later, though, she considered options she had outside of the facilities. But the choices she perceived aren’t really choices, after all, as she lamented, “We don’t have too many choices. We don’t have too many decisions. Our choices as young—go to school. That’s our main choice—we don’t have a choice. Either you go to school or you locked up.” As educators, it is our task to interrogate the norms and open the discussion to include the voices of those youths who might understand their options as limited as Katie does and we must find ways to connect the practice of classroom teaching with the operation of power in the larger society and to provide the conditions for students to view themselves as critical agents capable of making those who exercise authority and power accountable. (Giroux, 2009, p. 137)

That way, Katie doesn’t limit, by default, her choices as either going to school or being locked up. Academics must be both “critical educator” and “active citizen” (Giroux, 2009, p. 137). Such activism requires an expansion of the conception of “political activity” to include those acts and lives that are hidden and outside or below (subordinated by) the dominant discourse. If we do not, then we risk missing the immense political terrain that lies between quiescence and revolt and that, for better or worse, is the political environment of subject classes. It is to focus on
the visible coastline of politics and miss the continent that lies beyond. (Scott, 1990, p. 199)

That continent which lies beyond is not without topography so it’s not about charting new territory; instead, the tact is more about recognition than discovery in this rhetorical neocolonialism. One such cartographical method is offered by Jay at the beginning of this dissertation and echoed by Fisher at its close: Listen. The dialogue is a “complicated conversation” (Pinar, 1996) and the voices of these youths belong and it’s urgent for that “dialogue among teachers, parents, youth, and other interested parties concerning the situation of contemporary youth, both in terms of prospects and problems, hopes and challenges” (Kellner, 2008, p. 69) to take place. I was only able to chronicle the lives and answers of six respondent youth but when I asked Fisher for any advice moving forward, he offered a bit of wisdom that I believe applies to the field as much as it does me:

You should ask other people because they prolly live that lifestyle and that’ll make you understand some things about other people.

- Fisher, research participant and repeat offender
REFERENCE LIST


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APPENDIX A

University of Toronto Office of Research Ethics Approval

University of Toronto
Office of the Vice-President, Research
Office of Research Ethics

PROTOCOL REFERENCE #23503
January 8, 2009

Prof. Karyn Cooper
Dept. of Curriculum, Teaching and Learning
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto
252 Bloor Street West
Toronto, ON M5S 1V8

Mr. Jonathan Arendt
Dept. of Curriculum, Teaching and Learning
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto
252 Bloor Street West
Toronto, ON M5S 1V8

Dear Prof. Cooper and Mr. Arendt:

Re: Your research protocol entitled “Are These Kids Alright? The Lives and Education of Incarcerated Juveniles”

ETHICS APPROVAL

Original Approval Date: January 8, 2009
Expiry Date: January 7, 2010
Continuing Review Level: 1

We are writing to advise you that a member of the Social Sciences, Humanities & Education Research Ethics Board has granted approval to the above-named research study, for a period of one year, under the REB’s expedited review process. Please ensure that you submit an Annual Renewal Form or a Study Completion Report at least 30 days prior to the expiry date of your study.

The following consent documents received November 21, 2008 have been approved for use in this study: Assent form and Consent form.

Any changes to the approved protocol or consent materials must be reviewed and approved through the amendment process prior to its implementation. Any adverse or unanticipated events should be reported to the Office of Research Ethics as soon as possible.

If your research has funding attached, please contact the relevant Research Funding Officer in Research Services to ensure that your funds are released.

Best wishes for the successful completion of your project.

Yours sincerely,

[Signature]

Dean Sharpe, Ph.D.
Research Ethics Officer--Social Sciences and Humanities

McMurrich Building, 12 Queen's Park Cres. W., 3rd Floor Toronto, ON M5S 1S8
TEL: 416-946-3273 FAX: 416-946-5763 EMAIL: ethics.review@utoronto.ca
APPENDIX B

CONSENT FORMS
Dear Parent/Guardian:

My name is Jonathan Arendt and I am a PhD graduate student from the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto working on my dissertation, a research project called “Are these kids alright? The Lives and Education of Incarcerated Juveniles.” I am interested in the stories of students at the juvenile detention center and their experiences at their home school and their education at the detention center. I have done a lot of research on the topic and something important is missing: the life stories of the students themselves.

Your child will be one of only two or three students selected for this survey.

Participation in the study is voluntary and I need your signature and your child’s signature if he/she is going to participate. There is no penalty or punishment if you or your child refuses to participate and either you or your student can remove him/herself from the process at any time. I want to have three interviews of thirty to forty-five minutes and record them with your permission as well as your child’s. Your child’s name will not be used in the data collection or publication; his/her identity will be protected with a false name and no personal information will be released. Also, there is no reward for your student’s participation. He/she receives nothing extra or special treatment if he/she participates. I will keep the notes and data on the project for five years and after that time has passed all materials will be destroyed.

Nobody but me will have access to the information at any point of the research or publication process so that your child’s privacy is protected. What he/she says to me is confidential unless there is an indication that he/she will harm him/herself or another student or if they tell me that they have been abused. If your child tells me any information that talks about such harm to him/herself or others, I cannot keep that confidential.

Please sign below if you permit your child to take part in this study. Cooperation is, of course, much appreciated. If you have any questions, please contact me at (905) 257-6016 or by email at jarendt@oise.utoronto.ca. You may also contact my advisor, Dr. Karyn Cooper at kcooper@oise.utoronto.ca if you would like to ask her any questions about me or the project. If you have questions about your child’s rights as participants, please contact the Office of Research Ethics at the University of Toronto at (416) 946-3273 or by email at ethics.review@utoronto.ca.

Finally, if you agree to sign and let your child work with me on this project, please call me. I am willing to come to you to pick up the signed form. Or if you’d rather mail it back to me, I have included a self-addressed, stamped envelope that you can use to mail it back to me.

Sincerely,

Jonathan Arendt
PhD Student, University of Toronto

YES, I allow my child ___________________________ to participate in this study.
(child’s name)

Parent/Guardian’s Signature: ___________________________ Date: ______________
Dear ________________________________:

My name is Jonathan Arendt and I am a PhD student from the University of Toronto working on my final essay, called “Are these kids alright? The Lives and Education of Incarcerated Juveniles.” As part of this essay, I want to include the voices of students at the detention center and I am interested in hearing your story, specifically.

There aren't going to be very many students asked to be in the study, probably only a couple. I've had to do a lot of reading to prepare for this essay and in what I've read a lot of the students who are in detention centers like the one you are in and I'd like you to volunteer to take part in this project.

You do not have to do this – it is entirely up to you! You won't be punished if you decide to say no. Even if you say yes and change your mind at a later date, you can still say no and there won’t be any punishment from anyone. Not from me or your teachers or the people at the detention center. Also, if you do decide to help me out, you won’t get anything extra for helping. Nobody is going to give you any special treatment for participating.

So what am I asking you to do? How can you help me? I would like to interview you and use a tape recorder to tape your answers so that I can type them later and then I will erase the tapes. I think three or four interviews will work best and each one will be about thirty minutes long. I have a few questions that I will ask but there’s also room for you to talk about your experiences. I will use your answers as part of my essay where I talk about what it’s like being a student at school and a student at the detention center. How are they alike? How are they different? These are just a couple of examples. And I would like to keep this information in my files for 5 years and after that I will destroy the information.

Nobody will have permission to look at my notes or listen to my tapes; I am the only one who will. Anything you tell me will be private – nobody else will know. There are a few exceptions – if you talk about hurting yourself or someone else or you tell me about someone who hurt you, then I have to tell someone in charge about that. I can’t keep it a secret if you or someone else might get hurt.

If you would like to help me out and let me interview you for this paper, please sign your name below. If you have any questions, call me at (905) 257-6016 or by email at jarendt@oise.utoronto.ca. You may also contact my boss, Dr. Karyn Cooper at kcooper@oise.utoronto.ca if you would like to ask her any questions about me or the project. If you have questions about your rights as participants, please contact the Office of Research Ethics at the University of Toronto at (416) 946-3273 or by email at ethics.review@utoronto.ca.

Finally, if you agree to sign and let me work with you, please tell me when I am at the detention center or you can tell Mr. Carradine and give him this piece of paper with your name on it. He can hold onto the paperwork and get in touch with me so that I can pick it up from him.

Thank you so much for thinking about doing this.

Sincerely,

Jonathan Arendt
PhD Student, University of Toronto

☐ YES, I would like to participate in this study.

Student’s Signature: ___________________________ Date: ____________
APPENDIX C

PROPOSED INTERVIEW SCHEDULE
PERSONAL HISTORY

How old are you and what grade are you in?

Where have you lived? Where have you grown up? What neighbourhoods have you grown up in? Describe the neighbourhoods. Tell me about some important things that have happened to you.

Can you tell me a little bit about your family? How many siblings? What is life like at home? Do you have any older siblings who are also in school?

How did your parents react when the decision was made for you to be assigned here? Friends?

How often do you watch television or movies? Listen to music? When you do, what do you watch and listen to?

Have you ever seen a movie or tv show or news report about kids who get into trouble? What were they and can you describe what happened to the kids that you saw? Did you notice any similarities in what they did to what you are some of your friends have done?

When you are outside of school, what would you say are your main sources of information or learning about things?

What hobbies/interests do you have? Have you ever done anything artistic? Drawing, music, writing?

ACADEMIC/DISCIPLINE HISTORY

Describe the school you came from.

What is your favorite subject in school? Here? Why?

Tell me a little bit about some of the discipline problems you had at your last school. How often did you get in trouble? What did you do? What were the punishments?

Did your teacher say anything to you regarding your assignment here or temporary dismissal from school? Did the principal? Friends? Anyone else at the school?
How much did your friends get in trouble at school?

Did you know anyone at your former school that has been assigned to the detention center? If so, can you please tell me a little about it?

Do you think that you’ve been treated fairly in the decision process to send you here? Why/why not? Can you explain each step of the process from your perspective?

DETENTION CENTER EXPERIENCE

What can you share about why you ended up here?

How long have you been here at the detention center?

Is this your first time being assigned to detention center?

What is the length of your current assigned stay here? How fair do you believe your punishment is/was?

Compare the education at your last school to the detention center. Are there any similarities? What are the differences?

Can you give me a rundown of a typical day for you here? From the time you wake up until the time you go to bed? How are weekends or holidays any different?

How has your experience been here outside of the center’s classroom?

What are your favorite activities here? Which ones would you like the center to continue, even after you are gone?

What are the benefits from these activities you enjoy?

Why do you think you were sent here? Not the reasons which led to you being here – but what was your time here supposed to accomplish? Do you think that the center has helped you?

What happens to you after your time here is completed?