IN THIS PLACE CALLED PRISON:

HOW RELIGION STRUCTURES THE SOCIAL WORLD OF INCARCERATED WOMEN

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ABSTRACT

IN THIS PLACE CALLED PRISON: HOW RELIGION STRUCTURES THE SOCIAL WORLD OF INCARCERATED WOMEN

Rachel Ellis

Melissa Wilde

Criminologists and sociologists have long examined what governs the prison social world. However, prior studies have generally overlooked how religion organizes and stratifies life in prison. Drawing upon 12 months of ethnographic fieldwork inside a U.S. state women's prison, this dissertation demonstrates that religion is central to many inmates' daily activities. It contributes to their freedoms and privileges while also constraining their choices behind prison walls. Religion is woven into the fabric of prison life: threaded through material benefits, the prison social order, the meaning of incarceration, and even inmates' sexual identity. The extent to which inmates' experience is shaped by religion depends on their denominational affiliation and level of practice. As such, religion operates as a tool that leverages inequality among the prison population.

Religious messages cast imprisonment as part of God's plan, simultaneously providing hope and a neoliberal framework of individual responsibility, but always in the shadow of demographic patterns of mass incarceration. Religious messages are noticeably silent on issues of race and social class, while dictating acceptable behavior around gender and motherhood that conceal normative racial and class expectations. Profoundly shaping how women view their incarceration, religion stretches into even the most private spaces, that of women's sexuality. In an environment where being "gay for the stay" is common, religious programs function as a space in which inmates can spend time with their romantic partners. However, conservative Protestant programs encourage inmates to relinquish homosexual relationships and instead embrace femininity and submission, leading to conflict between inmates who subscribe to these ideals and those who do not. Finally, while participation in religious programs is a mechanism of adaptation, improving inmates' quality of life by providing material resources and social support, it is also a mechanism of inequality, given that these resources are unavailable to secular inmates, and their distribution depends on denominational affiliation. Overall, this dissertation demonstrates how religion propagates inequality within an already disadvantaged population.

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INTRODUCTION

On a rainy December night at Mapleside Prison,[2] nearly 40 members of the public gathered in the prison gym for a victim's awareness event. The gym looked a lot like a gym at a public high school: white cement walls and a waxy wooden floor, about 100 plastic chairs arranged between two basketball hoops at either end of the court. A podium with a microphone was set up in the center for the speakers to use. Attendees were themselves victims of crimes or family members of victims, although not directly victimized by the crimes of the inmates present that night. The warden, assistant warden, corrections officers, and outside volunteers sat expectantly in the audience alongside the public, prepared to hear reflections of apology from inmates. Ms. West, the staff member responsible for coordinating Mapleside's voluntary activities, started the event off by introducing the inmates who would speak that evening, commenting, "Programs such as this one prove rehabilitation *does* occur at Mapleside."

Asabi was one of ten inmates approved to speak. At age 18, Asabi was sentenced to 25 years as an accessory to murder. "I grew up in here," she told me the first time we met. Now in her mid-30s, Asabi stood poised, shoulders pulled back, appearing taller than her 5'2" frame. Routinely clothed in prison-issued blue and gray, Asabi occasionally customized her appearance by applying blue eyeshadow to her mahogany skin, polishing her nails, and braiding her hair in intricate patterns.

"I used to think I wasn't as guilty as the person who actually did the killing, but now I realize I am just as responsible," Asabi admitted humbly, speaking slowly and

[2] All names of people and places are pseudonyms to protect confidentiality.

clearly into the microphone. After apologizing for her crime, Asabi urged, “I don’t want you to think that we are consumed by this [imprisonment]. We are free. We are grateful for the freedom that God has allowed in this place called prison.” Asabi had become religious during her time at Mapleside. Throughout her incarceration, Asabi experimented with a couple different religions before getting saved. Currently, Asabi is a devout Baptist who believes salvation comes from accepting Jesus Christ as Lord.

Asabi divulged somberly, “It’s been a process . . . But now I can say I am finally free. I know the *only thing* I can’t do is walk out that gate.” Becoming religious transformed Asabi’s life in prison. It changed her perspective on what it meant to be a prisoner, structured her day with activities, provided her social support from other inmates and outside volunteers, and gave her a feeling of moral authority. She even stopped having sexual relationships with other female inmates because of it. On Sundays during the church services in the gym, Asabi served on the Christian dance ministry, wearing a shiny, flowing purple or white robe instead of the standard gray sweats, dancing to popular Christian music in front of a group of about 200 other inmates. On Thursdays, Asabi attended Baptist Bible study where, along with scriptural analysis, she and her fellow Baptist inmates shared emotional stories about the role of God in their lives. Each weekday from 9 to 5, as her job in prison, Asabi worked as a clerk for the chaplain, where she made $1.10 per day.

But was this all just lip service? Outsiders and prison officials sometimes question the sincerity of “jailhouse conversion,” asking whether inmates participate in religion because they have nothing else to do, or because it will impress a parole board (Clear and

Sumter 2002; Clemmer [1940] 1958; Thomas and Zaitzow 2006; examples of this in Johnson 1989). In this dissertation, I share portraits like Asabi's to demonstrate how religion substantially shaped the prison experience for women, both for inmates who participated in religious programs and those who did not. I tackle the question of sincerity by showing how religion organized the social world in prison whether or not inmates actually believed in the religious teachings.

Inmates like Asabi who actively participated in religion used it as an adaptive mechanism to make their lives better in prison. However, not all inmates garnered the same advantages. Conservative Protestant inmates gained the most advantages, while inmates who affiliated with other religious groups like Catholicism, Sunni Islam, and Judaism gained less. Inmates who chose not to participate in any religion gained the least.

Sociologists and criminologists have long been concerned with what organizes prison life: this dissertation demonstrates that religion organizes social life in prison, and, furthermore, shows how inmates have an unequal place in the social hierarchy based on their religious affiliation. More broadly, these findings show how religion works paradoxically: on the one hand, religion works in tandem with prison as an institution to reinforce the goals of incarceration. On the other hand, inmates actively draw upon religious resources to carve out a life for themselves in the face of the significant constraint of prison life.

Research Questions and Dissertation Findings

In this dissertation, I ask: How do female inmates adjust to the hardships of prison life? How does religion structure the social world of women's prison? Religion was

woven into the fabric of prison life: threaded through the meaning it provided to inmates, their sexual identity, their experience of race, class, and motherhood, and even the material and social benefits they received. This was true for some inmates more than others, depending on their religious affiliation and level of practice. As such, religion facilitated adjustment unequally. It was a tool that leveraged inequality among the prison population. Overall, this dissertation explains how religion governs social life unequally for incarcerated women, operating alongside the prison institution to simultaneously reinforce and challenge the punitive and rehabilitative aspects of the carceral experience.

The Prison Context and the Present Study

When we think about the U.S. prison system, we might picture the crimes that land people behind bars, from drug dealing to sex offenses to murder (e.g. Collins 2009; Contreras 2013; Wright and Decker 1997). We call it an "underworld" (Skarbek 2014) or "the belly of the beast" (Abbott 1981; Wacquant 2002). We may think about structural racism, the overrepresentation of the poor and persons of color in prison (Alexander 2012; Carson and Golinelli 2013; Olzak and Shanahan 2014; Pettit and Western 2004; Wacquant 2009), and the racialized overpolicing of poor urban neighborhoods (Desmond and Valdez 2013; Goffman 2015; Rios 2011; Shedd 2015; Stuart 2016). We might think about crowded jails that house America's transient populations (Irwin 1985). We sometimes imagine the cold, dark, faceless prisons rife with distrust, where you need to watch your back, especially in the shower, and where prison guards verbally and physically intimidate, sometimes abusing their power sexually as well (Conover 2001; Rathbone 2006; Ross 1981).

I spent twelve months conducting ethnographic fieldwork inside a state women's prison that I call Mapleside Prison. During that year of research, many of these popular expectations were confirmed – prison is a tough place to live. It is difficult to be confined to a particular space, every move regulated by the state, living amongst people who – at best – get on your last nerve, and – at worst – threaten your safety. Drab clothing, bland food, argumentative roommates, lack of privacy, addiction, stress, anxiety, loneliness, arguments, noise, stigma – all weighty, tangible hardships of being a prisoner.

But what also became evident – alongside the hardships of a life enclosed by fences, beyond the deprivations demonstrated in previous depictions of American prisons – was the vitality that exists behind bars. Establishing a routine, trying to "make something of your incarceration," as many inmates put it – this is what stood out during my fieldwork at Mapleside. One major expression of this resilience was through religion. Not all inmates were religious, nor was religion necessarily the single most defining feature of prison life. However, religion was a central organizing feature of the prison social world in ways that tell us a great deal about how women negotiate their own punishment.

Background on Women's Incarceration

Over half a century ago, classic prison scholar Gresham Sykes ([1958] 2007) asserted, "The student of human behavior can find many theoretical issues suddenly illuminated by examining this small-scale society where numerous features of the free community have been drastically changed." (p. xxx). Others agree that as micro-societies under state control, prisons are a fertile site to understand human interaction (Goffman

[1961] 2007; Goldstone and Useem 1999). For this reason, along with viewing modern-day prisons as an institution of social control that perpetuates inequality (Alexander 2012; Goffman 2009; Olzak and Shanahan 2014; Wacquant 2009), sociologists and criminologists have long been interested in analyzing what governs the prison social world.

Yet the overwhelming majority of what we know about prison stems from research on male inmates (for notable exceptions, see Hannah-Moffat 2001; Haney 2010; Kruttschnitt and Gartner 2005; Owen 1998; McCorkel 2013; Watterson 1996). Today, over 1.2 million women in the U.S. are under the supervision of the adult correctional system (Kaeble et al. 2015). Women account for 7.3% of the prison population and 18.4% of the total correctional population, including in jails and on probation (Carson and Anderson 2016; Kaeble and Glaze 2016). A growing population, rising by a rate of 3.4% annually (Glaze and Kaeble 2014), it becomes it increasingly important to understand the realities of carceral life for women, including the over one million children impacted by having a mother behind bars (Arditti 2015; Giordano and Copp 2015; Roettger 2015; Turney and Wildeman 2015). The relative rarity of prison ethnographies in the face of rapid carceral expansion, particularly ethnographies of women's prisons – especially given the difficulty of gaining access – has led to repeated calls for research on the prison experience (Jones 1995; Kruttschnitt and Husseman 2008; Wacquant 2002).

History of Prisons and Inequality

Prison worsens inequality by adversely impacting mental health (Sharkey 2010; Van Ginneken 2015), family and romantic relationships and social safety nets (Baćak and Kennedy 2015; Comfort 2007; Roberts 2004b; Turney and Wildeman 2013; Western 2006; Wildeman, Schnittker, and Turney 2012; Wyse, Harding, and Morenoff 2014), social citizenship (Allard 2002; Mauer and Chesney-Lind 2003), job prospects (Pager 2003; Loeffler 2013; Ramakers et al. 2014; Western et al. 2015), housing (Harding, Morenoff, and Herbert 2013); social status (Schnittker and Baćak 2013), participation in educational and medical institutions (Brayne 2014), and feelings of self-worth (Irwin 1985). Beyond effects post-release, however, scholars underline the detrimental effects on prisoners during incarceration (Mauer and Chesney-Lind 2003; Van Ginneken 2015), focusing on the "pains of imprisonment," including significant material deprivations, psychological deprivations, time away from loved ones, and a lack of autonomy, privacy, and security (Clemmer [1940] 1958; Harer and Steffensmeier 1996; Heffernan 1972; Irwin and Cressey 1962; Thomas 1977; Owen 1998; Sykes [1958] 2007).

Theorists have long argued that incarceration is a manifestation of state control and moral authority over society's most disadvantaged (Feeley and Simon 1992; Foucault 1977; Ignatieff 1981; Jacobs 1977; Sykes ([1958] 2007).[5] One reason for this rests on the socially-constructed nature of deviance, in which the actions of the have-nots are more likely to be labeled "criminal" than the haves (Erikson 1966; Hagan and Palloni 1986;

[5] For a thorough review of the history and development of women's prisons, see Rafter (1983) and Hannah-Moffat (2001).

Quinney 1970).[6] During the prison boom of the 1980s and 1990s, Malcom Feeley and Jonathan Simon (1992) coined the term "new penology" to describe a changing criminal justice system that "shifts away from a concern with punishing individuals to managing aggregates of dangerous groups" (449). The contemporary carceral system, then, can be understood as racialized, class-based social control, not only reflecting but also worsening existing inequality (Alexander 2012; Goffman 2009; Olzak and Shanahan 2014; Wacquant 2009), since those incarcerated are overwhelmingly young, poor, and persons of color (Carson and Golinelli 2013; Pettit and Western 2004).

Historically, the goals of prison included incapacitation, retribution, deterrence, or rehabilitation (Tonry 2006). Today's prisons, under the "new penology" (Feeley and Simon 1992), propagate a punitive meaning of incarceration, one promoting social control of blameworthy individuals who must be held accountable for their crimes (Allen 1981; Garland 2001; Hannah-Moffat 2001; Simon 1993). The rehabilitative efforts of prison are neoliberal in the sense that they encourage inmates to pull themselves up by their bootstraps, without reference to the structural inequality that leads individuals to a life of crime in the first place (O'Malley 1999; Wacquant 2010). By denouncing "flawed" individuals, even in purportedly rehabilitative programs (McCorkel 2013), these messages are entirely out of sync with the structural inequality of the revolving-door of the criminal justice system. The ways prison is punitive versus rehabilitative remain a central concern in current scholarship (e.g. Goodman 2012).

[6] In this paradigm, criminal behavior is understood as a rational response to thwarted access to cultural definitions of success through legal means (Merton 1938), or an effort to maximize earnings (Uggen and Thompson 2003).

Missing, however, is a complete understanding of how the prison experience is not monolithic – some inmates experience deeper pangs than others. In the next section, I turn to existing theories of what organizes prison life to show how they fail to illuminate the unequal experience of prison among inmates.

What Organizes Prison Life?

Existing scholarship has emphasized two major factors that organize prison life and influence inmates' adjustment to prison: abiding by or breaking prison rules, and building relationships. First, prison controls inmate behavior through strict rules and regulations. Some inmates follow the rules strictly, while other inmates flout the rules (Giallombardo 1966; Goffman [1961] 2007; Heffernan 1972; Owen 1998; Sykes 1958/2007). A prisoner's orientation towards prison rules dictates her place in the social hierarchy: Owen (1998) calls it avoiding "the mix," Goffman ([1961] 2007) calls it "playing it cool" or "keeping out of trouble." Whatever the language, the idea is the same: the rules of the institution significantly how inmates adapt to being incarcerated.

In women's prisons more specifically, rules go beyond regulating how inmates can and cannot behave. The rules are patriarchal: they reinforce traditional gender norms and expectations of women's behavior. In *Breaking Women* (2013), Jill McCorkel adeptly draws upon rich ethnographic data to show that the prison administration uses a rhetoric of rehabilitation to control women's bodies and minds. In the prison McCorkel studied, administrators viewed young, black drug offenders as "criminals" compared to white offenders of earlier decades who were deemed "good girls," creating moral distinctions between categories of offenders based on race. In Lynne Haney's *Offending*

Women (2010), a powerful ethnography of residential alternatives to incarceration for female offenders, even programs designed to avoid the conventional punitive model punish women through infantilizing, paternalistic prescriptions for what women should want and need financially, emotionally, physically, and sexually. In an illustrative example, one program Haney studied urged women offenders and their children to eat *Luna* bars rather than *Ramen* noodles, using nutritional value to dictate what women consume, while the women countered that *Ramen* was comfort food for them. Such prescriptions may be disguised in language that purports to empower women, as Kelly Hannah-Moffat (2000, 2001) convincingly demonstrated in her analysis of Canadian women's imprisonment. The way prison rules shape female inmates' social world falls squarely in the realm of gendered, sexualized surveillance (Lempert 2016). The way female inmates navigate these rules structures how they experience incarceration (Law 2009).

In addition, inmates – male and female both – must learn the rules of the collective social system called the "convict code," defined as norms of prosocial behavior among inmates, defiant of the prison administration (Hunt et al. 1993; Kruttschnitt, Gartner, and Miller 2000). The convict code encourages a collective orientation towards being an inmate and prohibits snitching and encouraging inmates to participate in strikes and protests. Inmates conform to the convict code to varying degrees depending on sentence length, prior contact with the criminal justice system, and prison-wide inmate turnover (Hunt et al. 1993; Jensen and Jones 1976; MacKenzie, Robinson, and Campbell

1989). Overall, prison rules – both official regulations and informal norms – significantly shape inmates' social experience of prison.

Second, scholars have focused on the key role of relationships in organizing the prison social world through gangs and fictive kin networks. This literature argues that men's prisons are governed by gangs, providing protection and material resources and dictating behavior for inmates (Black 2009; Colwell 2007; Edgar and O'Donnell 1998; Jacobs 1977, 1983; O'Donnell 2004; O'Donnell and Edgar 1998, 1999; Parenti 1999; Skarbek 2014). Of course, researchers have pointed out that gangs do not govern women's prisons at all (Skarbek 2014), perhaps given gendered barriers to violence (Jones 2010) and gang activity (Miller 2001). Certainly spats and altercations occur inside women's prisons (Griffiths, Yule, and Gartner 2011), yet they are not gang-related. Instead of gangs, scholarship specific to women's prison points to romantic relationships and fictive kinship. Friendships, same-sex romantic relationships, and "pseudo-families" buffer female inmates from the hardships of prison life (Giallombardo 1966; Severance 2005; Ward and Kassebaum 1985; Warren et al. 2004). These relationships provide emotional comfort, physical gratification, and a reciprocal exchange of resources between female inmates. The prevailing understanding of the social world of women's prisons focuses heavily on the role of these personal relationships.

More broadly, prison scholars have continually disagreed over two prevailing paradigms on what organizes the prison world: the "deprivation" and "importation" models. The deprivation model asserts that prison culture is generated by the structural features and material and social deprivations of prison (Berk 1966; Goodman 2014;

Owen 1998; Rock 1996; Sykes [1958] 2007). From this perspective, it is the internal features of the prison itself that govern social life inside it. Gangs that are "native" to prison (Lessing 2010) or borne out of a vacuum of governance (Skarbek 2014) reflect the deprivation model, as do same-sex inmate relationships and fictive kinships, given that inmate relationships replace romantic and familial relationships outside of prison.

The importation model, by contrast, argues that inmates bring with them preexisting norms, attitudes, and behaviors from their lives outside of prison (Cao, Zhao, and Van Dine 1997; Clemmer [1940] 1958; Flanagan 1983; Harer and Steffensmeier 1996; Irwin and Cressey 1962). Gangs that are brought into prison from the "street" are illustrative of this model (Jacobs 1974, 1977; Sánchez-Jankowski 2003). This paradigm highlights the iterative relationship between "street" and "prison" culture. Empirical studies testing these models have found evidence of both models at work (Mears et al. 2013; Thomas 1977).

Conceptual Contribution: Religion as Adaptation Shapes the Prison Experience Unequally

These studies, while telling us a great deal about the prison social world, mischaracterize prison life as overly monolithic. From this perspective, prison rules govern the inmate experience, and inmates adapt by joining gangs and forming intimate relationships with other inmates. While these factors are deeply central to the prison experience, they fail to consider that some inmates adapt more easily than others.

This dissertation presents evidence that not all imprisonment is created equal. Prior studies have shown that inmates maximize their quality of life by seeking the best

prison jobs (Goodman 2012) or cozying up to officers (Hunt et al. 1993). Put another way, inmates use "tactics" to carve out a better life for themselves (e.g. Law 2009). "Tactics" are individualistic means of everyday resistance, as opposed to "strategies," which are formalized and collective (de Certeau 1984; cf. Stuart 2016). Disadvantaged individuals and families creatively cobble together available resources (e.g. Scott 1985). In contexts of extreme poverty, for example, people develop networks of reciprocity (Stack 1974) and a sense of community (Duck 2015) to get the resources and social support they need. Economically disadvantaged households cobble together combined wages from low-paying jobs and public assistance (Newman 1999), and the destitute scrape by, collecting various resources that can be turned into food or cash (Edin and Schaefer 2016). It is worth noting that these "tactics" are not ideal solutions to disadvantage, particularly since they can pit the disadvantaged against each other (Scheper-Hughes 1992).

Scholars of the prison context have focused on tactics to improve an inmate's quality of life behind bars, particularly focusing on social relationships like joining a gang or engaging in a pseudo-familial relationship. However, these tactics do not occur in a vacuum. Inmates can likewise maximize their quality of life by drawing upon available institutions. While in prison, inmates are not isolated from key institutions like family, education, labor, health care, or religion. These institutional resources help inmates adapt to the hardships of imprisonment. For instance, inmates who have family members to spend time with during visiting hours may experience slightly better adaptation than an inmate whose family has cut all ties.

As such, analyses of adaptive social relationships do not tell the whole story. Inmates, like individuals in outside society, operate within a host of overlapping social institutions. In *Unanticipated Gains* (2010), Mario Luis Small argues that some individuals fare better than others based on the institutions in which they are embedded, which gives them access to beneficial social networks. Likewise, in the prison context, inmates adapt unequally based on the institutions to which they have access. If institutions facilitate unequal adjustment to prison, then prison adjustment depends not only on what inmates as individuals do, but on the institutions in which they are embedded.

Religion serves as an illustrative case through which to understand this critique. Even Goffman ([1961] 2007), in his seminal work on total institutions, suggested, "Strong religious and political convictions may also serve perhaps to immunize the true believer against the assaults of a total institution . . ." (66). Other institutions like family and education operate in similar ways, as will be discussed in the conclusion of this dissertation. Inmates can draw upon religion to organize their lives, just as Smilde (2007) found in his study of Latin American Evangelicalism as "cultural agency," in which Venezuelan converts used religion to reclaim control over the disorder in their lives. The importance of religion as an institutional strategy becomes even clearer when considering the findings of a recent study of female prisoners. In *Women Doing Life*, Lora Bex Lempert (2016) interviewed 72 women serving life sentences, and identified "agentic strategies" that inmates used to cope with the hardships of imprisonment. These strategies were: 1) continuing life "as if" living in outside society; 2) "staying busy"; 3) developing

relationships with fellow inmates; and 4) cultivating a relationship with God. Each of these strategies helped individual inmates find meaning in their incarceration. Lempert argues that the last strategy – religion – gives inmates hope and a sense of purpose. Yet again, this emphasis is overly individualistic. As Lempert shows, religion may provide a sense of fulfillment for inmates, but I extend the analysis by showing that religion also serves a powerful collective function as an organizing force that structures daily life in prison.

Sociologists of religion have long been concerned with how religion perpetuates socioeconomic inequality (Keister 2003, 2007, 2008, 2011; Weber [1958] 2003). Weber argued in his *Protestant Ethic* ([1958] 2003) that religious beliefs around work and investment generated economic inequality based on religious affiliation. Yet belief alone does not tell the whole story. Different religious groups provide different resources depending on how they practice religion, what members donate, and how they interact with dominant institutions. In this dissertation, I show that using religion as a tactic of adjustment generates inequality based on the access to institutional resources it facilitates. Religion is both a method of adjusting to prison and a mechanism that generates inequality, both materially and socially.

This dissertation demonstrates that religion both structures and stratifies the inmate experience. Religion structures the experience by working in tandem with the prison institution to promote punitive and rehabilitative carceral goals. At the same time, religion stratifies the inmate experience by providing unequal access to material and

social resources based on an inmate's denominational affiliation and level of religious practice.

Why Religion in Prison is Important

Religion and prison have been intertwined for centuries. The religious origins of penitentiaries shape modern-day prisons (Foucault 1977; Graber 2011; McKelvey 1977) and religious beliefs have long informed punishment practices (Applegate et al. 2000; Garland 1990; Grasmick et al. 1992; Grasmick and McGill 1994; Thomson and Froese 2016). In fact, the well-known concept of "panopticism," in which prison exerts power over inmates through constant unverifiable surveillance, likens prison surveillance to the watchful eye of God (Bentham 1995).

Additionally, outside prison walls, most Americans, and particularly disadvantaged Americans, draw upon religion to make sense of their lives. Between 93% and 96% of all Americans believe in God (Edgell, Gerteis, and Hartmann 2006; Froese and Bader 2010). Women – poor black women in particular – are especially devout (Chatters, Taylor, and Lincoln 1999; Mattis 2002; Roth and Kroll 2007; Schnabel 2015; Sullivan 2012). Founding social theorists have long viewed religion as a force that brings groups together (Durkheim [1912] 1995) and stratifies groups materially (Weber [1958] 2003). Furthermore, religious affiliation is a key factor in generating and perpetuating economic inequality (Keister 2003, 2007, 2008, 2011). Therefore, this suggests religion might play a key role in the lives of at least some inmates.

Furthermore, a growing body of research shows that religion and spirituality are powerful forces in the lives of the poor (Sullivan 2012) and those facing hardships

(Griffith 2000), of which prisoners constitute a significant contingent. In Susan Crawford Sullivan's (2012) *Living Faith*, the 45 poor mothers she interviewed in Boston were highly spiritual but the vast majority did not regularly attend church. Only 7 of her 45 respondents attended church once a month or more despite the primacy of faith in their lives. Sullivan finds that practical matters of transportation and work schedules, along with stigmatizing forces of single parenthood, lack of money to tithe, and extramarital cohabitation, push these disadvantaged women away from formal religious institutions. This finding would lead us to expect that religion as an institution might be alienating for the incarcerated women at Mapleside, many of whom are deeply disadvantaged. However, the prison context avoids the push factors of stigma and transportation, and makes religion readily available to inmates. Moreover, on a theoretical level, Sullivan's findings show that it is the individuals – not the institutions – who determine whether and how to draw upon institutional resources. Yet in the severely limiting context of prison, in which prisoners' lives are highly regulated, I find that it is the religious institutions – not the individuals – that determine who has access to institutional resources, and how much access they have.

Finally, and perhaps most crucially, religious programs are constitutionally-protected in correctional facilities, meaning they are prevalent and available to any inmate in the general population. The Religious Land Use and Institutionalized Persons Act (RLUIPA) in 2000 mandated religious freedom in every single U.S. jail and prison

(42 U.S.C. § 2000cc; Waltman 2010).[7] The result was an unprecedented influx of religious programs in every U.S. correctional facility. Religious activities, in this case, include "any exercise of religion, whether or not compelled by, or central to, a system of religious belief" (42 U.S.C. § 2000cc).

Today, though imprisonment itself upholds secular aims, faith-based initiatives and religious volunteers of all stripes enter U.S. jails and prisons to facilitate worship services and scriptural studies (Sullivan 2009; Pierce 2006; Spitale 2002). Apart from hiring a full-time chaplain with a state salary and benefits, religious programs incur no financial cost to prisons apart from the space they provide and the officers on patrol. Volunteers lend their time and religious institutions on the outside donate religious items for worship and practice. Full-time, state-sponsored prison chaplains appear to support state goals for incarceration, namely retribution – punishment for one's crime – with rehabilitation as a secondary goal (Sundt and Cullen 2002), even when they favor some religious inmates over others (Beckford and Gilliat 1998). Religious volunteers supplement the work of state-sponsored chaplains when they propose, organize, and lead voluntary programs inside prison.[8] Since these religious programs rely upon volunteers, rather than correctional dollars, the array of programs available to prisoners is wide-

[7] The 1993 Religious Freedom Restoration Act jumpstarted this (42 U.S.C. § 2000bb), but sparked debates regarding how it should be applied to the prison context. RLUIPA resolved this by defining the parameters of religious freedom for all individuals confined in state and federal institutions.

[8] Likewise, secular programs, apart from official, state-sponsored rehabilitative programs, rely on volunteers willing to undergo extensive paperwork and background checks to provide unpaid programming. As such, the availability of religious and secular programs is dependent upon the availability of eager, steadfast volunteers.

ranging and unstandardized – yet one theological study of religious clergy and volunteers entering prison found that even in this diversity, they all share a similar purpose: a psychological transformation in prisoners' lives (Lloyd, Dubler, Webb, and Atkins forthcoming). In fact, the limited research on religion in prison points to a "cognitive transformation" that signals personal growth of the offender (Giordano, Cernkovich, and Rudolph 2002; Maruna 2001).

Religion may have the potential to rehabilitate inmates. Being religious reduces the likelihood of criminal offending (Baier and Wright 2001; Evans et al. 1995; Flores 2013; Jang and Franzen 2013; Johnson and Jang 2010; Johnson et al. 2001; Petts 2009) and decreases the likelihood of recidivism (Johnson 2004, 2011; Johnson and Larson 2008; Johnson, Larson, and Pitts 1997; Sumter 2006; Trusty and Eisenberg 2003; Young et al. 1995), at least in certain circumstances (Giordano et al. 2008).

The rehabilitative effects of secular programs inside prison, including education, vocational training, and emotional-behavioral management programs, are well documented (Cullen and Jonson 2011; Esperian 2010; Henry 2015; Kuehn 1969; Lipsey and Cullen 2007; MacKenzie 2006; Petersilia 2003). Prior literature would lead us to expect that inmates could also benefit from participation in religious programs. For instance, research predominately on male inmates shows that, whether or not inmates were religious prior to prison, participation in religious programs improves inmate behavior (Kerley, Matthews, and Blanchard 2005) and affords a greater sense of hope and purpose (Aday, Krabill, and Deaton-Owens 2014; Clear et al. 2000; Cooney and Phillips 2008; Dubler 2013; Hallett et al. 2017; Johnson 2012; Kerley 2014; Lempert

2016; Maruna, Wilson, and Curran 2006; Thomas and Zaitzow 2006; Walker 2016). Religion appears to counteract criminogenic effects of prison: rather than causing criminal behavior, religion operates as an exit strategy from gang affiliation (Johnson 2012; Flores 2013; Skarbek 2014), and participation in religious programs leads to lower rates of recidivism (Johnson 2004, 2011; Johnson, Larson, and Pitts 1997; Sumter 2006).

In his interviews with 40 incarcerated women and 63 incarcerated men, Kerley (2014) found that participation in religious programs in prison led to positive psychological outcomes as a way to cope with hardships. Lempert (2016) found the same when interviewing women lifers. Although the overwhelming majority of studies on women's prisons make no mention of religion, in their study of women's prisons in California, Kruttschnitt and Gartner (2005) found that between 28.6% and 35.6% of the women in their sample said, "[T]he positive outcome of my incarceration is… finding a religion," with the top two responses being "having time to think about my life" and "getting off of drugs" (114). These studies suggest religion is an important component of inmates' lives, yet minimal research has interrogated how religion is important in prison, above and beyond psychological outcomes.

Religion is not a primary focus of Timothy Black's 18 year ethnography of three Puerto Rican brothers in Boston, *When a Heart Turns Rock Solid* (2009). However, Black's study aptly points to the complex role of religion in prison life. Fausto, one of the Puerto Rican brothers, joined a gang in prison and was put "on lock"[9] for two years.

[9] "Lock" is disciplinary housing, akin to solitary confinement. Being "on lock" means staying in a cell 23 hours a day, eating meals alone, with one hour of recreation. At

When he was asked to sign a form relinquishing gang membership in order to be eligible for a family visit, Fausto told Black, "Fuck what they think! . . . I'll sign your piece of shit paper. . . . And I wrote down, I'm thinkin' about becomin' a born-again Christian [laughter]" (Black 2009:248). Fausto's flippant, almost mocking use of religion in prison demonstrates his awareness that prison administrators favored religious conversion, and that it could be used to his advantage. Later, however, while struggling with heroin addiction years after his release from prison, Fausto pointed to the faith he learned in prison as his source of hope:

> I'm gonna keep hope until the day I die, because my faith, the stories and the Book tells of men going through hell and yet, they never, they never lost their faith. . . . That's what keeps me going because while I was in prison I had a chance to read the Bible for the first time in my life. . . . I learned from some of the stories in there. . . . (Black 2009:284).

As Fausto's experience demonstrates, religion can be viewed with both cynicism and reverence, as a powerful source of hope in surviving prison and the challenges of life after release. This dissertation draws upon this understanding of how religion can function as a source of hope in prison, but moves these conversations forward by showing how religion also operates as an organizing force inside prison that influences prisoners unequally.

Data and Methods

Mapleside, the chaplain visits those "on lock" every Thursday morning, bringing them Bibles and other religious reading material.

I spent 12 months conducting ethnographic research at Mapleside Prison. Mapleside represents a typical women's state prison in the mid-Atlantic United States, housing about 1,000 women of all security levels, from minimum to maximum. Outsiders called these women "felons" or "convicts" or "offenders." Insiders called them "residents." According to official state parameters, the population comprised about even proportions of black and white women, and a lower share of Latina women.[10] Ages ranged from 17 to over 80, with an average age of 36.[11] The majority of inmates were ages 21 through 50. Average length of stay is around 3.5 years, but sentences ranged anywhere from seven months to life. The largest shares of women were convicted of drug offenses (around 17%) and murder (around 20%), with the next most common offenses being larceny (around 15%) and assault (around 15%). Behind these statistics was significant diversity. Many inmates had dropped out of high school and were getting their GED in prison. Most others had high school degrees but no college. Some had Bachelor's degrees from highly reputable universities. A handful of inmates had earned Master's degrees and professional degrees. Some were first-timers; others were repeat offenders.

In the methodological appendix, I describe the process of gaining access, my approach to data collection and analysis, and consider questions of reflexivity and my role in the field. After obtaining necessary permission from the Institutional Review Board at the University of Pennsylvania and the state Department of Correction's own internal review board, I was permitted to enter Mapleside Prison as a researcher. From

[10] Exact numbers are withheld to protect the identity of the prison.
[11] State parameters were available only as means rather than medians.

April 2014 to May 2015, I visited Mapleside two to four days per week, from two to nine hours per day, averaging 3.5 hours per visit. My detailed field notes chronicled what I witnessed, along with quotes taken down verbatim in my notebook in real time, totaling nearly 900 single-spaced pages. I wrote field notes after each visit to Mapleside, before I returned for my next visit. For several months, this meant writing notes when I got home from fieldwork at 10:30 pm before I returned at 9:00 am the next day. I slept very little those nights.

At Mapleside, I observed a range of everyday activities, from watching inmates eat lunch to teasing each other in the hallway, to writing essays for college courses in the computer lab. Beyond informal observations, I conducted formal observations of programs in the Main Hall. Table 1 lists the variety of voluntary programs at Mapleside. I observed secular programs such as beekeeping, yoga, and victim's awareness events, bolstered by interviews with inmates who participated in programs outside my access, including gardening club, Toastmasters, Zumba, college education courses, GED courses, a honeybee preservation program, and a service dog training program.

[Table 1 about here]

As Table 1 suggests, religious programs outnumbered secular programs in frequency and availability to inmates; secular programs generally accepted fewer participants, met less often, and, unlike religions for which prison ministry is a theological prescription, garnered fewer volunteers. For two months, I observed religious worship services and scriptural studies for Catholic, conservative Protestant, Jewish, and

Sunni Muslim groups.[12] For the following ten months, I focused on the largest religious group at Mapleside Prison, the conservative Protestants, who comprised 63% of the inmate population. This group, composed of evangelical and black Protestant denominations as defined by the RELTRAD classification (Steensland et al. 2000), was an official umbrella affiliation for Baptist, African Methodist Episcopal, Pentecostal, Apostolic, and nondenominational Christians. The Protestant group held a single worship service for an average of 280 inmates each week, with separate Bible studies for each denomination within the umbrella. This group is difficult to categorize more precisely because it encompassed a wide range of denominational affiliations, contingent on which outside churches sent volunteer preachers to Mapleside. As Estrella, a devout Pentecostal Latina, once complained to me, "We have different groups coming into the pulpit. We get a smorgasbord of religion. We can't expect a consistent Word [of God]; we have to pick and choose what fits."

[Table 2 about here]

I observed Sunday church services, Baptist, AME, and nondenominational youth Bible studies for women under 25, Christian Witness Training courses, Ministry classes, classes based on the books *Purpose Driven Life* by Rick Warren and *Battlefield of the Mind* by Joyce Meyer, Discipleship classes, and religious movie screenings. I also attended special events: "Gospelfest," where Christian inmates showcased their ministerial talents, a weekend-long nondenominational Christian "retreat" in the prison

[12] Smaller religious groups, such as Nation of Islam, Wicca, Lutheran, and Jehovah's Witness, held meetings beyond my access. I sat in on one Seventh-day Adventist Bible study.

library, a Christmas caroling event held in the gym, and two weekend-long Christian revival meetings. Additionally, I conducted observations on major holidays, including Good Friday, Easter, Pentecost, Mother's Day, Father's Day, Thanksgiving, and Christmas. Ethnographic methods granted me rich insights into how religion works in prison. I paid special attention to scriptures cited, tone of preaching, emotions stirred, emotional energy derived (Collins 2004), and forms of prayer. I always noted the racial, age, and social class composition of religious programs.

I was prohibited from bringing a tape recorder inside the facility, and my request for one-on-one interviews were denied, given that they would require a guard to oversee it. Nevertheless, thanks to significant coordination by officers, I conducted sit-down interviews with 18 inmates, including 9 Protestants, 3 Catholics, 2 Jews, 1 Jehovah's Witness, and 3 Agnostics. I took notes in real time during these interviews.

Dissertation Roadmap

This dissertation uncovers the multifaceted ways religion unequally structures the social experience of daily life in prison. Some aspects of religion in prison seemed like benefits for inmates, some seemed like disadvantages. Either way, religion provided a substantial amount of resources that the state was not providing, thereby governing inmate adjustment for a substantial proportion of inmates. I share the voices of inmates, prison staff, and religious volunteers, comparing what I heard to what I observed. Throughout these chapters, I compare the perspective of religious inmates with voices of inmates who do not participate in any religious programs.

Chapter one begins by describing the setting of Mapleside Prison, chronicling what I saw as a researcher, from entering the prison gates to navigating the sterile hallways and noisy cellblocks. I outline a typical day in the life of an inmate, from breakfast to work to leisure time, and the relationships with fellow inmates and corrections officers that shape their day. I then set the scene of religion at Mapleside, describing the variety of available religious programs and who participates in them. I include an extended description of the energetic Protestant Sunday worship services attended by about 260 inmates every week.

The second chapter investigates how religion provides an alternative framework for understanding what it means to be an inmate. Contrasting official legal explanations, religious messages reinterpret imprisonment as part of God's plan. This framework of individual responsibility encourages inmates to seek self-improvement and behavioral transformation. These messages ignore the structural factors, including economic and racial disadvantage, faced by those most likely to become incarcerated. Given enormous racial disparities in the American criminal justice system, these messages have important implications for understanding systematic inequality and future life chances. Religious messages, therefore, work in tandem with prison messages about what it means to be an inmate to reinforce neoliberal punitive and rehabilitative prison goals.

In chapter three, I discuss how race, class, and gender intersect in religious messages. Here, religion shapes not only what women should desire, but reifies patriarchal expectations of femininity and submission consistent with the attitudes of the prison administration on gender and sexuality reported in prior research. Furthermore,

messages that encourage female inmates to find a “man of God” to marry are entirely out of sync with the structural disadvantage formerly incarcerated women face upon reentry. While staying silent on issues of class and race, religious messages prescribe normative expectations around family and femininity in ways that affirm gendered prison norms.

Next, in chapter four, I analyze how religion stretches into even the most private and intimate spaces, that of women’s sexuality. True believers are forced to reject sexual experiences and even lesbian identities that were once central for them. In an environment where being “gay for the stay” is common but illicit, the prisoners who participate heavily in conservative Protestant programs must reject anything but heteronormative sex.. Yet corrections officers fail to enforce official prohibitions against same-sex inmate coupling, and instead the most devout inmates take it upon themselves to censure same-sex inmate couples who attend religious programs together. Here, religion structures prison adaptation by discouraging inmates from entering same-sex relationships.

The last empirical chapter explains how, by participating in religious programs, inmates have access to material and social resources unavailable to non-participants. Those who participate the most gain the most benefits. These include time spent out of their cell, special clothing like colorful headscarves and flowing robes, and food such as kosher meals, feasts during Ramadan, and Christmas cookies. Conservative Protestant programs are the most resource-rich, and as such, inmates who affiliate with conservative Protestantism have access to the most resources. Material deprivations are a hallmark of prison life; alleviating these deprivations is inextricably intertwined with religion, getting

recast in religious language as “provisions” or “favor” from God. The uneven distribution of resources in religious programs leads to an unequal material experience of prison based on denominational affiliation and level of religious practice. Furthermore, while facilitating a network of emotional support among religious inmates and between inmates and outside preachers, variation in religiosity creates a contentious status hierarchy among inmates, a finding heretofore overlooked in the multitudes of studies on prison social order.

In the concluding chapter, I consider what religion as a governing feature tells us about inequality inside prison. I turn to numerous other institutions, such as family and education, to examine how institutions reflect and reinforce the punitive and rehabilitative aspects of prison life. I then suggest policy implications regarding religious freedom in U.S. state prisons and practical implications for the mechanics of religious practice in prison. I close with a discussion of possible alternative expressions of prison religion that avoid the downsides of religious practice presented here. Appended is a methodological reflection on my role in the field, from gaining access to establishing rapport, and a discussion of data analysis and writing.

This dissertation showcases both the benefits and drawbacks of religion as an organizing force in prison. While providing material resources, it creates an unequal social hierarchy. Feelings of redemption are countered by perceptions of moral authority and resulting conflict between inmates. Participation in religious programs generates both hope for release and complacence with the status quo. Religious programs both condemn homosexual behavior theologically and facilitate its practice on a practical level. For

better or for worse, religion dramatically shapes life in prison for the women at Mapleside – this dissertation explains how.

CHAPTER 1

THE PRISON SETTING

This place isn't fit for anyone. It isn't fit for animals. And they tell you it gets easier, that you learn to deal with your time, but I don't know. You watch your life pass by, out a window, or on the tv screen. At the end of the day, when it's lights off and they cut off the tv, and they lock you in your room, that's the hardest part.

Vanessa, 25 year old black inmate serving 30 years for murder

Going Inside

From the outside, Mapleside Prison looks like a public high school resting in a clearing: brick buildings surrounded by rolling hills and tall, deciduous trees, not far from farm houses that betray their age with drooping yellowed siding and rusting Chevy pickups parked on adjacent dirt driveways. It is the towering chain-link fences wrapped in barbed wire that signal Mapleside's punitive function. The prison is tucked away, only a couple miles from a commercial thoroughfare – hidden in plain sight – effectively rendering 1,000 women invisible from society's view, as is the function of modern-day prisons (Foucault 1977).

After arriving in the Mapleside parking lot for my very first visit, I found myself sitting in my car with shaky knees and a rapid heartrate. I had never before stepped foot inside an operating prison. I pulled my car into the section labeled "Visitor Parking" that had 30 parking spaces plus a few for handicapped visitors, which, along with an overflow

lot several yards away, somehow managed to be sufficient despite the inmate population of 1,000. At 8 am on a Sunday morning, I had no problem finding a spot.

I turned off my ignition and took a deep breath. Getting out of my car, I pulled my shoulders back, feigning confidence. A few yards to the left of the Visitor's Parking lot was a deep red brick building, labeled with large, black cast iron letters that read "VISITOR'S ENTRANCE" in all caps. At least I knew I was in the right place. I later learned that prison staff call this "the Gatehouse."

When I walked in, there were two mid-30s black female corrections officers ("officers" hereafter). Rarely called prison guards, most inmate and staff referred to them as "COs" or "officers," or even metonymically as "uniforms," or as "cuties on duty" when inmates were feeling playful. One officer was seated on a rolling chair behind an L-shaped desk, complete with a flat-screen tv that captured images of everyone who walked through the metal detector, a computer, binders bursting with official memos signed by the assistant warden stating who is allowed to enter the facility, and notebooks for recording employee and official visitor entries and exits. The second officer was standing across the desk, propping herself on her forearms chatting with the officer behind the desk. This was the officer who physically screened visitors, looking through their belongings to make sure they were only bringing approved items into the facility, telling them when to walk through the metal detector, and patting them down on the other side. In my year visiting Mapleside, only female officers conducted pat-downs, although occasionally there was a male officer seated behind the desk.

The officer doing the screenings called out to me, “You here for Girl Scouts?” I smiled and shook my head. Pointing to a pile of blank forms, she replied matter-of-factly, “Okay, then you need to sign in here and you can’t wear any jewelry except for a wedding ring.” I followed instructions then waited, stepping back from the desk a few feet, unsure what I was being asked to do. Moving through the prison facility is marked by top-down decisions about where your body is allowed to be. This is true for inmates, visitors, and staff. Everyone except administrative staff and high-ranking security personnel need to justify their presence in any given place. More than a full year after my first visit, when the prison chaplain took me on a guided tour, even she, who had been working at the prison for about 20 years, had to justify to officers on post why she was in the residence hall or the library or the sew shop, showing me around.

As a first-time visitor, I didn’t know where to keep my body. Should I stand next to the desk as I awaited further instructions, or would that be too aggressive, since the officer already acknowledged my presence? Should I stand by the metal detector? Should I sit in one of the blue plastic chairs nailed down to the floor by the entry door?

After about a month of research, I learned the drill: walk in like you’re used to being there. It helps if you are wearing business attire. Once you get to know the officers working in the Gatehouse, this whole process will be a lot quicker and friendlier. Walk right up to the scanner – it looks a lot like the ones they use for carry-on luggage in airports. Place your clear-plastic bag on the belt. All female officers and most volunteers have a transparent plastic purse in which you can bring food, a sealed plastic bottle of water or soda, pens and pencils, and whatever else is required for the job – in my case, a

Bible. I also chose to carry my entrance memo explaining my role as researcher, signed by the assistant warden. Even months into my field work, I was questioned by officers, and producing this memo justified my presence in the facility. With your clear bag waiting on the scanner, stand next to it or mosey over to waist-height composite wood table on the other side of the scanner, where the officer will inspect the contents of your bag once it has cleared the scanner. The officer will look through everything by hand then scoop up your clear bag and your coat, sweater, belt, and any other removable outerwear, and take it with her to the other side of the metal detector. Next, you should take a few steps over towards the metal detector. Wait about three feet away from it, facing the officer, until she says, "You can come on through," or wordlessly waves her hand for you to come through. If you try to walk through before her signal, you will be chastised, exactly the same way it works in an airport. Walk through the metal detector. You may hear a beep if you forgot to remove your watch, or – and I never understood this – if you are wearing boots of any kind, you will need to remove those and try again. Once you get through the metal detector, turn your back to the officer and stretch your arms out to the sides and straddle your legs slightly. The officer, wearing latex gloves, will pat your body down. Then approach the officer sitting at the desk with your driver's license or other state-issued ID. She will stand up and get your volunteer badge from an alphabetized filing cabinet behind her. Sometimes the badge will be misfiled, and if it takes too long to locate it, you may receive a temporary visitor's badge. Later, when you leave for the day, place your volunteer badge on the desk in front of the officer, and when she is ready, she will take it and hand you your license back.

But that was for veteran volunteers and staff. For visitors and newbies, it was a different story. That first day, I watched as three young white children passed through the metal detector one by one, followed by their father, presumably visiting their incarcerated mother at Mapleside. One of the young boys had a leftover piece of a cookie stuck to his shirt. The officer pointed this out and then removed it with her latex-gloved hand, tossing it into the large gray plastic trashcan behind her. The kids and their father seemed to know the routine here. After getting patted down, they walked past the desk to another waiting area where they would soon be given permission to walk to the visiting room.

That's once you get past the Gatehouse. I was still waiting. After a few moments, I realized I should have been clearer about why I was there, especially since the officers did not ask. I stepped back up towards the desk and called out to the officers, who were still making conversation amongst themselves, "I'm here to meet the chaplain." "Oh, you're not here to visit an inmate?" the officer behind the desk asked. I shook my head. She asked for my name and took my driver's license. Then she pulled a heavy binder towards her to look me up in the day's entrance memos. She found my name on the list. I asked, "Do I need to take my earrings off?" and she said no. I later learned that volunteers have much more leeway in what they can wear and bring into the facility than do inmates' visitors.

Once I passed through the metal detector, I had to provide a name and cellphone number to the officer behind the desk. Then they turned away from me as if our interaction was over. Not sure where to go, I had to interrupt them to ask what I should do next. The officer behind the desk sighed and explained, "Chaplain Harper isn't here

yet, so you can wait over there." She pointed to another section of plastic blue chairs bolted to the floor, lined up next to the back window of the gatehouse where others were waiting to visit with inmates. I sat down in the second row, flanked by empty chairs to either side of me. Some visitors were by themselves, others were chatting quietly to those they came with. After a few minutes waiting, two groups of visitors struck up a conversation about how many hours they had driven to get to Mapleside.

Soon enough, Chaplain Harper arrived. A black woman in her mid-50s, herself a faithful Baptist, Chaplain Harper is the only full-time chaplain on staff. She escorted me, along with Tanisse, a young black volunteer from a nearby African Methodist Episcopal church, down to the religious service. She walked us through the same set of chain-link gates that visitors pass through. The gates were massive, more than three-times my height, wrapped with steely barbed wire around the top. Each gate had a blue sign posted on it with gold letters that read, "Electric Gates Do Not Touch." Months later, Chaplain Harper would reveal to me that for the longest time, she thought that meant the gates would electrocute you, but instead it means that they are powered electrically to slide back and forth.

We walked through the first gate onto a cement square about half the size of a playground basketball court. It felt a lot like a basketball court too, since the ground was painted with thick red lines to indicate where you are supposed to stand, and because the gates are just like the ones you see at any public school or public park. It did not feel oppressive because nothing obstructed the blue, sunny skies above. That winter, when

clumps of fallen snow clung to the gates, transforming them into a sparkling white wall, the gates almost looked beautiful.

Chaplain Harper led the way, walking ahead about ten steps, towards the next thick red line where we had to wait until the second chain-link gate opened. We made small talk for a moment until that second gate opened, allowing us to walk on a concrete sidewalk that wrapped around a small garden that I later learned minimum-security inmates tended. Next, we waited for two heavy metal "sliders" to open to let us into the "Main Hall," the building that housed the gym, cafeteria, classrooms, computer lab, volunteer coordinator's office, religious library, and chaplain's office. Only an officer in "master control" – a desk space enclosed by glass, home to keys and handcuffs and controls to open and close doors – could operate the sliders. I often had to wait several minutes for the officer on duty to notice me waiting. Normally, it took at least five or ten minutes to enter the prison.

How Mapleside Looks and Feels

The Oppressive Feeling of Living in Prison

"There's a darkness in here, can't you feel it?" Coco asked me one Sunday evening in the prison gym. Coco is a 31 year old black woman serving life without parole for first-degree murder. Gazing at me with widened eyes, Coco's question sounded urgent. She looked up at the ceiling, and I did too. The oppressive weight of the summer evening's heat and humidity began to sink down over us. Everything was beige and grey, from the ceiling to the walls to the inmates' uniforms. The skylights in the ceiling of the gym now looked pitch black under the cloak of night; the only light came from the stark

ceiling lights overhead. “When I got here, all I saw was darkness,” Coco continued.

Estrella, on the other hand, felt more banality than darkness. A 38 year old petite Latina inmate serving 10 years for drug distribution, this is not Estrella’s first time locked up. Though disillusioned with imprisonment, Estrella sounded more resigned: “It really is it’s own little society. It’s own little world. I’m not saying it’s not the real world, but it’s different.” Leaning back in her chair as we spoke, Estrella folded her hands behind her head and closed her eyes. “I’ve been bored. I guess I’m sick of being here,” she said somberly. At two and a half years, Estrella had completed about 1/4th of her sentence.

Many inmates struggled with feeling disrespected and ignored by officers. One afternoon, Ms. Brenda, a black inmate in her mid-50s, who received the Ms. honorific from fellow inmates due to her age, shared her frustration when an officer ignored her:

> I was waiting at the sliders and the officer would not let me out. She just would not look up to let me out. Meanwhile she’d been opening and closing that door all morning. I was getting more and more frustrated, and I let out [a curse word]. But I don’t want to be like that.

Ms. Brenda started to tear up. An inmate sitting next to her try to console her by chiming in, “It’s because of the lack of freedoms in here. When they lock you in there, like animals. It’s all mind games; they see you. The more you bang on the door, [the officer] not gonna open that.” Yet another inmate in the class got riled up and came to Ms. Brenda’s defense, “Everything in here is meant to degrade you . . . [T]hey treat you like a child. It’s hard not to get upset.”

Many inmates reported feeling degraded by their incarceration. Maria, a late-50s

black inmate serving 25 years for murder, normally greeted me cheerfully over the twelve months I knew her. One spring morning, though, she let her guard down. Shaking her head, Maria complained, “I am in no mood for prison today. I just can’t deal with it today. All that stuff, I know you hear about it. I know you see it. I’m just in no mood.” She described witnessing an officer berating another inmate for something Maria knew she hadn’t done. “They way they talk to us,” Maria shook her head, “they treat us like animals. We’re all people in here. We’re all humans.” When Maria arrived in the Main Hall that morning, she believed the officer on post intentionally delayed opening up the bathroom for her use. Maria sounded distressed, choking back tears as she described:

> I asked for them to unlock the bathroom, and she [the officer] made a big fuss about it, not wanting to open the door. That’s not part of the punishment, not letting us use the bathroom. Nowhere does it say we shouldn’t have the right to use the bathroom. That’s a normal human issue. . . . This was a moral issue. I’m supposed to be able to use the bathroom when I need to. They treat us like animals.

Maria felt degraded for being delayed from what she saw as her right to use the bathroom.

Although prison life was far from easy, several inmates said they adjusted more easily than they expected. Officer McLean, the early 30s black female officer, reminded me that there is a range of experiences prior to incarceration. She explained, “Some women, when they get here, they have a lot of trouble. They ain’t used to living like this. But for others, this is a good place to be, ‘cause they got a place to sleep and something

to eat every day. It just depends."

Ja, who knew the revolving-door of the criminal justice system well, having already served numerous sentences for theft and drug dealing despite only being in her early 20s, confided in me that she saw incarceration as almost cushy: "It's job corps behind bars. It's like a daycare, Rachel. I'm telling you. Every privilege you have out there, you have in here. You seen how we live? We have flatscreen TVs, Xbox. . . . you can buy $85 in food packages from commissary every week. They got everything." Similarly, Maria, who complained above about being treated like an animal, told me once, "It was nothing like I expected . . . I call it Camp Cupcake." Lexi, the 40 year old inmate who had no prior experience with the criminal justice system, admitted to me that prison was a lot different from what she expected: "I was terrified before coming here. I mean, *terrified*. I thought I would get raped." At this, she smirked knowingly, demonstrating how naïve that expectation was. "I didn't know anything. I never knew anyone who had been to prison." Laughing, Lexi described that her worst fears were disconfirmed when she was paired with a roommate who was convicted of murder:

> I've only lived with murderers. It's funny, I get along with the murderers better. I think it's because they did one thing wrong, one time. Whereas some other people in here who are repeat offenders, they have that lifestyle. I can relate to the murderers better. The husband got in the way!

Lexi's description highlighted a key reality of the prison social world: repeat offenders with shorter sentences tended to stick together, as did those with decades-long sentences.

Consistent with prior research on women's prisons as less violent than men's prisons, life at Mapleside seemed to lack the fear, intimidation, and danger described in men's prisons, particularly related to men's gangs (Griffiths, Yule, and Gartner 2011; Owen 1998; Skarbek 2014). Overall, inmates described what Goffman ([1961] 2007) called the "fraternization process," in which a newly admitted inmate stereotypes other inmates in much the same way as staff, learning over time that most other inmates "have all the properties of ordinary, occasionally decent human beings worthy of sympathy and support" (56). Inmates shared a variety of perspectives on life at Mapleside, sometimes emphasizing feelings of constraint and degradation, other times emphasizing the surprising amount of comfort and positive human interaction within its intimidating walls.

Inside the Main Hall

As a condition of my research access, I spent most of my research time in the Main Hall. The Main Hall was a bustling hub of daily activity, functioning like a college student union. Every inmate spent time in the Main Hall for lunch and dinner in the cafeteria, and many inmates spent additional time in its classrooms, computer lab, mail room, gym recreation, visiting room, baby bonding room, chaplain's office, and volunteer coordinator's office. In the middle of the hallway are double-doors that led to the prison courtyard. These doors were constantly opening and closing as officers and inmates stream in and out. When I spent time talking to inmates, officers, staff, and volunteers, there was often a constant stream of inmates coming and going. Inmates were talking, singing, or yelling in the hallways while officers were answering ringing phones,

communicating with other officers over their beeping walkie-talkies, or issuing loud commands. The Main Hall was almost never quiet. The only day I observed that was truly quiet in the Main Hall was the day before Thanksgiving, when all voluntary activities were canceled, many administrative staff were taking the day off, very few inmates and officers were around.

I was primed by classic ethnographies of women's prisons (Giallombardo 1966; Ward and Kassebaum 1965) to expect an aesthetic similar to a "college campus." To me, the Main Hall looked like a public high school. The building felt sterile: the walls were cement blocks slathered in bright white paint, with tan speckled tile floors mopped daily by inmates, and fluorescent lights beaming overhead. It felt bright and squeaky clean, and often smelled of cleaning fluid. Around mealtimes, scents of hot meat dishes piping out of the cafeteria were occasionally pungent enough to elicit complaints, like sauerkraut on hotdog day. Some afternoons, walking down that hallway, a waft of microwave popcorn filtered through, recently popped by an officer on duty or an inmate who worked in the Main Hall. When Asabi popped some popcorn as I was leaving one afternoon, she beamed with excitement, ready to relish the treat.

One big difference between high school and prison was that every room in Main Hall had a large window for officers to look through at any time. However, panopticism (Bentham 1995) was not a mechanism of control at Mapleside – I expected a security camera in every room, but only spotted one in the visiting room. Despite the large windows, it was possible to have privacy in these rooms because there was usually only one officer on guard at a desk in the center of Main Hall, and the classrooms stretched at

least ten yards down the corridor. A light jingling of keys meant an officer was walking down the hallway, warning of imminent surveillance. Inmates were highly attuned to this sound, but it took me a while before I realized that when the clanging stopped, you were supposed to look up to see if the officer was in the doorway or the window, expecting to have your attention. She might call one inmate out of the room or make an announcement to the group.

The Main Hall includes five classrooms used for Bible studies, Jewish and Muslim worship services, Alcoholics Anonymous meetings, anger management classes, and other voluntary programs. This is where most volunteers stayed, unless they are teaching GED or college courses, in which case they report to the library building. Classroom 1 is right next to the desk at which the officer on post sits all day. As such, this room is used as a waiting area when movement is "on hold," meaning inmates must stay in place, wherever they are, and cannot move about the compound. Movement was placed on hold at least one in three days I observed, normally for 15 or 20 minutes, for reasons like a fight between inmates. Classroom 1 has a long table in it, where inmates who are training service dogs in the "puppy program" eat their meals with dogs at their side. Classrooms 2, 4, and 5 are the main classrooms used for Bible studies and other religious programs, down a short corridor with a large trashcan and recycling bin, two water fountains, and the empty space where Commissary used to be. Commissary is now conducted by mail order, delivered directly to inmates' housing units.

Each classroom has about ten desks, and inmates bring in extra plastic chairs once those are claimed. There are two large black chalkboards at the front of the room, and

almost always chalk available to write with, plus a strip of corkboard above the chalkboard, just like in public schools. In the summer, noisy window air conditioning units blast cool air, a welcome reprieve from the sweltering cells with no A/C. In the winter, classrooms are either freezing cold or sweltering hot, depending on the disposition of the petulant heating system, often doing little to help with the draft coming in from the gaps in the windows. In the winter months, I spent hours perched on the radiator taking notes for this study in classroom 3, where the chaplain's inmate clerks, Hanna and Asabi, worked on their computers doing office work.

Every classroom has a large window without blinds looking out onto the prison courtyard, where inmates mill about in no particular rush, going to and from their housing units, interspersed with staff and officers, mostly black women, smartly-dressed in navy uniforms, with walkie-talkies clipped onto their shoulders. One Friday evening, while waiting for the Jewish worship service to begin, I gazed out the window to watch inmates make their way back to their housing units from the cafeteria. It was raining, so most inmates, lacking rain jackets, bowed their heads to shelter their faces from the rainfall. Some wore ponchos or held a sweatshirt over their hair for cover. A large goose was waddling through puddles, and picked up a piece of wet bread from the ground. It was limping; the goose was injured. A group of three inmates came upon the goose as it was crossing the sidewalk. One of the three ran towards the hobbling goose, intimidating the animal with her broad frame. She cackled as the goose hastily hobbled across the walk to avoid her chase. I turned my attention back inside the classroom.

Though lack of privacy is a hallmark of prison deprivation (Sykes [1958] 2007), the Main Hall contains a rare private bathroom for inmates. A roll of toilet paper sits on the officer's desk. Inmates would pick it up and grab a couple sheets, signaling to the officer on duty a nonverbal request to use the handicapped-accessible private bathroom. The toilet paper roll had to remain on the officer's desk; the idea was that inmates would steal the entire roll if it was left inside the bathroom. When the officer had a free moment (at her discretion), she would stand up from her post and unlock the bathroom from the outside (there was no interior lock). A reflective surface above the sink served a mirror-like function, since glass mirrors were banned for inmates, but significant scratches made it difficult to use.

Spacious, clean, and no officers in sight, the computer lab is one of the few rooms that does not feel like a prison. Like most classrooms in the Main Hall, the computer lab stretches down the hallway ten yards away from the one desk where an officer sits on post. When full, the computer lab is a bustling workspace, with industrious inmates typing away on their keyboards. Inmates can request to use one of the fifteen or so computers during daytime hours to type up homework assignments for GED and college classes or to type letters to friends and family that they will later via snailmail. There no internet access anywhere at Mapleside, even in the computer lab – a deprivation for the 21st century inmate.

The chaplain's office is colorful, carpeted, and toastier than other rooms in the Main Hall. Decorated with crosses and scriptural quotes and a banner that looked hand-colored with markers that said "Make a joyful noise!," the office feels inviting. Chaplain

Harper sits behind a large wooden executive desk, across from which are two plush office chairs for visitors, a welcome change from the hard plastic chairs in the rest of the prison compound. Tissues and hard candies line the edge of her desk for inmates to take. Here, Chaplain Harper counsels inmates about faith, family, disciplinary issues, and most any other topic. She occasionally lets inmates call a family member on her personal line for free, whereas phone calls cost inmates anywhere from fifty cents to $7.00 for half an hour, depending on the distance, and lines are only open six hours a day. The hardest part of her job, the chaplain says, is delivering sad news, like an illness or death in the family.

Anyone can request a meeting with Chaplain Harper, although a part-time chaplain (also a black Baptist woman, like Chaplain Harper) is specifically designated for the Jewish and Sunni Muslim groups. Two white Catholic volunteers are available for counseling, and many white inmates said they preferred meeting with the Catholic volunteers, particularly Catholic and Jewish inmates. Finally, a male conservative Protestant minister came in once a week for counseling as well. I heard that it was much easier to get an appointment for religious counseling than for psychological counseling by mental health professionals located in the prison.

I spent a significant amount of time in the chaplain's office, organizing files in one of the chaplain's three filing cabinets, or sorting through the mountains of paperwork on her desk. There was always a lot of activity, people popping their heads in with a request, a greeting, or to make a joke. The atmosphere was usually uplifting. Chaplain Harper had privacy and leeway in her office to do what she wanted, so she would

sometimes bring extra cookies or cake from a staff meeting and share it with her clerks and her volunteers.

On Thursday mornings from 9:00 to 11:00 am, I volunteered in the religious library. The religious library is a small room, no bigger than a maid's chamber, filled with theological, philosophical, fictional, and self-help books related to religion. Everything in the library has been donated from the outside. Two inmates are allowed in at a time, and they can peruse the selection and check out up to three books for two weeks. Outside the library is an even smaller vestibule, with a large desk I typically sat behind with Maria, the late-50s black Baptist inmate serving 25 years for murder. Maria had volunteered to run the library. We checked people in, organized library cards, and kept track of who checked out what book. Because of its location right next to the Main Hall officer's desk, Maria and I spent a good chunk of those two hours every week interacting with officers. When the officers at the desk were friendly, we talked to them about religion, dieting, or the latest episode of *Empire*. When they were unfriendly, Maria would whisper complaints to me, and we would talk amongst ourselves or with inmates who had come for the library. As I explain further below, Maria and I discussed everything from roller-skating to speeding tickets to how God delivered her from homosexuality.

Touring the Prison Compound

Though I spent most of my time in the Main Hall, the hub for all extracurricular activities except for education, I had the opportunity to take a tour of the whole prison on my penultimate day of fieldwork. Outside of my tour of the prison compound,

administrators restricted my access to the Main Hall. This meant I could not directly observe daily life in the cellblocks or the work buildings or even outdoor recreation. To address this limitation, I frequently asked inmates to tell me about the goings-on outside of the Main Hall. I relied on their reports to craft a partial understanding of how religion plays out outside of the Main Hall. Furthermore, many inmates spent significant portions of their day in the Main Hall. Different inmates spent time in the Main Hall for different reasons, and this helped me capture a wide variety of prison experiences, even without being in the cellblocks themselves.

That day, Chaplain Harper led another volunteer and me through each building on the compound. We saw the tiny, dark cells where "new admits" live in for their first two weeks down the river, and the medical ward with palatial rooms by comparison. We saw the dental facility, which looked like a regular dentist's office, a nurse's station that could have been in any hospital in the country, and the sterile, bare-bones isolation area for inmates on suicide watch, lit 24 hours a day with bright white overhead lights. We visited the buildings where inmates work: the sew shop, the cut shop, in cubicles working on computers doing data entry or designing state furniture, and mail and distribution, where they print all vehicular registrations for the state. We walked through the sunny quad during outdoor recreation, where inmates were playing badminton and volley ball, tanning themselves, and shooting the breeze jovially. After getting permission from the officer on duty, an inmate took us to the corner of the compound to show us the honey bee hives that had recently arrived for the inmate-led bee preservation program. We saw

the prison library and GED and college classrooms that, again, looked just like a high school, colorfully decorated with posters and chalkboards and wraparound desks.

After seeing all of that, I told myself prison didn't look so bad. But then we got to the cells, where inmates must spend at least eight to ten hours a day. The moment we walked into Cellblock 4, the atmosphere changed. It was dark, and it took a minute for my eyes to adjust. Everything looked gray and dim, and although the sun shone bright outside that May afternoon, few lights were on indoors, and little natural light managed to sneak inside. Only tiny slivers of light worked their way through the narrow window in each cell. The building felt hot, dank, loud, dank, and dingy. Cellblock 4 formed a big circle, neo-panoptic style, with the control room, commonly called "the bubble," in the center, with each wing shooting out like spokes. It was noisy with inmates' chatter, singing, and yelling, although the building quiets down when inmates are locked in their cells by a heavy metal door with a small window for surveillance. Each wing was made up of two levels, connected by a staircase, with white painted concrete walls.

Though I had been warned, I could not believe how cramped the cells were. Anne, a white inmate in her 40s serving time for murder, told me the cells are 7 feet by 10 feet. In reality, they look even smaller than I envisioned. A set of bunkbeds crowd almost half of the double-occupancy space. The ceilings are low, the beds are smaller than twin size, and a small stainless-steel toilet sits in the corner, to be used with no privacy whatsoever, next to a tiny metal sink. Though considered contraband, in one cell, the inmates fashioned a toilet-seat cover out of cardboard and magazine cutouts

laminated with tape. The lack of bathroom privacy was a big source of anxiety for some. As Anne explained to me:

> I try to avoid this at all costs, but if you have to *use* the bathroom, at the first gas or anything you have to turn around and flush down every single thing. And it's difficult, if you're trying to take a shit, to turn around and reach the handle to flush it down. And you're supposed to spray this chemical, but it's not allowed so we have to hide it. It's horrible.

This toilet etiquette of repeated flushing and spraying a chemical is an inmate-generated social norm in response to the lack of privacy inside the cells.

Each inmate gets her own metal locker, and there is a set of coat hooks along the wall to be shared. A sliver of bright sunlight brightened the room through a small window, with a radiator underneath for heat in the winter. As Anne told me, "The biggest issue people have with their roommates is about temperature. One wants the window to be open – that would be me – and the other is too cold. It's a constant struggle." The concrete floors are hard and cool, and cellblocks are noisy with the clamor of hundreds of women talking, singing, and arguing. Inmates can make calls to friends and family on public phones in the center of the housing unit during designated hours.

On our tour, we saw three cells. Two of the cells were in this wing: one was messy, cramped, and drab; the other, though the same dimensions and layout, felt far more cheerful, decorated colorfully with pink and purple streamers wrapped around the metal bunkbed poles and photographs of smiling faces plastered to the wall. These small touches made a huge difference. It occurred to me that as a neat freak, having a messy

roommate in such close quarters would be a recipe for constant stress and conflict, given that you are locked into the cell for about eight hours a day.

The third cell we peeked into was on Cellblock 2: the honor pod, home to mostly lifers and women with long sentences and no behavioral infractions. Though the cells are the same size, there are a lot of perks to living on Cellblock 2. Here, inmates can make calls anytime during the day, rather than only at designated hours, and they have a large indoor rec area, light and airy with natural light filtered in through skylights, with tables for hanging out and playing cards. Seeing these small cells gave me a greater appreciation for how much more comfortable it would feel to spend time in the Main Hall for classes and programs.

A Day in the Life of a Mapleside Inmate

At 8 pm on a bitterly cold Thursday night in January, sitting around a small table in a classroom in the Main Hall for the weekly Jewish scriptural study meeting, Lexi and Karen, both white inmates in their early 40s serving multi-year stints, were sorting through Jewish books that had been donated, deciding which ones they wanted to take back to their cells to read. The three of us were chatting about how the week had been going. Karen shared, "I was on the phone with my boyfriend the other day, telling him 'Yesterday I had yoga, today I have pilates, then I'm going to a computer class–' and he said, 'Sounds like you're in Club Med!' So I said to him, 'Would you rather I just sit in here depressed?'" Lexi nodded, "We're all so desperate and sad, we just keep going and going, or we'll go crazy."

Though marked by material deprivations (Sykes 1958) and periods of intense boredom (Adams 1992), a day in prison is highly structured, chock full of ways to keep busy. Estrella, the late 30s Latina inmate serving 10 years for cocaine distribution, highly active in the Protestant programs in prison, walked me through a day in her shoes. Estrella's typical weekday starts with a 4:00 am wake-up. Her body has gotten used to it. At 4:30 am, inmates may leave their housing units to walk across the grassy courtyard the Main Hall for breakfast or to the medical building to take medication. Anne, a white inmate in her 40s serving a life sentence for murder, relishes those morning hours: "It's still quiet and most people [inmates] aren't up yet. I look at the trees, I look up at the moon, and I use that time to pray."

But breakfast is optional, and unlike many inmates, Estrella does not take medication, so instead, she says, "I take a shower, I get dressed, and then I get back into bed and pray or read or watch TV until they call us out for jobs and school." Every inmate can purchase a 13" or 15" flat-screened television from an approved vendor, which costs between $150 and $200. Some inmates "rent" their tvs to newly-arrived inmates for a fee as part of their "hustle." Two roommates per cell means two televisions, sometimes causing conflict over the volume of the TV and disagreement about which of the two has to listen to her program through headphones.

Inmates must wear prison-issued blue and gray sweats and denim. They have a wardrobe to choose from, consisting of gray t-shirts, sweatshirts, cardigans, basketball shorts, sweatpants, and denim button-downs, coats, and jeans. Most outerwear has the letters "D.O.C," stamped on the back in large white block print. Inmates express their

creativity when it comes to footwear, which they order from another approved vendor and pay for out of pocket, sporting all brands and styles of sneakers, flip flops, slide-on sandals, ballet flats, and boots, but nothing with a heel. I saw everything from colorful geometric-patterned *Vans* sneakers to brown *Ugg* boots to *Timberlands*.

Another way for inmates to personalize their appearance is by wearing colorful socks, trendy glasses, or a hairclip (they were allowed to wear only one single hairclip at a time). Inmates could also paint their nails and toenails, and often did so in very intricate patterns. Inmates got dolled up for religious services and special programs, but only a handful wore makeup every day. Inmates were permitted stud or small hoop earrings, as well as a religious necklace: many Christian inmates wore crosses, some wore a rosary as a necklace, and an inmate I met who was spiritual but not religious wore three crystals around her neck. In the winter, many inmates covered their heads with knit gray caps and their hands with bright gloves that they were given as a donation every holiday season (though they were not allowed to choose which color they got). Scarves were technically contraband, although a number of inmates with long stints managed to own at least one sheer fashion scarf. Muslim women were allowed to wear a headscarf, although officers were unpredictably strict about making sure it is worn properly, with improper wear casting doubt on the inmate's religiosity.

Inmates used variations in prison clothing to express different gender identities. While every inmate was required to wear prison-issued denim and gray, some adapted this fashion to be more feminine-presenting, pairing a tight-fitting gray t-shirt with a soft button-down cardigan and skinny jeans. Others were more masculine-presenting, with

cropped haircuts and baggy sweatpants, loose-fitting t-shirts, or wide-legged denim. Before my research began, the Assistant Warden issued me a normative caution: "You'll see women – and some women who look like men." Occasionally, masculine-presenting inmates faced critiques by prison staff for their gender presentation. One young, light-skinned black inmate balked at such a critique, her eyes wide in visible dismay: "[An officer] just told me I need to get my hair and nails done because she said 'you're too beautiful to be dressing like a boy'." While prison uniforms are meant to deindividualize inmates (Goffman [1961] 2007), inmates tailor their outfits to eke out a sliver of self-expression, be it for fashion or gender presentation.

Work Assignments

Everyone's morning is different, depending on her work or school assignment. Jobs were supposed to be filled based on inmates' requests, but often a recommendation from another inmate to a staff supervisor was enough to get a friend hired. As Chaplain Harper explained, "It's like the real world; it's about who you know. If you got someone working for [the shops] and their friend vouch[es] for them, then they'll get a job, when there were 12 other ladies waiting in line for the job."

Most work assignments begin at 6:30 or 7:00 am, but other inmates who work afternoon or evening shifts can sleep in. Estrella goes to school for a "life skills" class that her case manager signed her up for, from 7:00 to 10:00 am, then works in the sew shop from 10:00 to 10:45 am and 11:30 am to 1:45 pm, with lunch in the cafeteria from 10:45 am to 11:30 am. In the sew shop, along with 200 other women, Estrella has one of

the better paid jobs, sewing prisoner uniforms, officer uniforms, neon yellow jackets for the housing authority, and every official state flag that waves over every county office.

At Mapleside, the most common jobs include computing and data entry for the prison company, sewing uniforms and state flags in the sew shop, or printing state-sponsored public service materials in "Mail and Distribution." Other jobs maintain prison operation, such as custodial and kitchen work. Inmates without a high school degree take GED classes instead of work. Maria, for instance, works in Mail and Distribution, processing vehicle registrations, where she can make $3.25 per day (which is about seven hours), plus a $4.05 bonus for showing up, so that's $7.30 per day. Anything less than a full day counts as a half day, so she makes $2.07 plus $4.05, totaling $6.12, on half days. Those who work in this department process 15,000 vehicle registrations a day and produce mailings and public service announcement campaigns for state-sponsored organizations. Maria said earnestly, "It's not much – don't laugh – but it's a lot for prison. I don't buy all them clothes; I don't need 9 pairs of sweatpants and 10 t-shirts for walking around in here." Inmates have the option of buying additional sets of gray and denim clothing. Working in the shops can add up to $200 to $300 per month, or even more for overtime, Maria boasted.

Like 100 other women at Mapleside, Maria works for the prison's inmate-run company, which as Chaplain Harper explained to me, "It gives them something to do to be productive, to give back. Companies like to hire them because it's cheap labor, and companies are always trying to get the cheapest labor. . . . [Inmates] can make good money that way." Working for this company can also mean using highly technical

software to design furniture for local universities and "everyone from the governor down to the prison cells," the boss of that division told me. Bosses are not inmates, but instead paid staff. Inmates working these jobs get their own flat-screen PC and carpeted cubicle in the work building, which is personalized with items like magazine cut-outs of Halle Berry, shirtless men, and characters from *Big Bang Theory*, photographs of family members, babies, and loved ones, and high-resolution pictures of cats on printer paper. Post-it notes, paper, and filing cabinets abound, making it look like an office in any office park in America. The only difference is a heavy metal door that slides shut to lock inmates in at any time.

Sociologists view compulsory prison labor as a source of both exploitation and dignity (Goodman 2012; Haney 2010). One major source of this tension is the low wages, since jobs pay between $1.05 to $7.30 per day. As Chaplain Harper once commented offhandedly, "I guess it's a win-win, because the ladies make money and the state can get these goods and services for a cheaper price. But then again, of course they don't get paid much." Chaplain Harper reasoned that she thought the salaries were commensurate with the cost of living in prison: "If you think about it, it's a lot. Some of them save up, so you'll have some women with $10,000 or $20,000 in their bank account." These examples were atypical, and inmates had to spend money on clothing, food, and other creature comforts during their incarceration. Inmates who wished to send money home to their families sheepishly described their struggles in doing so.

Other inmates worked in the mail room, making them popular since everyone wanted to know whether their package arrived. Or inmates might work as custodians,

mopping the floors, squeegeeing windows, and cleaning bathrooms in every building on the compound, the benefit of which is befriending kind officers and gabbing with them about trendy hairstyles or dishing about the latest episode of *Criminal Minds*, and nabbing some extra cleaning supplies to use in their cell. Other jobs include yardwork and landscaping on the compound, reserved for inmates who were trusted to wield heavy electric shears and other gardening equipment, cooking and serving food in the cafeteria, the perk of which was access to extra food to pinch. Some inmates who qualify work as tutors for GED students, and others take on jobs like supervising those on suicide watch in the mental health wing. Inmates on work-release performed jobs like cleaning up trash along the highway, which was unnerving as cars zipped by quickly, but also a welcome change to get "out of the institution every day and [be] amongst the living," as one work-release inmate told me. Inmates enrolled in the GED program were not assigned jobs.

Free Time

After 1:30 pm, when work is done, inmates choose how to spend their time: on the phone calling home, in the visiting room with guests (up to two per week), in free recreation where, weather permitting, they can lounge at picnic tables or play volleyball in the courtyard, or, significantly for this dissertation, in the Main Hall for voluntary religious and secular programs.

A typical day after work, Estrella returned to her housing unit to change out of her tan work scrubs, with the words "Sew Shop" printed on the back: "We can't wear our work clothes other places. So I put on some sweats." All times other than work, inmates must wear regulation blue or gray. After Estrella changed into sweats, it was time for

voluntary afternoon programs, secular and religious. Table 1 shows the variety of available voluntary programs for inmates. Most days, Estrella got a small 2” by 2” paper pass to walk over to the Main Hall for religious classes like Christian Witness Training, Ministry Class, or Bible Institute. There is a religious program offered every afternoon and evening in the Main Hall. There are denomination-specific programs like Baptist Bible study, Sunni Muslim worship and study, and Jehovah’s Witness worship and study. Conservative Protestants can also attend programs like a grief counseling group, Discipleship class, a religious movie screening, classes based on the books *Purpose Driven Life* by Rick Warren and *Battlefield of the Mind* by Joyce Meyer, courses on discovering your spiritual gifts, and a Christian-centered drug addiction counseling program.

Secular programs in the afternoons and evenings include college courses for those who qualify, a yoga class led by an outside volunteer that draws about 10-15 women, an inmate-led Zumba class, Alcoholics Anonymous, Gambling Anonymous, Al Anon, gardening club, social group meetings for women over 50, and one for discouraging violence in women under 25, computer classes, book club, crocheting club, an Alternatives to Violence program, and Toastmasters.

Apart from formal programs, afternoon rec time in the gym allowed inmates to use exercise equipment and the basketball courts, and outdoor rec time on the grassy quad when the weather permits allowed inmates to sit at picnic tables and chat, find a space under a tree to read, play a game of volleyball in the center of the yard where a net is set up, or toss around a foam football. Rec time in the housing units for those who

chose to stay there involved sitting at tables and chairs in the common area, playing cards, reading, using the microwave to make food, coffee, or tea, or making phone calls, depending on whether the phones are available.

Drama abounded when it came to making calls. As Estrella told me, "In [Cellblock 3], that's where the gangs are, you'll have people who monopolize the phone. They'll say, 'If you give me three dollars you can get 10 minutes at 6:30.'" I opened my mouth in surprise, and Estrella insisted, "I'm serious! They'll steal your stuff in there. It's a jungle." In a separate interview, Estrella clarified, "It's not like a real gang. Like they'll be on gangs on the outside where they aren't supposed to talk to someone from another gang on the inside, but they're friends! They ain't even supposed to talk to each other." These "gangs" of women are not related to the local or national gangs that operate outside prisons, nor would they fall under the traditional definition of prison gang as "an inmate organization that operates within a prison system, that has a corporate entity, exists into perpetuity, and whose membership is restrictive, mutually exclusive, and often requires a lifetime commitment" (Skarbek 2014:9).

Instead, Estrella urged that the gangs are "not real," and operate more as cohorts of women who gang up on others. "They'll do things like say, 'Give me your TV'." Dorinda, a Jewish inmate, corroborated, "When there are limited resources of something here, it gets horrible." She relayed a story about being intimidated while she was using the phone: "One day a group of women surrounded me and closed me in a circle so no one could see me, and one woman pulled the phone out of my hand. But I kept my grip

on it; I don't know what they were going to do. Finally one woman outside the group said something like, 'Oh, leave her alone' and they did."

From 2:30 to 5:00 pm, Estrella explained, "we're all locked in [our cells], unless you have class. Those are our mandatory naps." She laughed. Nevaeh, another Christian inmate, divulged that she looks for any excuse to stay in the Main Hall for 2:30 to 5:00, "I just don't like being in my room, I'm always out of bounds. At this point the officers expect to see me out of bounds, so they don't even ask."

"Count" happens four times per day, a half an hour into each officers' shift: 7:30 am, 3:30 pm, 11:30 pm, and 3:30 am, but during the two nighttime counts, inmates do not need to get out of their beds, though they must move in their beds because, as Asabi explained, "one of the escapes involved someone using a dummy in her bed to make it look like someone was there. So you gotta move around to show it's you." If inmates are in the Main Hall during afternoon count, the officer rounds them up by walking through the hallway and taking them to the gym. Around 3:30 pm, count begins, and lasts for around 10-20 minutes. Everyone knows the drill. In the gym, inmates line up in five lines, depending on which of the five housing units they live in. Two officers run the count: one simply counts the number of inmates in the gym, the other looks at each inmate's ID badge, one by one, and writes their DOC number down on a clipboard. When this officer hands the ID badge back to the inmate, the inmate saunters over to the other side of the room to indicate she has been counted. There is no rush to get to the line on the other side; some scuttle across the gym floor with their head bowed, while others swagger across with their chest puffed out. This is one of the moments in which inmates

are most reduced to a number. Some inmates smile and joke with the officer, others avoid eye contact, and others frown and act annoyed. During count, inmates chat with each other, or put their nose in a book, or simply stand by themselves waiting. In the end, the two officers then compare numbers, and report their numbers on their walkie-talkie. All inmates need to be accounted for on the compound – the number counted must match the number on the official roster, updated daily. Meanwhile, volunteers are not allowed to be present for count. I observed count two or three times before learning that this was prohibited. Instead, volunteers remain in the classrooms until count ends.

After count, class resumes, Estrella told me, and dinner runs from 5:00 to 6:00 pm, again based on housing unit. Those who miss dinner for a reason deemed legitimate can request a late tray. Some inmates complained that the portions were too small, others complained the food was inedible, and one even complained that the cats in the cat companionship program were fed better than the inmates. Officer McLean, an early 30s black officer I got to know well during my fieldwork, reminded me that for some inmates, "this is a good place to be, 'cause they got a place to sleep and something to eat every day." I was never allowed to eat in the cafeteria with the inmates. However, I was invited to get lunch from the officers' cafeteria twice. The food is the same as the inmate cafeteria, but only officers and staff were allowed. Both occasions reminded me of public school lunches – a counter to order from, staffed by inmates in stained white scrubs and opaque white hairnets. Every day offered a different menu – square, cardboard pizza, a turkey sandwich and a slop of gravy, and always a salad bar with iceberg lettuce and creamy dressings. As a vegetarian, I loaded up on extra carrots and celery, and doubled-

up with two cups of delicious sweet tea. I took my lunches back to the classroom with the chaplain's clerks to eat, but otherwise could have stayed and sat at round tables where officers were eating cafeteria meals off of plastic trays or from Tupperware lunches they brought in themselves.

After dinner, Estrella continued, "I'll take a shower, use the phone, and by 7:30 or 8 o'clock I'm in my room. I read, study, or watch TV from 9 to 11. I go to sleep at 11:00." Weeknight classes run from 7:00 to 9:00 pm, and visits last from after dinner until 7:30 pm. When I asked Estrella about her twice daily showers, she giggled, "People shower like 20,000 times a day here. I think they're trying to wash something off that can't be washed away."

After a long day of work, school, programs, meals, and interpersonal conflict, inmates go to bed anywhere between 9:00 pm and 11:00 pm, or even later for night owls. Lexi, the 40 year old Jewish inmate, told me that nighttime was the hardest time of day for her: "I go through everything in my head, I remember conversations word for word. The night is when I really feel like I'm locked in. You can't get up in the middle of the night, you can't go get a snack from the refrigerator. There's no moment that's unguarded. Even in the middle of the night you hear the walkie-talkies go off."

Socializing with Fellow Inmates and Officers

An average weekday in prison is predictable, regimented, and routine. Though boredom waxes and wanes, inmates avoid total ennui through all the drama. Interpersonal conflict was the premier topic of conversation among friends and acquaintances, and complaints were aired daily. In two separate interviews, when I asked what else I should

know about prison life that I may not have seen in the Main Hall, both pointed to these interpersonal issues. Navaeh, an early-20s black inmate serving time for attempted murder, put it laughingly, "People are weird here. Seriously. I'm the only normal person here." I asked the same question to Estrella, who chuckled and looked straight at me with a raised eyebrow: "First of all, you know these people are crazy." It was more of a statement than a question. Estrella nodded when I made eye contact. "You know that part." This echoed what sociologist Gresham Sykes wrote in his 1958 [2007] classic prison ethnography, that an inmate in the prison he studied said, "The worst thing about prison is you have to live with other prisoners" (77).

Estrella continued, "It's survival of the fittest in here. You might not know this, but I'm an introvert. I wasn't an introvert until I got here. But it's crazy, so much drama." Estrella went on to explain how drama happens: "I avoid rec, because if you sit at a table you can get 'caught up' easily [in the conflict]. You could just be sitting there, but then there's an issue, and someone will come up to you, and say, 'Why you ain't say anything?' Or you could get caught up just because you was there." Anne, the Catholic inmate in her 40s serving a life sentence for murder, likewise told me about the tension that arises based on who you sit next to in the lunch room. A lot of it, she thought, was due to "jealousy" and, unlike herself, "some women *do* want to fit in." Anne sighed, "There's so much crap here. I know they say you're supposed to expect it, 'cause you're in jail, but there's lying, cheating, stealing–" Anne counted these grievances on her fingers.

In addition to conflict, positive relationships evolved and social interactions brought joy to inmates. Much of the prior literature on women's prisons focuses on the "pseudo-families" that develop in prison, strong relationships that replicate familial bonds (Giallombardo 1966; Owen 1998; Severance 2005; Ward and Kassebaum 1985; Warren et al. 2004). I met a handful of women who had prison "mothers," a majority who had romantic relationships with girlfriends, and countless meaningful friendships between those who shared the experience of being in prison and all the pains that entailed.

For instance, my interview with Estrella happened to be the same afternoon that her friend Honey was leaving prison. Honey was a young, light-skinned black woman always looking stylish despite her blue and gray sartorial constraints. While Estrella and I sat talking in the Religious Library, she asked me to keep an eye out for Honey walking down the hallway so we could pause our interview for a goodbye. I spotted Honey walking down the hall to Property to pick up her belongings before leaving for good. A handful of inmates crowded in the doorway of classroom 1 to wish Honey good luck, but they were not allowed to leave the classroom. Honey snuck in to give a quick hug to each of them. Estrella and I stood at the doorway of the Religious Library, waiting with Honey until the officer on duty told her she could leave. She looked anxious. Her hair was carefully curled, looking polished and pretty, but her widened eyes and shaky stance betrayed her nerves. Gulping, Honey shook her head and said, "It's going to be an adjustment. But it's gonna be good. I think I'll be fine this time." Estrella and Honey exchanged "I love you's" when Honey was escorted down the hallway. When we

resumed our interview, Estrella seemed winsome: "I love her. I'm gonna see her on the outside. I know it. A lot of times you say you'll stay in touch and then you never do, because you were only friends because you spent so many years together. It's weird 'cause you shared so much, but those aren't the people you'd choose to spend time with on the outside." Social interactions with other inmates brought both joy and challenges.

Interactions with corrections officers were no less complicated. The officers at Mapleside were mostly female and African-born or African American. White inmates occasionally confided that they felt officers treated them unfairly compared to black inmates. As one white inmate in her 40s put it, "[S]ometimes there are officers who will let someone do something and then when you try to do the exact thing, they won't let you. And a lot of times it's based on race. A lot of the inmates are in gangs, and some of the officers are from the street, in the same gangs or they have family members in the same gangs, so they'll let inmates get away with anything."[13]

The interactions between officers and inmates I observed ranged from jovial to dismissive to harsh. In an illustrative lighthearted moment, I witnessed one of the inmate custodians in the Main Hall playfully order the Lieutenant who oversaw her, "Go ahead in the hall!" The Lieutenant switched her hips and stayed put. "I'ma stay right here," she sassed back. Conversation flowed smoothly to a new topic: the pineapple chicken cheddar wrap the inmate was going to make in her housing unit tonight, using the

[13] As described earlier, scholars have repeatedly asserted that although conflict occurs in women's prisons, gangs are almost entirely absent (Griffiths, Yule, and Gartner 2011; Skarbek 2014). When inmates refer to gangs, they seem to be describing aggressive social cliques that bully other inmates, rather than highly structured, formal gangs.

pineapple she took from the cafeteria today. This moment of facetious role-reversal illustrated the lengths to which friendly, joking relations could go between inmates and prison staff who knew each other well. As Navaeh explained of officers, “They just want a friend. They’re locked in here with 100 people that they can’t be friends with.”

Sometimes, when it became too egalitarian, the officer had to reassert her authority. When Officer Holt matter-of-factly told two inmates they could not leave the Main Hall, they talked back to her. She barked back, “Let me do what they pay me 40 some thousand a year to do, okay?” Another time, Officer McLean, the officer working the Main Hall desk, was in charge of keeping tabs on the inmates on custodial duty. I was sitting with McLean chatting when she spotted a bottle of Dasani water sitting on top of the filing cabinet where the cleaning supplies are kept. She picked it up and turned to me annoyed, “This is why we never have anything.” I asked for clarification. She explained, “This is cleaning fluid.” The implication was that the inmate custodian was trying steal it by disguising it in a Dasani bottle she could take back to her cell. I was equally surprised that Officer McLean never confronted the inmate, she simply confiscated the water bottle without a word.

Mr. Lipton, a black male officer in his early 50s, was an exception: he was beloved by inmates. One afternoon in the inmate-led Christian Witness Training class, a black male officer walked by the window and waved, interrupting our class. I saw some of the inmates grinning as one called out, “We love Mr. Lipton.” Pepper, a 50-something black women sitting in the back row of the classroom asked rhetorically, “Does everybody clap wherever he goes? I didn’t know if that was just Cellblock 1.” Asabi,

who was teaching the class, asked why all the inmates love him. The students called out answers like, “He’s sincere,” “He’s a sweetheart,” and “He do his job.” Hollis, a veteran inmate in Christian Witness Training serving 10 years for burglary, added, “He’s not like the average foreign officers that work here.” Numerous black and white inmates alike complained that African-born officers were harder on them than African-American officers. When I asked Maria, the late-50s black inmate serving time for murder, “What does it mean to be a good officer?” she had a response at the ready: “It’s simple. Professionalism and respect.”

Complaints about officers abounded, ranging from disgruntled to disrespected. On the day of the prison’s annual Employee Appreciation Day, Ronnie, a 25 year old black inmate, laughed, “I don’t know what they appreciatin’.” Other times, interactions escalated when inmates felt officers are treating them unfairly or doling out punishment unevenly. Anne, a Catholic inmate, told me, “I’m usually respectful so they know if I’m not that it’s something big.” To win the respect of Officer Agnew who had been making it difficult to pick up her meds, Anne said she “flipped out” on him, “and he has respected me ever since. But it shouldn’t take that, and not everyone can do that. And they’ll write you up like that.” Getting written up, also called getting a “ticket” is bad because it can mean cell restriction, getting put “on lock” (segregated housing), or a demerit on the inmate’s record for the parole board. Inmates and officers can both write up complaints about each other, but officers certainly do it more often. As Anne told me, “If an officer does something that I know is wrong, I *will* write them up. And they don’t like that. Then they’ll treat me like shit for a few weeks, but I don’t care. I am going to

write them up." Both Anne and a fellow Catholic inmate, Bernadette, had negative experiences with Officer Agnew, who apparently called himself "King Agnew" according to Anne. Bernadette, a white inmate in her 60s serving time for a financial crime, shared a story about a time when she had to tell Officer Agnew that she could not walk the stairs because she has arthritis: "I told him, 'I have the right not to use stairs because I might fall, . . .' and he said, 'I hope you *do* fall.'" This level of disrespect, though rare, was seared into Bernadette's memory.

The trick was, as one young black woman tearfully put it in Young Adult Bible Study, remembering who is in charge: "I been here for five years, and now I'm 22 years old. Last year, I was on the right path for 15 months and then in one moment it all changed. I was back on lock. I know I got myself here. But it's hard to stay on the right path. A lot of times the officers mess with you and you want to talk back, but you gotta remember they got that uniform on, they got that power." Another inmate hummed in agreement. Interacting with officers was a constant balancing act, one that often required deference to orders, however unnecessary or unfair they seemed.

The biggest conflict escalation I witnessed between an officer and an inmate involved a uniform violation. Although I predominately spent time with inmates, I also got to know some officers to gain a better understanding of the entire prison experience. The time I spent on post with Officer McLean gave me insights into the corrections officers' perspectives on life at Mapleside.

Early one evening as inmates were filing into the cafeteria, I was sitting at the Main Hall desk with Officer McLean. The phone rang, as it did several times an hour,

and Officer McLean picked up. She was instructed by an officer on the other end to stop a certain inmate who'd left the housing unit before she reached the cafeteria. This inmate's uniform was not up to code, as she'd slung a pink Hello Kitty towel over her right shoulder. A 20-something, thin black inmate with braids waltzed in, wearing a grey shirt, grey shorts, and knee-high pink argyle socks, and the pink Hello Kitty towel in question. Officer McLean stood up and walked towards the door. "Step to the side," she ordered. The inmate stepped to the side, but protested, "How come?" Officer McLean fetched a plastic bag from one of the desk drawers and opened the bag, outstretching her arm for the inmate to drop the towel in: "Hand me the handkerchief." "How come?" the inmate protested, "I don't need to give that to you. This is a personal thing! This ain't right." Officer McLean stayed calm, quietly repeating "Hand it over," and occasionally adding, "This is an order from above me." The inmate disregarded the orders, and waltzed past McLean, stomping towards the cafeteria. At the door of the cafeteria, although I could not see it, I overheard a scuffle with Officer Goodson, another black female officer. The inmate shouted, "For what? For what?" Before I knew it, the inmate had turned to face me, head hung low in defeat, while the officer handcuffed her. A third – male – officer, came and held the inmate by the arm, escorting her toward the door as the inmate continued to protest. "Take her to lock," Officer Goodson ordered. Once the inmate left, Officer McLean turned to Officer Goodson and chided, "It's not that big a deal! Now you gonna have to write a report." Officer Goodson conceded, "I know, but she was getting to me." A few moments later, Officer Goodson got on the walkie-talkie

and said to the officer on the other end, “Ok, you can let her go.” The inmate was released from lock.

Later, when I rehashed this event with Officer McLean, she explained, “It’s hard because you don’t always agree with what they tell you to do. But if it’s from above, you got to do it. What I don’t understand is why [the officer in the housing unit] let her out with it, why she let her get this far. She could have just told her to go put it back in her cell before leaving the housing unit.” I asked her how she kept calm. She explained, “It used to be hard when I first started, ‘cause I used to have a short temper. But I just remind myself, they human and they have good days and bad days just like I have good days and bad days.”

That autumn, in a new behavioral initiative, I witnessed Chief Sawyer, Mapleside’s Chief of Security – the top-ranking security officer – himself a mid-50s black man, standing outside the cafeteria next to the officers on duty. The inmates all knew why he was there: to issue disciplinary tickets for foul language. A striking figure, tall and always dressed in a sharp suit with a shaved head, Chief Sawyer did not play around. Mid-October in Discipleship class, those present were complaining about Chief Sawyer’s new tactics. Maria and Rashida, inmates who led the class, disagreed about his efforts. Maria had been complaining about “how he made those girls scrub [the sidewalks] outside in the rain yesterday.” Rashida explained, “They scrubbing them because they cursing.” Maria shook her head, disgruntled, “But what’s he gonna do about the officers? The officers call us a ‘B–,’ or a ‘C–.’” Felicia, an early-30s black inmate serving time for assaulting a police officer, interjected, “And they supposed to be our role

models." Rashida stood up for Chief Sawyer, "He's a man who *stands* for something. He's real fair, he believes it should be the same for everybody."

Earlier that day, I had been sitting in classroom 3 with Hanna and Asabi when one of the Main Hall custodial workers came in to complain about Chief Sawyer: "He always stands up here waiting for women to curse, and then put them on horrible detail. It don't work 'cause they be out there mad, cursin' about it." To my surprise, Asabi, whose usual refrain was "Be obedient," a lesson from her faith that she routinely applies to daily life in prison, reflected, "I don't like it. They grown women – if they want potty mouths, they can have 'em." Later, as I was walking from classroom 3 back to the chaplain's office, I heard one inmate yell, irritated, "This isn't a fucking prison, it's a fucking daycare." A male officer, who had been walking away towards classroom 3 turned around towards the source of the complaint, "Who said that?" he asked loudly, ready to chastise her.

I cannot attest to the more sinister conflicts between officers and inmates. I heard rumors about an officer impregnating an inmate, several officers having sexual relationships with inmates, a couple officers pushing and shoving inmates, a former warden forcing inmates to perform sexual favors, and an officer whose neglect of an inmate's concussion after a "slocking"[14] by another prisoner led to an inmate death. But I never heard about any of these from the sources themselves, and I did not witness anything above verbal altercations between inmates and officers related to unfairness and uneven enforcement of rules.

[14] A "slock" is an improvised weapon of a lock in a sock that can be used to hit others.

Mapleside's Religious Programs and their Participants

According to official state Department of Corrections literature, inmates are free to practice any religion they would like, as long as their practice is in compliance with security regulations and budgetary restrictions. All religious groups are designated a weekly worship service and study forum; a group is defined as two inmates or more. Each religious group is permitted holiday observances and one ceremonial meal annually. Inmates told me that each religious group is allotted only two holidays per year of their choosing, although I saw no such restriction in the DOC religious services manual. Both Protestant and Catholic inmates had a Good Friday service and an Easter Sunday service, but no Holy Thursday mass or Saturday Vigil. Additionally, both groups celebrated Christmas and Pentecost. Jewish inmates held a *seder* the first two nights of Passover, as well as a Chanukah celebration and a Yom Kippur fast. Muslim inmates had special meal accommodations during Ramadan.

At Mapleside, to affiliate with a particular religion, inmates must complete an official "Religious Preference" form. Inmates can only affiliate with one religious group at a time. Inmates can convert religions; to do so they must submit a "Change of Religious Preference" form. This is allowed only once every 60 days. "Shopping" religious services to decide which one fits best (Warner 1993; Wuthnow 1988) is not permitted. Chaplain Harper complained that switching was all too frequent given that she was responsible for handling the paperwork, wishing that the rules would return to twice a year, as it had been in the past. Indeed, when Chaplain Harper asked me to file the

“Change of Religious Preference” paperwork, I was handling upwards of 100 forms each month.

Describing how many inmates participated in religious programs, Hanna, Chaplain Harper’s inmate clerk, estimated that out of 1,000 inmates total, “On a good weekend we have . . . 270 at the Protestant service. Second biggest is Catholic, and that’s 50. Then when you count all the little ones, it’s gotta be 500.” Chaplain Harper agreed, “I would say 50/50 [participate in religious programs]. For some, it’s a crucial part of their survival. Others are not engaged at all.” Compared to the general prison population of 1,000 women, inmates who participate in religious programs skew older, with longer sentences and a higher proportion of violent crimes, except for youth Bible study for 18 to 25 year olds. With no existing roster, I developed a proxy for the most active participants: the 12 inmates handpicked by Chaplain Harper to assemble and distribute Christmas gift bags to the rest of the inmate population. As Violet, an early 50s black woman serving time for murder, told me, “I was real glad when I got called up here this morning.” Violet laughed, crouching forward to tell me in hushed tones, “I wasn’t sure I was gonna be one of her *chosen ones*.” Smirking, she drew out these last two words for facetious emphasis. Although an imperfect measure of all participators, the chaplain’s “chosen ones” approximate a measure for the most active conservative Protestants. I compiled data on age, offense, sentence length, and length of stay for the “chosen ones.” Table 3 compares these data to official statistics of the total Mapleside population from the Department of Corrections. It shows that compared to the general prison population,

inmates who participated heavily in conservative Protestant religious programs skewed older, with longer sentences and a higher proportion of violent crimes.

[Table 3 about here]

The Sunday Church Service

With 63% of Mapleside inmates identifying as conservative Protestant, and nearly 280 attending church services every week in the gym in the Main Hall, I devoted a lot of time to observing these services. The gym is located across from the cafeteria, down a couple steps and through glossy wooden doors that swing open. Brightly lit with sun streaming through its skylights most days, the gym was invitingly warm when filled with people for services, although without air conditioning, it feels more like a sauna in the summer: humid, sticky, and dank. Protestant church services drew a crowd of about 100 inmates on Sunday mornings, from 8:30 am to 12:00 pm, and about 160 different inmates from 6:30 to 9:00 pm, and anywhere from two to ten outside volunteer ministers. On particularly hot days, the inmate-ushers who stood at the door would hand everyone who entered a cardboard handheld fan they could wave themselves with, donated by a local funeral home. The gym was typically set up with six rows of navy plastic chairs in facing a podium in the center. The podium was made of light laminate wood, outfitted with a microphone connected to two cumbersome *Peavy* speakers and, occasionally, a blue banner hanging down the front of the podium, which read "Wise men still seek Him / Come and worship the King."

The podium was flanked by two rows on each side of chairs, one for the outside visiting ministry and one for the choir. Always conservative Protestants, outside

volunteers came from area churches, largely representing denominations such as Baptist, Pentecostal, and African Methodist Episcopal. When I spoke to a psychologist who conducted mental health evaluations for defendants, she immediately identified "church ladies" as "always women, always well-dressed, and very nice." At Mapleside, outside volunteers were indeed predominately female and African American, with a couple exceptions, and almost all were middle class or upper-middle class.

The weekly service was a production. Some inmates were in charge of setting up speakers and testing the microphone. Others – choir members – wore purple and gold robes and were allowed to arrive early. About 10 to 15 inmates wore white stretchy gowns and black jazz shoes and danced during the service as members of the dance ministry. Once in a while, mime ministry would perform in black and white getups, and drama ministry, composed of anywhere between three and ten women, performed in regulation prison clothes. Ushers wore gold robes and greeted other inmates at the door, asking them to sign in, and handing them a brochure with the schedule of the service. (For several months of my fieldwork, I would be the one to photocopy 300 of these brochures each week, designed by one of the chaplain's inmate clerks.)

Walking into the gym on Sunday evenings for the Protestant service is a lively, boisterous experience. Starting around 6:30 pm, lay inmates trickle into the gym, one housing unit at a time, having just returned from dinner. Popular Christian music blares through two large speakers, inmates roam around the gym freely chatting with those they do not see during the week, and even hugging each other hello (inmates told me that worship services are the only time physical contact is technically permitted). Some

nights, there are bright yellow, orange, and red banners waving high in the air by members of the banner ministry, printed with the words “Amazing Grace” and “Let us crown the King.” Hanna, an active member of banner ministry, told me, “Most people don’t realize it, most people think you’re just waving flags and it looks pretty, but banner ministry is actually from the Bible. We are waving the banners to open up the gates of Heaven for the Holy Spirit to come in. It’s much more serious than people think.” The atmosphere feels festive and fun.

Around 7:00 pm, sometimes 7:15 pm, the service begins. Inmates have mostly taken their seats by then, almost filling the 200 chair room. The most religious inmates sit in the first few rows – these are the women who shout out “Amen,” “Praise God,” “Preach preacher,” and other affirmations. They might raise their arms to the sky when something particularly resonated with them, or even stand up if they were so moved. The back three rows are filled with women who are younger on average, and far more likely to chat with the women around them during the service. For these women, the church service functions more as a social hour. A significant amount of women come to church to sit in the back row with their girlfriends to spend time together, a factor that shapes the experience of religion for many inmates, which I will discuss further in chapter 5.

After the praise and worship teams finishes singing two or three rousing songs a cappella, the service opens with an introductory prayer and scripture reading, then an inmate MC introduces outside volunteers and guests. The adult and young adult choirs perform, also a cappella, with much stomping and syncopated clapping, and the dance

ministry does an interpretive dance to a contemporary Christian song pumping through the loudspeakers. The mime or drama ministry team also performs every couple weeks.

Next, the preacher or another volunteer stands at the podium to pray over prayer requests – small slips of white paper handed to each inmate upon her arrival to the gym, on which she can anonymously write a message about who or what she would like the preacher to pray for on her behalf. These most often include prayers for family, loved ones, health, mental health, addiction issues, parole, and legal matters. Finally it is time for the preacher's sermon, which usually runs about 20 or 30 minutes. Some preachers are fire and brimstone, others insist that God loves you no matter what. Some energetically pace the front of the gym, others calmly lay hands on inmates to heal them, and others yet stand stock still and deliver somber sermons.

The sermon is always followed by an altar call, in which the preacher asks anyone who would like to "give their life to Christ" to come stand front and center to recite the sinner's prayer and get saved. Somewhere between three to ten different women come forward every service. Then, the preacher calls for backsliders, "anyone who needs to rededicate their lives to Christ," and this elicits ten to fifteen additional women. With new inmates arriving in prison almost daily, and other inmates repeatedly rededicating their lives to Christ, participation in the altar call is consistently high compared to churches outside prison (Nelson 2005).

Inmates in the back rows start to trickle out around 8:45 pm, though they are chastised for doing so, and encouraged to stay until after the benediction prayer, in which we bowed our heads and listened as the pastor prayed for our health, safety, and success.

By 9:00 pm, one or two officers appear in the back of the gym, their presence signaling that it is time for the inmates to leave. By 9:05 pm, the officers might verbalize this request to the volunteer leading the service, by making eye contact and widening their eyes, or tapping their watch, or mouthing “Time to go.” Inmates need to be locked into their cells for 9:30 pm count, and it takes a couple minutes to walk to the housing units from the gym.

CHAPTER 2

"*YOU* KNOW WHY THE CAGED BIRD SINGS": RELIGION REDEFINING INCARCERATION

There is power in the name of Jesus (x3) / to break every chain (x3) /

There's an army rising up (x3) / To break every chain (x3) /

I hear the chains fallin' (x3).

These are the lyrics of a gospel ballad that the Mapleside church choir frequently sings during the conservative Protestant worship service. Although not penned with prison in mind, the imagery of broken chains clearly resonated. The inmates in attendance joined in passionately singing along with the choir, their feet stomping with the downbeat, their eyes closed in plaintive thought. It once drove Una, a 40-something African-born inmate, to speak in tongues. When Chaplain Harper ordered custom white t-shirts for the Protestant church officials, the design included the lyrics "Break Every Chain" printed underneath an image of a white cross in front of a military camouflage background.

Contrasting this rallying cry, religious messages at Mapleside were hardly ones of resistance. Instead, the typical conservative Protestant message was typified by a lesson from Miss J, a black Pentecostal preacher in her mid-50s, during one of her *Purpose Driven Life* class sessions: "First it's the CO [corrections officer], then it's the PO [parole officer], then it's your boss. The structure of authority in the kingdom is set up for a reason. If you're rebelling now, you'll never get anywhere." Far from breaking "every chain," this message promoted obedience to prison rules and submission to social hierarchy.

Religious messages interpreted incarceration as part of "God's plan," a narrative that simultaneously provided greater meaning and a framework of self-improvement consistent with conventionally punitive and neoliberal rehabilitative prison narratives. Religious inmates consequently interpreted interactions with state agents (corrections officers, parole boards, case managers) as acts guided by God, even when outcomes were unfavorable. Research on culture and social movements argues that religion can operate as a tool for resistance in certain contexts (Brown and Brown 2003; Pattillo-McCoy 1998; Smith 1996; Wilde 2004; Wood 2002; Young 2002; Yukich 2013). Contrasting this, despite their potential to challenge prison messages, I found that religious messages, mediated through the prison context, reframed incarceration through a spiritual lens and ultimately promoted a neoliberal framework of individual responsibility consistent with state goals for incarceration.

Neoliberal Discourses on what it Means to Be an Inmate

A growing body of literature examines how prison harms the imprisoned through its discourses around what it means to be an inmate. Research has consistently pointed to the "self-blaming requirement of prison life" that exists in the neoliberal era of punishment (Calavita and Jenness 2015). The prison administration encourages inmates to conceive of their incarceration as social control of blameworthy individuals (Allen 1981; Garland 2001; Hannah-Moffat 2001; Simon 1993). These top-down messages punish "flawed" individuals, even in purportedly rehabilitative programs (McCorkel 2013). During the prison boom of the 1980s and 1990s, Feeley and Simon (1992) coined the term "new penology" to describe a changing criminal justice system that "shifts away

from a concern with punishing individuals to managing aggregates of dangerous groups" (449). Reflecting the new penology, prison messages promulgate a carceral experience marked by normative assumptions about gender, race, and class (Belknap 2010; Comfort 2007; Haney 2010; Hannah-Moffat 2001; McCorkel 2013; Rhodes 2004). Religious messages that shape how inmates view their "time" obscured these broader conceptions of stratification in the American mass incarceration era, focusing on messages of self-improvement without mentioning racial or economic inequality that leads to incarceration. Of course, individuals commit crimes and are sentenced individually. However, systems of inequality based on race and class shape an individual's likelihood of participating in an act deemed criminal, and, after release, individuals are likely to return to the same communities and networks. Although the individual committed the crime, understanding the social context in which she did so would reflect the realities of the contemporary carceral state. The neoliberal era, beginning after the Cold War, shifted economic control to market forces through state deregulation (Babb 2005; Centeno and Cohen 2012). The term "neoliberalism" is more often a critique than a value-neutral term (Evans and Sewell 2013), given its role in increasing socioeconomic inequality (Centeno and Cohen 2012) and decreasing collective bargaining among the working class (Viscelli 2016). Neoliberalism strengthened the power of socioeconomically-privileged individuals and institutions.

Accompanying this economic paradigm was a shift in cultural ideology. Termed the neoliberal "social imaginary" (Hall and Lamont 2013; Evans and Sewell 2013), this ideology emphasizes personal responsibility, productivity, and consumption in a society

perceived as meritocratic (Camaroff and Camaroff 2001; Frank, Camp, and Boutcher 2010; Greenhouse 2009). Neoliberal rhetoric focuses on self-improvement rather than collective bargaining or structural inequality. Individuals' lives are "projects" (Boltanski and Chiabello 2007) of their own control (Greenhouse 2009). The neoliberal imaginary is just as much about personal responsibility as it is about personal failure; those who fail to pull themselves up by their bootstraps are deemed "losers" (Grazian 2010; Lamont 2000). This ideology leads to weaker solidarity among workers and the poor, and thwarts mobilization (Portes and Hoffman 2003; Martin and Brady 2007; Roberts 2002).

Recent studies have documented that neoliberalism is part and parcel of the penal system (O'Malley 1999; Wacquant 2010), particularly regarding prison privatization (O'Malley and Palmer 1996), compulsory labor (Goodman 2012), monetary sanctions (Harris 2016), and even carceral reform (Hannah-Moffat 2000, 2001; Schept 2015).

However, this scholarship on neoliberalism has not fully explained how economic structural change at the macro level leads individuals to buy into neoliberal social logics at the micro level (cf. Fairbanks and Lloyd 2011). The current study shows how the neoliberal social imaginary filters into inmates' understanding of their incarceration, shaping how they view the moral "projects" of their lives.[15]

Recent scholarship emphasizes the key role of religion in the neoliberal imaginary. Hackworth (2012) coined the term "religious neoliberalism" to examine how messages from the religious Right bolster neoliberal ideology related to welfare,

[15] Sociologists of work have begun to examine this micro-macro link, analyzing how individuals come to adopt neoliberal attitudes around labor (Hochschild 2016; Sharone 2013; Viscelli 2016).

promoting "righteous responsibilization of the poor" (Purser and Hennigan 2016). Dating back to Weber's *Protestant Ethic* ([1958] 2003), sociologists have investigated how religion-as-culture facilitates economic goals. Today's growing popularity of prosperity gospel preachers reflects a shift in which religious blessings are defined through material gains of health and wealth (Bowler 2013). Here again, researchers have examined economic consequences of the neoliberal turn in individuals' self-concept, while failing to interrogate how individuals come to adopt the neoliberal social imaginary of their day-to-day lives beyond economic institutions (Keister 2008, 2011). The present study extends this nascent literature by demonstrating how religion as a cultural resource facilitates the enactment of neoliberal ideology by operating as a mutually-reinforcing institution within the prison institution.

Does Religion Promote Resistance in the Prison Context?

Prior literature suggests religion would provide an alternative experience of prison. This scholarship documents how religious inmates report different attitudes and behaviors than their secular counterparts. For instance, research predominately on male inmates shows that, whether or not inmates were religious prior to prison, participation in religious programs improves inmate behavior (Kerley, Matthews, and Blanchard 2005) and affords a greater sense of hope and purpose (Aday, Krabill, and Deaton-Owens 2014; Clear et al. 2000; Cooney and Phillips 2008; Dubler 2013; Hallett et al. 2017; Johnson 2012; Kerley 2014; Maruna, Wilson, and Curran 2006). Religion appears to counteract criminogenic effects of prison: religion operates as an exit strategy from gang affiliation (Johnson 2012; Flores 2013; Skarbek 2014), and participation in religious programs leads

to lower rates of recidivism (Johnson 2004, 2011; Johnson, Larson, and Pitts 1997; Sumter 2006). Furthermore, religion facilitates the "redemption script" the incarcerated and formerly incarcerated use to signal reform (Maruna 2001).

Outside prison, social movement scholars have championed religion as a tool for activism (Brown and Brown 2003; Pattillo-McCoy 1998; Smith 1996; Wood 2002; Young 2002; Yukich 2013). Specifically, research heralds the black church as a resource for major political change (Barnes 2005; Calhoun-Brown 1998; Gilkes 1998; Higginbotham 1993; Lincoln and Mamiya 1990; Swain 2008), including its instrumental role in the Civil Rights movement (Chappell 2002; McAdam 1986; Morris 1984; Williams 2002). The centrality of freedom and deliverance in black Christian theology (Cone 1969; Levine 1977; West 1982) paves the way for community action (Pattillo-McCoy 1998; Wilmore 1998). Other research tempers these findings by pointing to variation in the extent of community engagement by denomination, socioeconomic status, and structural characteristics of a given congregation (Billingsley 1999; Cavendish 2000; Chaves 1999; Harris 2001; McRoberts 2005; Savage 2008). Overall, scholars contend that religion operates as a tool for mobilization in varied forms (see Baumann 2016). As Pattillo-McCoy (1998) argued, "Familiarity with the styles and rhythms of church talk is necessary for getting things done" in the community she studied. The present study interrogates what, exactly, is the thing getting done. Taken together, as a cultural schema (Sewell 1996) or repertoire (Clemens 1993), this literature would predict that religion could provide a repertoire of resistance to prison logics of punishment.

In the prison context, the limited existing scholarship has proposed that religion acts as an alternative group loyalty to counter feelings of alienation (Jacobs 1975; Johnson 2012), which, when threatened, leads to mobilization or even rioting (Useem and Goldstone 2002). Even Goffman ([1961] 2007), writing on the deindividualizing power of total institutions, suggested religion as an antidote to prison ideology: "Strong religious and political convictions may also serve perhaps to immunize the true believer against the assaults of a total institution . . ." (p. 66). Debates on the extent of religious radicalization inside prisons, including Nation of Islam and Islamic fundamentalism (Awan 2013; Hamm 2009, 2012; Mamiya 1982; Mulcahy, Merrington, and Bell 2013; Liebling and Straus 2012; Useem and Clayton 2009; Useem 2012), suggest the potency of this question in the contemporary political climate.

However, while championing religion as a resource, the literature has failed to consider what happens when dominant groups harness the resource. Despite their potential to countervail prison messages, I find that religious messages, mediated through the prison context, reinterpret incarceration through a spiritual lens and ultimately promote a neoliberal framework of individual responsibility consistent with state goals for incarceration.

Redefining Incarceration as Part of God's Plan

Previous research has suggested that religion gives inmates hope (Kerley 2014). In this section, in addition to hope, I show how religion did indeed help inmates make meaning out of their imprisonment. However, this meaning was not without important implications. Religious messages defined incarceration as "God's plan." However

problematic this conceptualization may be (e.g. Friere 1968; Soering 2008), the sentiment was prevalent.

One hot Sunday evening in June, I observed a Protestant worship service in the gym. Windowless and without air conditioning, industrial-sized fans blared in a feeble attempt to cool us down. The volunteer preacher was Pastor O'Neill. A late 40s black Pentecostal male, Pastor O'Neill volunteered at Mapleside several times a week, leading youth Bible study classes and offering counseling sessions to supplement time slots offered by Chaplain Harper. After reading *Acts 4:1-13*, in which apostles Peter and John were jailed for preaching the gospel, Pastor O'Neill shouted into his microphone over the din of fans, "82% of people in the Bible went to jail. Jesus *Himself* went to jail. *You* know why the caged bird sings." Applause reverberated in the congregation. Pastor O'Neill's message not only normalized prison, but also showed how even the divine was imprisoned, aligning incarceration with righteousness rather than class-based and race-based social control.

In a similar instance, I was making small talk with Kathy, a black Methodist volunteer, about the faded white "D.O.C." lettering printed on the back of inmates' denim jackets. Instead of "Department of Corrections," Kathy told me, "I call them Daughters of Christ." Kathy's renaming exemplified this alternative definition of the carceral experience as godly. Likewise, at another Sunday Protestant service, Pastor Young, another volunteer preacher, himself a nondenominational Christian black male in his 40s, blended together the concepts of crime and sin, offering a perspective on how God views incarceration: "God does not care what you did. If you asked for forgiveness, He cast it

into the sea of forgetfulness. He gave you a clean slate." Emotional energy in the room rising, Pastor Young began to pace around the podium, calling out, "You're not serving time, you're serving Christ." These messages obscured legal, punitive interpretations of incarceration in favor of one dictated by divine judgment.

In addition to theologies of forgiveness, Protestant clergy routinely cast prison as part of God's plan. For example, at the annual interfaith Thanksgiving service, Chaplain Harper, a faithful Baptist, opened the service with a prayer. She asked us to bow our heads as she said, "Even if you were surprised you got here, God wasn't. Believe me, God knew you were coming here before you did." Months later, in a prayer in front of the Protestant congregation, Chaplain Harper whispered into the microphone, "Mapleside is not your purpose in life, but [God will] use it for your purpose." According to Chaplain Harper, whether or not it was part of the plan, God would use these women's incarceration for a greater purpose.

Reverend Mona provided a similar interpretation in her Ministry class as she regaled the class of inmates with stories of miracles and womanhood. A former Black Panther, she now believed prison was a "necessary struggle." Reverend Mona never mentioned the racial inequality of the criminal justice system, but instead encouraged inmates to see incarceration as a test from God. She taught, "In Christianity, we believe God uses us *through* suffering. We have no worth outside of God. Anybody and everybody can suffer." At another class session, Reverend Mona taught, "God wouldn't give you the assignment if He didn't trust your heart." The classroom was full of extensive nodding, affirming God's empowerment through the "assignment" of prison.

Then, as if letting the class in on a secret, Reverend Mona cupped her hand over her mouth and whispered, "He believes in you even more than you believe in Him."

Viewing prison as a necessary struggle was common among conservative Protestant preachers. One night in *Purpose Driven Life* class, Miss J, the mid-50s black Pentecostal preacher teaching the class, explained, "This [incarceration] is an assignment, a test. . . . Your assignment is not always good. New level, new devil." At this, a young inmate exclaimed, "Ooh!" and asked Miss J to repeat that again so she could write it down. A couple months later in Baptist Bible study, a middle-aged white inmate who had taken Miss J's class shared, "[Mapleside] is the hardest test I ever had." Like the neoliberal categorization of society into "winners" and "losers" (Lamont 2000), prisoners are seen as having been handed down their punishment by the highest authority.

Whether or not preachers viewed prison as a test, for the most part, they believed it was part of God's plan. One hot Wednesday evening in late July, Miss J urged during her *Purpose Driven Life* class, "[The Devil] ain't been nice to you; you don't need to be nice to him. He took your life, he took your kids, he took your money; he took everything. For the next 40 days [the duration of this class], think 'I'm gonna do it God's way' 'cause it hasn't been working the other way. Figure out what he wants me to do. Even here, at Mapleside. God uses everything." Miss J urged that God could use prison for the better. Furthermore, the following week, Miss J taught that everything should be interpreted religiously: "Good, bad, or indifferent, everything is *spiritual*. Your judges, the court? Spiritual. Who's in this room this week, who was in the room last week? Spiritual. Rachel's here? That's spiritual." She went on to say that everything is part of

God's plan, and that prison is temporary: "You don't get to choose your assignment. Mapleside is a temporary address. Your address before you was here? That was a temporary address too, you just didn't know it. It is temporary here." Incarceration at Mapleside, then, was an "assignment" from God, fated to be.

Similarly, at the interfaith Thanksgiving service, Chaplain Harper encouraged inmates to "View your time here as a training, [as] time to strengthen your spiritual muscles." Chaplain Harper went on to emphasize that inmates continue to be under God's dominion: "God hasn't forgotten you. He knows everything you do. It's not like a dark cloud came over here and God can't see in. He still watches over you and loves each and every one of you. I always say, if you can make it here at Mapleside, you can make it anywhere."

Echoing this message, at the Mother's Day church service – an emotionally fraught day for the incarcerated women at Mapleside – Apostle Kendra, a tall, slender black nondenominational Christian in her 50s, preached:

> You have to *accept* that you supposed to be here. We've all been through things. Getting raped? Been there. Laying down with someone after the first night? Been there. No matter what you done, you ended up here for a reason that you haven't fulfilled yet. You need to stay here, that's your assignment.

During Apostle Kendra's sermon, many inmates enthusiastically called out affirmations like "Tell the truth!" and "Come on!" Defining incarceration as an assignment from God was standard at Mapleside's Protestant worship services. By providing a greater, spiritual meaning for one's imprisonment, these messages obscured the role of structural

inequality based on race and social class in mass incarceration (Alexander 2012; Western 2006).

While the vast majority of religious messages followed this pattern, encouraging inmates to believe that incarceration was part of God's plan, there were occasions when pastors deviated from this message. For instance, one night at the *Purpose Driven Life* class in late October, Miss J, the Pentecostal black preacher, warned uncharacteristically, "Don't just accept your incarceration. Don't become institutionalized. Don't accept this as your final destination. Cases are being overturned all the time." She continued, describing structural inequality surrounding their imprisonment, "There's a lot of over-sentencing, especially for women." This sort of message was rare. Yet even in this potentially politicizing class lesson, Miss J the inmates present to have hope that God would intervene in their sentences: "Cases are being overturned all the time. Remember Miss Sue? She got out on parole after being incarcerated for decades. If God did it for her, He can do it for you, too." Even in rare cases where structural inequality around gender was explicitly discussed, messages tended to revolve around the belief that God was in control of one's incarceration.

Religion was deeply meaningful for many inmates. Rosemary, a late 40s white inmate serving 15 years for theft, captured the prevailing sentiment during a discussion of *James 1* and *John 1* one April evening in Baptist Bible study. Sporting her usual long, gray basketball shorts and t-shirt, her foot tattoos peeking through her Adidas sandals, Rosemary's eyes looked strained as she reflected tearfully, "[T]hese scriptures reinforced who I am in God's eyes." Rosemary started to choke up, her voice sounding stifled to

avoid bawling, “I have been chosen by God and he loves me tremendously. I’ve used this as affirmation that I am not what I used to be because I’ve accepted him as my Lord and Savior.”

With God in control of their prison sentence, inmates often expressed their hope for release in religious language. One evening at the *Purpose Driven Life* class, the room was crowded with over 50 inmates, about 60% black and 40% white. Nearly every seat was full. Three inmates had perched atop the heating unit on the side of the room rather than taking a chair. Towards the end of class, one of the three called out, “Some of us are leaving soon.” Miss J seemed pleased as she waved the three of them to the front of the room to pray. Four women approached. The fourth woman did not have a release date set, but she declared, “I’m claiming it.” Miss J prayed for each woman in turn. By the second woman, Miss J was in tears, nearly whimpering, “Don’t look back. God’s got you. I don’t care what the court papers say.” Miss J put God’s will above that of the legal system. In a similar instance, after a particularly uplifting session of *Battlefield of the Mind*, Estrella accompanied Reverend Mona and me out of the classroom. Grinning, she pointed towards the front sliders, the metal doors between herself and freedom, and promised us, “I’ma walk out with you next time. I believe.” Estrella believed that vocalizing her prayers made it more likely that God would answer.

“Speaking something into existence,” as Estrella had done, was a pervasive theme in Protestant services. During one altar call at the church service one week in December, Chaplain Harper asked anyone “who came in here tonight worry, who heard that sermon and it spoke to them, come up here and I want to pray in agreeance with what you are

asking God for." Almost all of the inmates came up; I counted about 100 of the 160 in church that night. She asked the inmates to hold hands, and, with her eyes closed in fervent prayer, Chaplain Harper declared, "I stand in agreeance with your prayers about parole, sentencing, reconciliation with your families. . . . I see that many of you won't see another birthday here. I declare many of you will be out by your next birthday."

Many public prayers centered around early release from prison. Once in *Discipleship* class, Rashida, the mid-40s black Apostolic inmate serving time for a financial crime, started off class with a quick prayer which included: "Please bless us in our release situations. Get us out of here." This was received by a loud "Amen" from someone in the class. Rashida smiled, flattered, "Gotta keep it real." Another time, Rashida prayed at the close of a Ministry class, when she delivered a rhetorically beautiful prayer, full of weather-related imagery. It was storming outside, and the women had just come off of an hour-long shelter-in-place due to a tornado warning. Rashida fervently prayed, "Father God, we pray that this rain is a *cleansing* rain. Cleanse us, cleanse the administration, cleanse this place, cleanse the hearts of the judges, cleanse the hearts of the parole boards so that we make things right with our release days."

Religious inmates and volunteers believed that God was in control of meting out punishment and favor. When Minister Patrice, a late-60s black Pentecostal preacher came to Sunday church in prison, she cooed in a disarmingly quiet voice, "I don't care what you did on the outside, if He decides to favor our lives, it will be done." At this, most of the volunteers in attendance from Minister Patrice's church raised their hands in witness. Minister Patrice urged the inmates to approach their incarceration with positivity despite

their situation, "You gotta wake up in the morning saying to yourself, 'This is the day the Lord has made. I *choose* to be glad.'" With God in control of their incarceration, conservative Protestant messages gave inmates hope of early release, and the belief that their lives were passing according to a divine plan.

A Religious Framework for Crime

Inmates also gave God a central role in the retelling of their crime itself. Anne, the 40-something white Catholic inmate, told me how she linked her crime to her relationship to God. Looking pained, her eyebrows furrowed, Anne explained: "I was angry with God. I remember a few years ago my husband was beating me pretty bad, and I was angry at God. My husband wanted me to kill this man who he found out I was having a relationship with." Anne clasped her hands and raised them towards the ceiling, and looked up, continuing, "I remember being in my kitchen, on my hands and knees, praying to God, 'Please, let me find another way out of this.' Two days later, I killed [my victim]. And I was angry with God. I was *mad*. I didn't know why He didn't find another way for me." Anne believed God had not answered her prayer. Once in prison, Anne completed Catholic conversion classes and got baptized. She is now at peace with her incarceration: "There are women who will be out in three months, and I don't envy them. I'm happy with my place right now."

Likewise, when describing her crime at an event during Victim's Awareness Week, Maya, a devout Sunni inmate, shared, "I thank God every day that both of my victims are still alive. I was in and out of consciousness – I had been under the influence – and I realized what I was doing as I came to. That second, I started praying to God."

Estrella, a Protestant inmate who was doing time for drug distribution, avouched, "God was talking to me the whole time, I just wasn't listening."

This perspective was adopted for a range of wrongdoings. Heather, for instance, is a late-50s white inmate serving nine years for theft. Though raised Catholic, Heather was saved at Mapleside. She remembered the exact date it happened: November 20th. It all started when "I switched shoes in the visiting room, and I was caught. That's why I was going to go on lock." Heather was trying to illegally bring a new pair of shoes into Mapleside by "switching" with her visitor. Heather used to be a "public defender" in prison, a nickname for someone who would advocate for themselves in disciplinary matters on the inside. At the time, when she was put "on lock," she prepared her own defense: "I was waiting to go up for my hearing, and I was looking for a loophole. And I found a loophole. I was going to tell them something so that I wouldn't have to go on lock."

Heather was prepared to talk her way out of being punished on lock for switching shoes. She continued, "The night before I was supposed to go up for my hearing, it was a Friday in early November, I got diarrhea." Heather laughed and covered her hand with her mouth:

> Sorry to be graphic, but that's what happened. So my hearing was rescheduled for the following week, and then it happened again. Now I know that was God trying to tell me something. Two weeks later, they told me I had to go through with this one, that it couldn't be canceled. In the middle of the night the night before, I heard someone say "Heather," and I woke up.

At first, she was not sure who had called her name. She went on:

> I called through the vent to the woman [in the cell] next to me and ask if she said anything. You could tell she sounded like she was waking up. She wasn't messing with me. She said, 'No, that wasn't me, go back to bed.' So I did, and then I heard my name again. Now I know that was God. I asked her again if she said my name, and she said no. And I believed her. So I immediately got down on my knees then and there and started praying. That's when I was saved. I went in to my hearing the next day and I told the truth.

Heather believed God was trying to prevent her from lying. She had been saved. Heather no longer identifies as a "public defender" in prison because "Now, I think if you do something wrong you should be punished for it. So I don't do that anymore. That's just how it is." She went on, "I was on lock for 200 days, and I memorized one Scripture per day. That's how I got through it." For Heather, God's intervention while she was attempting to avoid punishment for a transgression in prison transformed her spirituality and enabled her to cope with being isolated for the majority of a year.

There was a limit to this framework. Louise was a recently-admitted inmate, about 50 years old with watery blue eyes and long blond hair. On the white soles of her navy *Keds* sneakers, she had scrawled in black ink the name of her daughter on one side and the word "GOD" in all caps on the other. On one of her first nights in the *Purpose Driven Life* class, Louise shared boldly:

> I had been in [jail] for ten months, and I just knew I needed more time to get my life right. I had a vision that I would get five years, which was too much for my

> crime. That didn't make sense. In court, I asked the judge to give me five years, because I needed to get my life right. He said that was admirable, and then gave me what I asked for.

The other inmates in the room looked at each other incredulously. Giving credence to a vision that gave someone a harsher conviction was alarming – Louise had crossed a line, though she did not seem to realize it. It appeared that religious interpretations of God's role in sentencing were supported when those interpretations led to a *shorter* – not longer – sentence.

Not every religious inmate wholeheartedly subscribed to this framework. While reading the chaplain's mail one afternoon and then summarizing the letter for her, I came across a message from a Protestant inmate who was currently "on lock." In this long letter penned in blue ink, the inmate said she did not know how to interpret the religious lessons she heard in Bible study: "Am I supposed to still believe I'll go home? My sentence is life without parole plus 100 years." Chaplain Harper quickly plucked the letter from my hand and commented, "I need to meet with her." Being sentenced to life without the possibility of parole challenged the framework of incarceration as part of God's plan, given the difficulty in viewing the meaning of a life behind bars as divinely ordained.

How Neoliberal Religious Rehabilitation Obscures Structural Inequality

Reinterpreting prison as part of God's plan provided a counter-narrative to the prison logic of punishment. However, these messages supported a neoliberal framework of personal responsibility and rehabilitation consistent with prison goals. For example,

while leading a Youth Bible Study, Pastor O'Neill insisted that "God is not concerned about your crime. He's concerned about what you're going to do next. He wants you to get out of a criminal mentality." For Pastor O'Neill, getting "out of a criminal mentality" required self-rehabilitation. To accomplish this, he explained that inmates needed to work hard: "When God allows times outs in your life, he's giving you the opportunity . . . for your soul to grow. It's all about motivation. You have to have the motivation. . . . You can't just wing it." This emphasis on a spiritually-productive use of time behind bars mirrors a neoliberal definition of self-worth based on productivity (Greenhouse 2009).

Similarly, in a Ministry class session, Reverend Mona lectured, "You are exiled. Do anything you can get your hands on. That's why you're here – some of it is what you did, but some of it is because He [God] wants you to be here." Likewise, to a broader audience of interfaith inmates at the annual Thanksgiving service, Chaplain Harper encouraged inmates to "View your time here as a training, [as] time to strengthen your spiritual muscles." These clergy promoted neoliberal ideology focused on self-directed productivity, with no mention of official rehabilitative programs inside prison.

Inmates who viewed incarceration as God's plan adopted the neoliberal model of personal responsibility while behind bars. Inmates' sense of moral self (Presser 2004; Winchester 2008) flourished, in the following cases, by getting "saved" or becoming a "born-again" Christian. To illustrate, Ja is an early 20s black woman serving several years for theft and drug distribution. I plopped down next to Ja in the back row of Youth Bible Study one afternoon to chat. The conversation quickly turned to faith as she emphatically assured me, "God saved me . . . [by] putting me here [in prison]. I've

learned so much about myself from being here. You don't know yourself until you come to a place like this, stripped of everything you have." Ja attributed a substantial amount of personal growth to her incarceration and God's role in it. Testifying in Christian Witness Training class one afternoon about *Psalm* 34, Hollis, a 50 year old black devout inmate serving 10 years for burglary, shared how she is grateful for waking up this morning. She explained, "Some people thank God for saving them; I thank God for *rescuing* me."

Religious narratives describing God as the "ultimate judge" led inmates who participated in Protestant programs to view that God controlled their imprisonment. For instance, during the *Purpose Driven Life* class one Wednesday evening, Kimmie, a late 30s black woman who was normally timid in class, shared, "When I first got here, I felt distant [from God]. I kept saying, 'God, where are you? Where are you?' But I know he's always been with me. I realized He brought me here to get my attention." For religious inmates, imprisonment was understood as a much-needed time for self-improvement.

Nevaeh, a mid-20s black woman with a life sentence for attempted murder, described her initial struggle with belief: "When I first came here, I was awaiting my sentence for a crime I didn't commit." She glanced down at the table in front of her and shrugged, "I'm over it now, but I was looking at a life sentence plus 180 years. . . . When I got my time, I believed in God, and I believed He's a just God – How just is *that*? Getting all that time for a crime I didn't do." Nevaeh looked me in the eyes, disheartened, "I didn't grow up expecting this. None of my family went to prison, nothing like that. My mother kept saying God put me in prison to sort some things out." The next day, she requested the pseudonym Nevaeh, "Heaven spelled backwards." In prison, Nevaeh

became a practicing Baptist. In fact, just over a month after our interview, Nevaeh proudly handed me a copy of an essay she had written on salvation, telling me, "I've been handing it out officers, everybody. It might help you."

Just as Naveah had struggled, not all inmates adopted the notion of incarceration as part of God's plan, For instance, when I asked Estrella, the 38 year old Latina serving time for drug distribution, whether she thought incarceration was part of God's plan, she seemed perplexed. Estrella was one of the most devout women I met, active in all church programs, from Ministry classes to Christian Witness Training, to dance ministry, to teaching Youth Bible Study. Estrella couldn't contain her smile as she giggled, "God put you here? *You* put you here." Then her smile faded as she hedged, "It's true that I wouldn't have been alive if I didn't come here. But I don't think God was like, 'This is my child and I want her to end up in jail.'" Theological nuance depended on inmates' spiritual beliefs alongside their exposure to a variety of religious teachings. Extraordinarily schooled in scripture, Estrella's understanding of divine intervention complicated the simple idea that incarceration was part of God's plan.

Indeed, even the most religious inmates did not uniquely describe their incarceration in spiritual terms. They perceived structural inequality in the criminal justice system, particularly with respect to gender. Whereas scholarship tends to show no difference in sentencing by gender (Steffensmeier, Kramer, and Streifel 1993) or – if at all – greater leniency in sentencing for women (Pollak 1950), especially mothers (Koons-Witt 2002), some women at Mapleside told me their sentences were longer than the men they knew. However, research has shown that sentences tend to be harsher for women of

color compared to white women (Belknap 2015; Klein and Kress 1976; Kruttschnitt 1980-1981). As Estrella lamented to me, “The whole system is harder on women. I’ve only been here [in prison] once before, but the father of my son has four convictions for the same type of crime, in close time proximity, and we both got the same sentence: 10 years.” Coretta, a mid-40s black inmate serving 40 years for murder, a weekly attendee at the Protestant worship service and Miss J’s *Purpose Driven Life* course, likewise thought women got the short end of the stick: “That’s one thing I’ve learned, that women get much longer sentences than men. Growing up, the crowds I used to hang with, they’d go away for a summer or two and be back.” Yet these instances were rare. Inmates infrequently discussed gender inequality in their religious narratives describing incarceration as a test from God.

A Religious Framework of Rehabilitation

Furthermore, this religious framework provided a script for pathological rehabilitation. The extended case of Geraldine’s alcoholism illustrates how conservative Protestant messages cast trauma, addiction, and hardship under the purview of God. As such, rehabilitation required religious belief and practice. This understanding of rehabilitation as meted out by God bolstered a framework of self-motivated “bootstraps” mentality. .

I first met Geraldine in September at the Thursday night Baptist Bible study, but we didn’t talk until five weeks later. I was sitting with Hanna and Asabi, the chaplain’s inmate clerks, in classroom 3, idly organizing files (that’s how I earned my keep). I wasn’t doing much of anything, just watching Hanna hunch over her Styrofoam tray to

eat a late lunch, a turkey sandwich and some sauerkraut, when Geraldine poked her head in. Was it too late to get a pass to borrow books from the Religious Library tomorrow, Geraldine wanted to know.

"They're already printed, we're ripping 'em up now." Hanna told her. Grinning warmly, Geraldine pressed, "You can't write me one right now?" Hanna laughed and shook her head, "You think I can write passes? Child, I don't have that kind of power!" "Oh, I thought you could." Geraldine shrugged, then gestured towards me. "Oh yeah, that's my little friend. I always look for her on Thursdays," she told Hanna. "I tell her she look like a kindergarten teacher."

An officer called out to Geraldine, "Move it along." Geraldine was still standing in the hallway with only her head and shoulders tucked into our room. "I'm just talkin' about church stuff," Geraldine called back. Hanna giggled at this half-truth, then whined, "Now [the officer] gonna come in here."

Though always smiling, prison isn't easy for Geraldine. Nearing 50, her once tall, thin frame now stands hunched, with her neck craned forward, making me think of all the years she must have had to literally keep her head down. Geraldine is a light-skinned black woman with curly black shoulder-length hair, normally slicked into a no-nonsense tight, low bun. A couple missing teeth means she doesn't pronounce fricatives, "th" words like "this" and "that." This makes even the most somber statements sound unintimidating; most people find it easy to laugh and have a good time when Geraldine's around. Still, she seemed relieved to confide in me, "I'm getting my teeth fixed soon because I'm sick of people saying they can't understand me when I talk." On a

particularly emotional night in Bible study, Geraldine shared with the group, “I like to smile and make people laugh, but I’m hurting on the inside. People don’t know how unhappy I am.”

Geraldine’s closest friend in Bible study is a mid-30s Latina named Priscilla, who sings on the church choir and always looks gussied up in bright pink lipstick and smooth, flouncy curls. For several months in Bible study, Geraldine and Priscilla would sit next to each other and pass notes. One afternoon just before Christmas, however, I was in the chaplain’s office pushing papers with Hanna and Asabi, when Geraldine stopped by to borrow the latest *Oprah* magazine. She was itching to share her woes: “The warden talked to me yesterday. She said since I’m a marine, if I lay a hand on someone else, I’ll catch another charge automatically. When that girl lifted her hands to me yesterday–” Geraldine wound her fists up towards her face and lurched forward to show us what she wanted to do to Priscilla yesterday. And Sandee had started with her too, Geraldine complained. Hanna and Asabi already knew the backstory to this, and filled me in later about Geraldine and Priscilla’s recent fight. Geraldine asked us frankly, “Should I quit Bible study?” Asabi urged quietly, “No. Let it go. Don’t let them get in the way. You can sit next to whoever you want.” Geraldine seemed satisfied with this advice. But before she left Chap’s office, Geraldine leveled, “You know, even pretty girls can get their face messed up.”

Geraldine gave her life to Christ in the prison’s gym, where church is held, the first Sunday after she got locked up back in 2013. In addition to Bible study, Geraldine

deepened her faith by *Purpose Driven Life*, the class discussed earlier. One night in early November, just before class began, Geraldine raised her hand to tell the teacher, Miss J, "I was talking to the officer, 'cause this class [*Purpose Driven Life*] meets at the same time as AA. And my case manager said I have to go to AA for parole. I'm 16 months clean, but today I really wanted to drink. The warden had to come down and talk to me, 'cause for some reason today I wanted to drink." This was a new warden, recently installed, who had well-known plans to change the prison status quo. She took a hands-on approach, meeting with inmates individually to advise them and help them through their problems. In my year of fieldwork, no inmate said a negative word about this new warden, although a couple officers felt frustrated with the new rules.

Miss J calmly advised Geraldine, "Well you should pray and ask God where you should go. No one is forcing you to be here. But I will say [that] they got AA every day of the week." Geraldine stayed put. Miss J then addressed the class of 37 students, "Who in here struggles with addiction?" Almost every hand shot up. "Addiction is a spirit, it manifests itself in the natural. You putting addiction above the power of God. God – who created everything, He can do everything – but he can't fix your addiction? What does that say about your faith?" she asked incredulously. "It means you doubt. God made a covenant with us; make a demand on your covenant. Is [God] a man that He's a liar?"

The lesson continued as usual, week 2 of 5 on how to find your purpose in Christ. An hour passed, and it was finally time for prophecies. Miss J told me she has been hearing the voice of God for about two years now, but only when she's teaching in prison. She does not prophesize anywhere else but this class, normally closing out the

session with anywhere between one to four prophetic readings, although she may begin class with one if the Holy Spirit so moves her.

Miss J called Geraldine to stand with her in the front of the room. She began, "You have free choice and free will. I can't help you unless you're ready. Are you ready?" Geraldine nodded and quietly replied, "Yes." Miss J asked why Geraldine wanted to stay clean. Geraldine paused, then looked at Miss J squarely in the face: "I want to be a right mother for my grandkids, and my kids." The rest of us applauded.

"Don't tell me, tell Him!" Miss J barked, "Tell God you don't want to drink anymore." Geraldine lifted her eyes timidly towards the ceiling: "I don't want to drink no more."

"Say it like you mean it!" Miss J urged. Geraldine tried again, a little louder this time, daring to hold her gaze on the ceiling for only a second: "I don't want to drink no more."

"Now say it to your body. Put your hand on your heart." Geraldine followed orders, placing her hand on her heart and lowering her eyes: "I don't want to drink no more."

"Now tell Hell you don't want to drink no more," Miss J pointed to the ground. Geraldine mirrored and pointed down with her index finger, hunching over to address the floor: "I don't want to drink no more."

"Good!" Miss J encouraged, "One more time, tell God, your body, and the Devil." Geraldine obliged. The rest of the inmates present looked entranced, staring at Geraldine from their seats with pained, empathetic eyes. From her seat in the front row, Carla

widened her eyes and murmured, “I never heard her say that.” Miss J pivoted in her spot to face Carla: “What you say?” Carla repeated, shaking her head, “I never heard her say that, all the years I’ve known her.” Geraldine nodded, “She and I go way back. We from the same part of town.”

Miss J instructed the class, “Put your hands up, we’re gonna pray for her.” Geraldine closed her eyes and bowed her head, crossing her arms in front of her body. Everyone in the room outstretch their palms forward towards Geraldine. “I’m hearing the words, ‘Why? Why do you drink?’ I see you in a dark room. I see hands. Someone abused you.” Tears welled up in Geraldine’s eyes, and soon, a single tear tumbled down her cheek. Several other women in the room began to cry. Miss J prayed, “Rid your mind of depression. Take away all suicidal thoughts.” She continued to pray out loud for several minutes. Geraldine stood silently, with her eyes closed and head bowed.

Boldly, Miss J asked, “Did any of that make sense to you? You don’t have to share if you’re not comfortable.” Geraldine lifted her chin and looked straight at Miss J: “I don’t care if they know – it was my father.” Miss J shook her head sympathetically while Geraldine nodded. Pulling at her collar and fanning herself, Geraldine added, “My body feels on fire.” Miss J explained, “Your cells are changing! They’re hard at work. That’s why you feel like you on fire.”

“Come on Carla, come give her a hug,” Miss J instructed. Carla stood up and hugged Geraldine, telling her, “I love you.” “You too, give her a hug,” Miss J told Sasha, another woman in the front row whose eyes were glassy throughout the entire prophecy. Sasha got up to hug Geraldine. One by one, without further instruction, almost all of the

36 other women left their seats to hug Geraldine. A line formed in the middle of the room as we each waited for our turn to hug her. Some embraced Geraldine tightly and whispered privately into her ear. Others held her in silent support. In the weeks that followed, Geraldine continued to attend Miss J's class, although she seldom interacted with her classmates outside of the classroom. This example demonstrates how a religious program redefined alcoholism through a religious framework of rehabilitation. Instead of trauma counseling, this brand of Protestantism promotes prayer and divine healing as sources of physiological and emotional transformation (cf. Baker 2008; Stolz 2011). This is important given that emotions play a key role in the success of rehabilitative programs (Rossner 2013).

Attaching Divine Meaning to State Actors

If neoliberal religious messages shift control away from state agents, it is useful to interrogate how inmates who adopt these perspectives interpret their interactions with state agents. At Mapleside, religious inmates viewed interactions with parole boards, case managers, and corrections officers as being guided by God's plan. This shows how encounters with representatives of the prison institution that are cast in religious language consequently reinforce prison narratives about incarceration.

For example, Sabine is a 25 year-old white woman who recently returned to prison for a parole violation. The only person to sit through as many Bible studies as I did – six hours every Wednesday – Sabine attended Ministry Class with Reverend Mona from 1:30 to 3:00 pm, an inmate-led Christian Witness Training from 3:00 to 5:30 pm, and *Purpose Driven Life* with Miss J from 7:00 to 9:00 pm. One particularly draining

day, I asked her how she managed the nearly nonstop religious classes – I myself was floundering. She cheerfully justified her intensive Bible study schedule: "I'm just trying to get as much as I can while I'm here." Smiling, Sabine told me, "Last time [I was in prison], I left before God's time. I wasn't ready – that's why I'm back. I'm trying to take in as much Bible study as I can while I'm here. This time I want to leave on God's time."

Similarly, Maria, who has served seven of her 25 year sentence, told me firmly, "[T]ime isn't on my mind." She said she has come to peace with "Why am I here? . . . I'll get out in God's time." Sabine and Maria both viewed that God, not criminal justice officials, controlled their custody and release.

One November night in the Baptist Bible study, Sandee shared a testimony that explicitly shifted control from her case manager to divine authority. Sandee is a 45 year old black woman serving time for second-degree murder. Sandee is considered a low security threat, and works as a custodian in the administrative wing of the prison. Sandee told us about how earlier that week, her case manager got "pissy" with her for manipulating her way into a meeting with her – something Sandee fully admitted to doing. When the case manager retaliated snapping at Sandee, saying, "Your fate is in my hands," Sandee got angry. She told us she replied to the case manager, "No, it's not. My fate is not in her hands – it's in *God's* hands. Not her hands." Sandee's frustration stemmed from her case manager assuming too much authority over what she perceived to be under God's purview.

Inmates likewise cast decisions made by the parole board as part of God's plan. One March morning, while volunteering at the religious library, I started talking to

Geneva, a 45 year old black inmate doing time for drug possession as a repeat offender. Crestfallen, Geneva shared, "I went up for parole last week. The [Holy] Spirit was telling me 'immediate release,' but the parole board said something different. I was really torn up about it." She continued, saying that Minister Patrice, the late-60s black Pentecostal preacher who volunteered at Mapleside, told Geneva, "You don't know what [God's] plan is for you. You don't know how many lives you touch in here. He might need you in here." That evening, when Minister Patrice led the Sunday worship service, her message aligned with this advice:

> God has limitless resources. He can cause people, places, things to line up to your benefit. He can cause everything to change overnight. He can cause everything to change in one second. . . . God has a specific time. All things according to God's time. That helps you relax. If God has allowed it to stay, then God has already equipped you with enough patience to handle it.

The following week in Reverend Mona's Ministry class, Geneva got choked up when she shared her story again for the group of 22 inmates: "I had my parole hearing two weeks ago. They told me no, that I would have to go up again next year. I was down, I was real down. I was about to go in my room and hang myself right now." She gulped, then lifted her hand to gesture to the women sitting near her: "The sisters behind me prayed on me, they covered me. Now I know . . . God wanted me to be here." Geneva eventually believed God wanted her to stay at Mapleside for a reason. Reverend Mona supported Geneva's logic by replying, "No parole board can get in the way of God's

will." Ceding control to divine authority, Geneva, Minister Patrice, and Reverend Mona believed that the parole board acted in a manner consistent with God's will.

This approach to parole decisions was prevalent across religious volunteers. For instance, at her *Purpose Driven Life* class, Miss J once explained, "Some of you complain or get upset when you're parole is denied. There could be an assassin outside that gate. When God doesn't do what I ask, I'm still content. He has done too much for me to doubt him now." In Miss J's view, inmates should be "content" with God's decisions because they are ultimately beneficial, such as avoiding "an assassin outside that gate."

Parole decisions, an ever-present source of anxiety among inmates, were likewise cast as part of God's plan. Estrella, introduced earlier as the 38 year old Latina doing time for drug distribution, illustrates this well. She joked that her petite stature at 4 foot 10 belied her hometown notoriety when it came to cocaine sales. Estrella was a repeat offender, this time sentenced to 15 years, with a 10 mandatory years without the possibility of parole. One of the most devout women I met at Mapleside, Estrella was a member of the dance ministry, taught Christian Witness Training and youth Bible study to other inmates, and attended Baptist Bible study weekly. Her whole family converted from Catholicism to Pentecostalism after moving to the U.S. In an example of how religious messages foster hope of release, one evening at Bible study, Estrella testified:

> When I was sentenced, the judge gave me 10 years, no parole. . . . Then a few months ago, [God] told me I was going home, but I didn't know how. My case

> manager called me and said, "Ok, you're going up for parole soon." And I'm thinkin' "No, I'm not." The Holy Spirit says, "Shut up!" So I shut up and listened.

The class responded with lots of "Amens." Several weeks later, Estrella was told that the hearing was a mistake, and was denied parole. This disappointment did not shake Estrella's faith; she continued to attend weekly Bible study, serve on dance ministry, and pray daily.

Several weeks later, I interviewed Dale, a former attorney and white middle-aged male who now sits on a parole board at both men's and women's prisons. We sat in the first floor lobby of a D.O.C. building on a blustery winter afternoon. Getting straight to business, Dale pulled an overstuffed manila folder out of his briefcase to show me his parole calculation forms. He explained:

> It's supposed to be scientific. We calculate "How likely are they to reoffend?" The factors are their criminal record, education, work experience, whether they completed drug programs [in prison]. One big factor is age. The older they are, they less likely they are to mess around anymore. And we look at if they're getting in a lot of fights in prison, then they're likely to be trouble wherever they go.

After spending a couple minutes perusing these forms, Dale admitted, "It's all bullshit though. We have leeway in what we decide."

I asked Dale whether the parole board considers religiosity. "No, not at all," Dale was firm on this. "What about if they have certificates from religious programs? Doesn't that show participation in prison?" I persisted. Dale shook his head, telling me in the

same matter-of-fact tone, “Not really, we really look at if they complete drug programs and work training, not religious programs at all. ‘Cause what else do they have to do all day? They can sit in those classes but it doesn’t mean anything.”

Months later at a Sunday church service, Estrella bounded over to greet me with outstretched arms. She eagerly shared the good news: she had been to court and the judge reduced her sentence. Estrella was cleared to leave prison two months later; she served only three years of her sentence of ten years without the possibility of parole. As this story illustrates, though religious participation may not directly influence parole decisions according to one parole board member, the religious framework for incarceration generated an alternative script in which God can intervene in women’s prison sentences beyond the authority of the parole board.

Inmates who viewed God as in control of their incarceration interpreted actions of prison staff as guided by God’s will. For instance, at Discipleship class one afternoon, Maria shared a story about her struggle with religious fasting. That month, Mapleside’s religious inmates collectively abstained from certain foods and replaced them with prayer, a common practice in conservative Protestant circles (Goodstein 1998). Maria explained, “I am not good at fasting. I’ma keep it real. I’m just not good at it. I tried to give up meat and bread, and I did fine for the first few days, but then Wednesday was chicken night, so I had that. I thought I would just give up bread, because I thought it would be easier.” Maria pinched her forearm and smiled sheepishly, “That’s [my] flesh. Then they had turkey. And I really wanted to make a turkey sandwich. So I went into the dining hall and brought out some bread to take back to my room.” Then came God’s

intervention: “As I was standing there waiting to leave, the CO [corrections officer] asks me, ‘Where’s the food you wrapped up?’” Maria doubled over to laugh, then patted her left shoulder, “Of course it was right there. That wasn’t nothing but God.” Here, Maria identified the officer’s intervention as an act of God to prevent her from breaking her fast.

Disciplinary interactions with officers, which would normally be interpreted as prison rules, were also given an alternative religious framework. One night in at the Protestant church service, there was a scuffle in the back row. A young black inmate yelled, “This is my church, this is my church!” Then she threw her hands up in surrender and hurtled out of the gym quickly. Two officers chased after her. While this was going on, Reverend Donna, who was preaching that evening, instructed, “Don’t get distracted. That’s the devil. The devil wants us to get distracted. I want to see your eyes on me. Keep your eyes on me right now.” Reverend Donna reframed this tiff as the work of the devil.

Likewise, one Wednesday afternoon in Youth Bible Study, the teacher asked, “Was there any time when you stood firm on God when it looked like things going were bad?” One young inmate shared a story about a prison cell shakedown interpreted through a religious lens:

> A few weeks ago there was a shakedown, and I knew God was gonna give me an OK officer who wouldn’t mess up my whole room. ‘Cause it was a Saturday at 2 am, and I had choir rehearsal in the morning. I knew he’d give me someone who wouldn’t make it so I had to clean my whole room. He gave me an OK officer and I got enough rest to wake up happy and feel energized for choir rehearsal.

Here, God granted the inmate an “OK officer” during a prison shakedown so that she

could sleep well and be ready in time for choir rehearsal.

Inmates generally pointed to religious transformation as the source of their compliant, nonaggressive behavior. Laurelle, a biracial woman in her mid-40s convicted of robbery, shared a testimony during a ministry class, describing a time when she shouted at an officer who detained her. After the flare up, Laurelle apologized. She explained, "It took a lot. I told her, 'I am a Christian woman, and that is not how I behave. I don't want you to look at me in the future and see *that*.' It took everything to humble myself, but . . . I don't want to blow my [Christian] witness." Though she struggled with the apology, Laurelle's use of religious language elevated her role as Christian above her role as prisoner.

A similar message was underlined at the inmate-led Discipleship class. Maria, the late-50s black inmate serving 25 years for murder, was teaching the class that day. Maria lectured, "Unbelievers are looking at us 24/7. Everybody who come in here preach that. We got to follow the rules. If I can't be obedient to the rules of the prison, how can I be obedient to Him?" With this, Gabriel pointed up to the ceiling, gesturing towards God. An inmate sitting in the front row of the classroom nodded, affirming, "The Bible says be obedient to your masters." Consistent in her belief, one night Baptist Bible study, Maria shared "God puts everybody in authority in here [in prison] that we *have* to follow. I have this mandatory meeting on my housing unit, that I have to be on time for. But I don't have to – I'ma keep it real. It won't take time off my sentence." Maria used this example to illustrate that she follows prison rules not for the sake of staying out of trouble in prison, but rather to be obedient to those who God placed in authority. In this sense,

religious messages encourage compliant behavior in prison by using a moral, rather than legalistic, framework.

Taken together, these examples demonstrate how religious inmates interpret interactions with state actors to not only reflect a neoliberal view of incarceration, but also support compliance with unfavorable outcomes. This religious framework encourages inmates to uphold prison behavioral standards in language that otherwise appears to challenge traditional conceptions of imprisonment. The two institutions worked seamlessly towards complementary aims.

Religion Promoting Behavioral Transformation

"I see it as a boot camp. It's a training ground to go home and [practice religion]," said Estrella, the 38 year old Latina serving 10 years for drug distribution. Inmates pointed to behavioral transformations as an outcome of their newfound religious fervor. For example, Laurelle, the biracial inmate active in church choir and dance ministry, shared her testimony with whichever ministers would listen. One time after dancing with the dance ministry at the *Purpose Driven Life* graduation ceremony, she was standing with Miss J afterwards, telling her, "When I first got here I was so different, but He transformed me. It's all God, it's *all* Him." Another time during Baptist Bible study, Laurelle shared with the group, "Back in 2008 when I got here, I was real violent. But I once I got saved, I realized my expectations need to be on God, and not on people."

Jojo, a 30 year old black inmate serving time for a fatal armed robbery, recounted a story to this effect one night in the *Purpose Driven Life* class. In her characteristically husky voice and peaceful smile, Jojo shared, "My faith was tested yesterday. A sister in

Christ said something to me – I won't say the details, but she said something to me that she should not have said." Jojo sighed for dramatic effect then continued, "I went into my room, and the God in me brushed it off. A while ago, I would've gotten real angry, but God showed me where I stood as his child. To God be the glory. If that hadn't have happened, I wouldn't have seen how far I've come." Jojo believed that becoming religious improved how she handled a contentious situation.

Inmates reported that being known as religious, particularly under the panoptic scrutiny from officers and other inmates, raised their behavioral standards. As Esther, the late 30s white woman with a life sentence for murder, shared in Bible study one evening, "Something real bad happened to me recently, and it did make me ask God why He did that." A lump rising in her throat, Esther squinted and turned to face away from the rest of the classroom. She continued:

> But I knew everyone was watching me to see what I would do. 'Cause there's a way I would have reacted before I got to where I am, and I think there's a tendency to go back to how you were when you face a struggle. But . . . I didn't want to show others that my faith was shaken, even though it was, 'cause that could have harmed them in their faith.

Esther attributed her newfound resilience to faith and the behavioral expectations it entailed.

Another time, in Discipleship, Audra, a mid-40s black woman serving time for theft, whose daughter was also locked up at Mapleside, shared, "I was having major problems with my roommate. I would cry at the drop of a hat; it was horrible. But then I

was in the shower the other day, and God told me to just apologize. So as I was stepping out of the shower, she was right there. I apologized, and she apologized to me, and now we're good." Here, God was instrumental in resolving a practical interpersonal problem.

Contrasting this silver-lining approach, Chanel, a 40 year old black inmate serving a life sentence for murder, got on the microphone and delivered a prayer unlike most others: "I thank you God in spite of our situation, in spite of being here. We wish we could be with our families, but we thank you anyway." Chanel's prayer took me by surprise because its message was rare, to express gratitude *despite* being incarcerated rather than *because* of it.

Finally, one morning, while working in the religious library, Evelyn, a mid-40s black woman serving time for a financial crime, came to check out some Christian books. She arrived around 10:15 am, and because her lunch shift started at 10:30 am, she decided to linger, pretending to look at additional books so she would not have to walk back and forth to the Main Hall from her housing unit. I asked Evelyn how she was doing. She shook her head, "I'm really trying to change my life. That's why I am coming to things like this, the religious library." Evelyn grinned, "Things are changing for me. It's been real good. I'm finally finding peace in a place like this." As with many other inmates, for Evelyn, religion was a source of change for the better.

How Other Religions Redefine Incarceration

We might expect differences in religious messages by denominational affiliation, given theological differences between conservative Protestants and Catholics, mainline Protestants, Muslims, and Jews. However, elements of the conservative Protestant

perspective infused the experience of other denominations, a finding perhaps unsurprising given the "protestantization" of American religion (Demerath and Williams 1992) and the protestantization of the prison chapel (Dubler 2013). Inmates from a variety of religious groups attributed greater meaning to their incarceration, particularly valuing the role of God in their lives.

Karen, a mid-40s white woman serving three years for theft, who attended Jewish worship services weekly, shared, "The hardest time for me is . . . [when] I wake up and remember I'm here. Then once the day gets started I am busy and I forget. But in the mornings especially I have anxiety. That's where God helps me." Karen found that faith helped her through emotional obstacles on a daily basis. Similarly, Anne, a 40 year old Catholic woman serving a life sentence for murder, pressed, "This [religious service] is something here I want to have a hand in. It's one of the few things here I'm not ashamed of." When I asked her to describe what Catholicism meant to her in prison, Anne paused to consider, then said, "Whole." She smiled, adding, "Enriching, satisfying, fulfilled."

At Catholic mass on Sundays, prayer frequently centered around legal issues. During the invocation portion of mass, inmates regularly prayed for "all the women who are going up for parole, that their court appearances go smoothly." This supplication was so frequent that some inmates grew weary of it. As Anne, the white Catholic lifer in her mid-40s, complained, "I am just so *sick* of everything being adapted to prison." She sighed, "Sometimes you get tired of being reminded of where you are."

In addition to praying for divine intervention, other religious inmates echoed Protestant repertoires of prison as part of God's plan. For example, Tati, a 40-year old a

Muslim inmate serving life for murder, asserted:

> I used to think it was bad to be here, but now I'm happy to be here. I *know* that God saved my life by putting me here. He saved all of us from something, we might not know what that is. There's a blessing in everything – even being here. What we think is bad is not bad. There's always something good that comes out of it.

Tati's perspective mirrored that of conservative Protestant inmates, a perspective of greater meaning for one's incarceration.

Similarly, at the interfaith Thanksgiving service, Tiandra, a 50 year old black Catholic inmate serving a long sentence, described her gratitude for being able to "open my eyes in the morning, not everyone can say that. I am grateful that I can eat without a feeding tube, we can all say that. And I'm grateful for forgiveness." With this, Tiandra nodded. "I've had a hard life since I was five years old. God's forgiveness is so amazing." Chaplain Harper, who had been leafing through prayer requests, listening but not watching the prayers, called out an affirmative "Amen" to this, and Tiandra received a standing ovation from the group of about 160 inmates present.

Likewise, Lexi, the 40 year old white Jewish inmate sentenced to 15 years for a financial crime, believed in a larger purpose for her imprisonment, one beyond legal punishment. Lexi shook her head somberly while sharing, "I thought that I was being punished and it was time to get back to being Jewish. I think I'm here for a reason." Lexi continued:

> When I first got here, I immediately signed up as Jewish. My father was Catholic,

> but for some reason I wasn't interested in that. This sounds crazy, but when I first got here, I thought that it might be God punishing me for my grandparents turning away from Judaism. After the Holocaust, I had many family members who died; my grandfather was in a labor camp. After that they just turned away from Judaism.

Lexi's believed God, rather than the state, was responsible for her incarceration. At first, she thought her incarceration was divine punishment. Lexi no longer believed God was punishing her, although she continued to participate in Jewish programs each week.

In the same vein, Brigit, an energetic black woman in her 20s, was eager to share her conversion story with me: "I been a Muslim for two, three years. I started when I got here. I had been interested in it before then but I never took that first step. I actually prayed the night before I went to court. I prayed that if God helped me out, I would start practicing." Brigit clasped her palms and gazed up to the ceiling with a furrowed brow. "And He did. I was up for a life sentence, but I only got 20 years. He did take care of me. I *love* Islam. I love everything about it. There's nothing I don't like." Then Brigit shrugged, "Except maybe covering my hair." That day, Brigit's hair was draped by a beautiful bright yellow headscarf. As with conservative Protestant inmates, Brigit shifted control of her sentence from the judge to God. Overall, religious messages predominately supported this neoliberal framework, regardless of denominational differences.

The Question of Sincerity

Religious volunteers applauded inmates for finding religion in prison. Late April during a Baptist Bible study, a volunteer minister leading the class that night commented

"If jailhouse religion is what it takes for you to get your relationship with God, so be it!" Miss J, another religious volunteer, suggested a similar message: "That thing you going through is designed to refine you. Some of y'all weren't even going to church when you out there [at home]. Now you're going to church [in prison]." However, not everyone shared this positive view.

"I call it Strange Fire," Estrella confided in me one afternoon. We were discussing how you could tell if someone was only pretending to be "filled with the Holy Spirit." She couldn't remember where she had seen the term "strange fire," but thought it was somewhere in scripture, and believed it accurately described many inmates. Nodding her head vigorously, Estrella told me it happens "all the time." The question of sincere religious practice weighed heavy on the minds of many inmates, just as cynical outsiders suggest that an inmate uses "jailhouse conversion" only to convince a parole board of a change of heart, that she will not return to her criminal ways. Indeed, countless inmates I met kept a file folder full of certificates of completion for religious programs, ready to exhibit at their parole hearing when the time comes. Yet only two inmates admitted to participating in religious programs insincerely. One young white inmate said she came to Jewish study to get out of her cell. Another young black inmate was always walking through the hallway during afternoon Bible study. When I once ran into her in the hallway on my way to the bathroom, I playfully derided, "Why are you always out here?" She chuckled, "'Cause my classes are so boring. I like to get up and get out because I'm bored. I just want the certificate – parole looks at that stuff."

Yet the sincerity of religiousness may be difficult to measure even if participants extract benefits above and beyond the spiritual. Sociologists of religion acknowledge "people's religious ideas and practices generally are fragmented, compartmentalized, loosely connected, unexamined, and context dependent" (Chaves 2010:2). Even most religious require external reinforcement to activate religious identity, despite intentions being fully sincere (Tavory 2016). The complexity of this question of sincerity is perhaps best understood by taking a closer look at the story of one inmate: Hanna.

The Complexity of Sincerity: Hanna's Story

"They treat [Hanna] like a baby," Taryn whispered to Gabriel, and continued, shaking her head in dismay, "She's almost 40 years old! Don't get me started." Taryn and Gabriel are two 40-something black inmates hand-picked by Chaplain Harper to lead the Youth Bible Study class on Wednesday afternoons, serving time for a financial crime and murder, respectively. That day, their lesson included watching a DVD of a sermon by nondenominational megachurch pastor TD Jakes. Taryn and Gabriel sat in the front row and continued to gossip about Hanna. Listening in, I recalled a moment when I witnessed an outside preacher sitting with Hanna, convincing her to eat a lunch of baked ziti and salad at Chaplain Harper's Christmas party, much like a parent does for a picky child.

Estrella didn't buy Hanna's story, either. As devout as they come, Estrella was reluctant to gossip. But by the end of our sit-down interview, Estrella seemed relieved to confide in someone outside of the situation. She leaned in towards me as if to let me in on a secret: "[T]he whole thing with Hanna, I think she's faking it. She acts like she can't

talk and then you round the corner and she talking. It's deception. . . . I think it's for attention. I don't think it's right to distort the Word [of God] like that."

The "whole thing with Hanna" went like this: Hanna believed Satan was speaking to her. This was not the unusual part – many conservative Protestants at Mapleside believed God and Satan spoke to them directly, a belief prevalent among evangelical and black Protestants (Nelson 2005). The problem was, Satan was telling Hanna to kill herself.

Hanna is a 40 year old white woman with a Master's degree, and is serving a long sentence for a violent crime. At 5'2", her petite stature and big blue eyes made her look all the younger. Hanna wore wire-framed glasses most days and usually tied her fine, brown hair back in a casual low pony tail, although for a special occasion like a birthday or an important church service, Asabi, her roommate in the honors housing unit, braided her hair, and even applied some eyeshadow. Asabi is the late 30s black woman who has been locked up since she was 18 as an accessory to murder.

Hanna and Asabi got along well as roommates, sometimes with a banter that was more like family. Not only did they live together, but they also worked together as Chaplain Harper's two office clerks. Asabi was protective of Hanna, and often chided her for staying in the Main Hall too late into the night. Their work hours were 9 to 5, but Hanna often busied herself with work in the Main Hall until 9 pm, the latest possible time she could stay out of her cell. For instance, it was an afternoon in late August when Hanna, Asabi, Chaplain Harper, and I were all pushing papers in the Chap's office. Asabi reprimanded Hanna in front of all of us: "I thought we were gonna eat together [last

night], like a family!" Hanna protested; she would make it up to Asabi tonight by bringing back extra chicken nuggets from the cafeteria. Asabi continued her playful derision: "You come home too late. Yesterday I cooked and you didn't come home til 9. And then you didn't even eat it." Chaplain Harper laughed along with her two clerks, and jokingly sassed, "She made you dinner in the microwave, and it's sittin' there, getting cold!" Hanna pouted her lips to frown: "I come home after the street lights come on!" Asabi turned to me and widened her eyes before warning Hanna, "I want you back by 7. When Rachel leaves, you need to leave too. Rachel, make sure she come home when you leave."

As Chaplain Harper's office clerks, Hanna and Asabi were paid $1.05 a day to perform administrative tasks like filing, paperwork, handling requests to switch religious affiliation, distribute Bibles to new admits, and so on. Asabi used to work for the inmate-run prison company doing data entry, where she made a far higher wage, but sat "all day in front of a computer. People thought I was crazy when I started working for Chap." For the significant pay cut, however, they got a number of other perks. They got a lot of personal time with the chaplain to socialize and receive extra counseling. When the chaplain brought back cookies or cake from an administrative meeting, she always gave them a piece. Hanna and Asabi knew the officers who worked in the Main Hall, and could normally bend the rules to pinch extra food from the cafeteria. With their shared desk on wheels, Hanna and Asabi typically worked in the chaplain's office unless she's in a meeting or counseling session, in which case they wheeled it over to classroom 3 across the hallway. Very few meetings were held in classroom 3, so it functionally

became Hanna and Asabi's own office space. In this classroom was a second computer, a clunky, old school yellowing monitor that had Microsoft Word, Excel, and games like Solitaire, but no internet access; inmates were not allowed to use the internet. The computer was password-protected, so no other inmates could use it. When they were in classroom 3, Hanna and Asabi closed the door for privacy.

For Hanna, the greatest perk of all was that the Main Hall officers let her stay out of her cell until 9:00 pm – she remained in the Main Hall working on her PC, typing up Bible study attendance records or playing Free Cell. Even though her workday technically ended at 5:00 pm, most officers turned a blind eye. Some days she was allowed to get the Main Hall as early as 4:30 am.

Working for the chaplain also gave Hanna and Asabi power over other inmates. The two of them got to make decisions about which other inmates are allowed to do which religious activities. Other inmates bombarded them with requests and questions, which could get tiresome, but often brought with it a sense of status. Hanna in particular was viewed by other inmates as the gatekeeper to the chaplain – walking down the hallway with her, I routinely noticed the barrage of questions and requests she would encounter: "Can I get a Bible?" "Can I sign up to go to the religious library this week?" "Can I sign up for *Purpose Driven Life*?" Hanna would usually agree to each of these requests, and when we got back to the office, she would write them all down on a little slip of printer paper to jog her memory later. When I remarked on all the requests she had to remember, Hanna laughed and said she doesn't mind. Asabi sometimes chastised

Hanna for being too accommodating; Asabi felt that other inmates were using Hanna; they rarely hassled Asabi with requests, even though they both held the same job.

When I first met Hanna, she could be found in the very back of the gym during Sunday services, curled up in a chair where she could worship privately, without anyone watching. “I’m in the shadows in those services. I sit in the back,” Hanna told me during our first conversation. She would shuffle along the back of the gym in white ankle socks, her shoes were off, moving about the room as she pleased; the officers gave her the leeway to do so. By the end of my year of fieldwork, Hanna still sat in the back of the room, but she took center stage at the beginning of the service to wave bright yellow, orange, and red banners high in the air. These banners are printed with the words “Amazing Grace” and “Let us crown the King.” Hanna explained, “Most people don’t realize it, most people think you’re just waving flags and it looks pretty, but banner ministry is actually from the Bible. We are waving the banners to open up the gates of Heaven for the Holy Spirit to come in. It’s much more serious than people think.” Participating in the service was a huge step for Hanna.

Hanna was diagnosed with dissociative identity disorder and bipolar disorder, and struggled with eating disorders throughout her life after a history of childhood trauma. She had her good days and her bad days. On good days, Hanna buzzed around the Main Hall, smiling at everyone, teasing corrections officers, joking around with Asabi. On bad days, she huddled in the corner of one of the Main Hall classrooms, folded her arms over her face to shield herself from the rest of the world. On days like these, when I approached her to say hello, she sometimes lifted her head off the desk long enough to

shake it back and forth, and other times she did not respond at all. Hanna found solace on these bad days in baggy sweatshirts and her *Hello Kitty* coloring book.

People who have been around Hanna for a while expected this rollercoaster. It all reached a boiling point after the first revival meeting at Mapleside. Over a weekend in early August, the chaplain had organized a revival meeting in prison: any inmate from the general population was invited to come to the gym to hear outside preachers speak. The goal was to save souls and revitalize the fervor of those already saved. Two weeks after the revival meeting, I was alone in Chaplain Harper's office with Hanna. She seemed more chipper than usual; she greeted me that morning with a hug. Once we were alone in the chaplain's office, Hanna shot up from her desk and approached me with a bounce in her step, wordlessly handing me two sheets of loose leaf. Both pages were covered front and back in neat handwriting, each letter sunken deep into the page, suggesting a slow and careful writing.

It read like a suicide note. Though the content meandered, the letter was coherent; each word seemed carefully planned. Hanna had written this note last week in the fallout from the revival meeting. Hanna told me she felt "called to share" this letter with me. In the letter, she wrote about how she had been doing well until she received a phone call from someone in her past, back when Hanna used to participate in Satanic worship. The person on the other line had called to remind Hanna that she had "sold her soul to the devil," and there was nothing she could do about it. Hanna wrote that even though she was now saved, she felt she never fully could get right by God. "I've spilled blood from my wrists and thighs before, trying to rid my blood of Satan." The only way to resolve

this, she wrote, was for her to die. She concluded the letter with gratitude and love for Chaplain Harper.

Stapled to this suicide note was a second letter. This second letter was typed out on printer paper, Hanna told me she had written it "after her transformation." Hanna busied herself at her desk while I read the second letter. She wrote about her suicidal thoughts in past tense: "I wanted to die," but it was Satan who was convincing her of that, she had realized. After I read the letter, I lifted my head towards Hanna, not knowing what to say.

Hanna was forthcoming. She filled me in on the backstory. "Last Wednesday," she explained, "Chaplain Harper was anointing people, and I always stay away from that, because I'm terrified. But for some reason, before I knew it, she was doing it [anointing me]. I stood in front of her, and before she anointed me, she took a step back." With this, Hanna mimed Chaplain Harper's reaction: she widened her eyes, mouth agape in fear, and lifted both her hands in timid surrender. Chaplain Harper proceeded to anoint Hanna, but this reaction made her anxious: "I got so worried about what she had seen in me, or that I gave her something bad." Hanna believed that evil spirits could transfer from one person to another, as did a number of other conservative Protestant inmates, like the time Vanessa booked it out of the gym during a church service one evening when she thought Hanna was acting possessed.

Later that day, Hanna continued, when another religious volunteer came to Mapleside, Hanna spilled her guts: "I don't remember what I said. Apparently I was talking 90 words per minute . . . . I don't know what I was saying. I think it was God

talking, then the Devil talking . . .” When she told the religious volunteer about her suicide plans, the volunteer called Chaplain Harper for backup, who then called the supervisors in the mental health wing. Hanna sighed, “So then mental health was involved, and Asabi and Estrella knew, so it was too late. Like I couldn’t go through with it anymore.” Hanna had written yet another letter to her parents on Friday to say goodbye: “I didn’t expect to still be here when they got it,” she later told me, looking me right in the eye. Hanna continued, “Asabi and Estrella *made* me call my parents and tell them to disregard the letter. I didn’t want to, but they stood there with me and made me do it. It was hardest to tell my mom. . . . After I finished talking to my mom, Estrella said, ‘Let me talk to her,’ and she got on there . . . and told her, ‘Don’t worry. We are going to make sure she is in good hands here.’” Hanna grinned. She said they prayed together all night that Saturday. Her family behind bars was taking care of her.

Things turned around by Sunday morning: “Chaplain Harper preached at church like she has *never preached before*. I know she was speaking directly to a lot of people that day [including me]. It turned me around.” After the morning service, Hanna stood hugging Chaplain Harper, sobbing into her chest. She felt comforted by what she called Chaplain Harper’s “unconditional love.”

Hanna chuckled and shook her head. “I can’t wait to see what He has in store for me next.” For Hanna, “the scariest part about the whole thing is how calm I was about it. It felt like the right thing to do. I hope in the future I can tell the difference between Satan talking to me and God talking to me. The scary thing is, Satan was using God’s word to convince me.” Hanna lowered her head and, reflecting on her confusion. She smiled,

tight-lipped, telling me her parents were coming from a couple states away to visit her today.

Hanna found some comfort being in prison. She was due to go up for parole the following spring, and divulged, “I’m scared. I don’t have anyone I can trust out there who I can *legally* rely on.” Hanna’s relationship with her family was strained due to her crime and her ongoing mental health issues. For parole, Hanna would have to prepare a plan about where she would live if she was released – this is standard procedure. Hanna paused to reflect, “Actually, I thank God I’m in prison.” She began to count her blessings on her fingers as she enumerated them for me: “Here I’m safe, I have my health, and I’m at peace. I can’t believe I’m not in some insane asylum somewhere; it’s only by God’s grace.”

Months later, Hanna had another religious experience during the second revival in the prison gym. Before the service, the visiting pastor noticed dried cuts on Hanna’s wrists. The reverend “laid hands” on Hanna and prayed for her. Hanna explained that she was being “delivered from the demons. I haven’t heard voices since.” Even Estrella, who was skeptical of Hanna’s situation, believed that a spiritual transformation was occurring. From Estrella’s perspective, “I saw Hanna up there and I immediately knew what was happening. Her fists were clenched, and that’s a sign she’s holding onto something. Then when the preacher said ‘In the name of Jesus,’ [Hanna’s] face changed. It had been purple, she had been holding her breath, but then when she said that, her face got color back in it. I knew she was being delivered.”

Hanna's demonic possession meant she got a lot of attention from Chaplain Harper. She loved Chaplain Harper, and believed Chaplain Harper loved her, unconditionally. She valued her job working as the chaplain's clerk in large part because it meant prolonged interaction and lots of free counseling. After the revival, Hanna started having daily meetings with Chaplain Harper.

Other inmates took note of the attention Hanna received, and sometimes resented it. For instance, another afternoon after screening a DVD in Youth Bible Study, Gabriel was wheeling the TV back from the classroom to the chaplain's office, but the lights were off in the office and the chaplain was nowhere to be found. We looked for her in the gym, we looked for her in the computer lab, we looked everywhere on the Main Hall to no avail. Gabriel couldn't just leave the television just anywhere, for fear it would be broken or stolen. When we walked back towards the chaplain's office, we peeked in this time and noticed that the light was on in the storage closet, meaning the chaplain was probably in there, comforting Hanna during an episode. Gabriel laughed and turned toward me, "It's probably an exorcism or something. You gotta have a sense of humor in here." She leaned her back against the wall to wait patiently for the chaplain to finish.

Estrella likewise thought all the attention was misguided:

> She's got good people trying to help her through it. But they giving her what she don't need – what she need is psychological help. That's part of her issues. I told them. I told Chap what I thought, how I felt. . . . I think it's for attention. . . . I don't think it's right for chap to meet with her every day was spent so much time on that, but that's up to her.

The question of sincerity lacks easy answers. As Hanna's story demonstrates, religion provided a thorough, meaningful framework through which setbacks and successes alike were cast as otherworldly intervention. Religious volunteers, along with Chaplain Harper, defined Hanna's mental health issues through this religious framework. Other inmates questioned whether Hanna embraced this religious framework for mere attention-seeking.

Whether or not Hanna intentionally performed demonic possession, her story demonstrates just how powerful religious messages were inside prison, and how they brought with them material and social improvements to the hardships of prison life. Perhaps equally telling is the level of gossip and feelings of unfairness other inmates felt, contrasting their own "sincere" belief to Hanna's perceived falsity. Either way, the power of the narrative tells us just how central religion is in the lives of many inmates at Mapleside.

Secular Inmates' Legalistic Perspective on Incarceration

Devoid of messages about prison as God's plan, non-religious inmates adopted official legal language for incarceration: they are serving time for their criminal offense. Cassidy is a white, early 40s non-religious inmate with short, cropped gray hair, convicted of a white-collar crime. Eschewing her Southern Baptist roots, Cassidy shared with me, "God's not for everyone. I've been here for seven years. The first few years, I blamed God. Slowly, I took responsibility; I finally said that I did it. 'Cause I blamed God at first. It's easy to blame God." A Jewish inmate likewise felt alienated from religion. Sighing, she told me, "Religion teaches that the righteous are rewarded, but it's

not true. The righteous are punished and the wicked walk free." At this, her eyes welled up and she turned her face away from me.

One rainy afternoon in April, I stopped by the computer lab to interview Kifa, an atheist whom Esther suggested I meet. Wrapping her arm around my shoulder, Esther introduced me. Kifa buried her head in her hands and protested, "You setting me up!," worried I wanted to convert her. Esther assured Kifa, "No, she ain't like that. She has no religion. She grew up – Jewish?" Esther turned towards me and raised her eyebrows to confirm.

Kifa is an early 40s black woman with short hair curled into tiny twists, which she twirled and untwirled idly as we spoke. She told me she has been incarcerated for 14 years. Kifa went to church growing up, and her parents are still Christian, but she no longer believes in God. When I told her I had heard others say that incarceration was part of God's plan, Kifa snorted: "I'm in here for armed robbery. That's why I'm here. I robbed someone." She continued, "It's all the suffering. You see how we live in here? There can't be no God. Last week, I was watching the *Passion of the Christ*. If God really suffered for us, then why are we still suffering?" For Kifa, prison life means suffering through a legal injustice. Absent religious messages to imbue incarceration with an alternative meaning, Kifa survives prison "one day at a time."

Notably, the secular inmates I interviewed were among the most active, participating in activities ranging from college education classes to a victim's awareness program, or, at minimum, voluntarily spending time in the computer lab amongst other inmates. The majority of those who did not participate in religious or secular programs

remained in their cells, outside of my research access. As Lexi, the 40 year old Jewish inmate commented, “So many women here are anti-social.” Because I spoke to the most active of the non-religious inmates, my findings are a conservative estimate of the prison deprivations for those who participate in no programs at all. On one of my last days of fieldwork, Hanna hypothesized on how those without religion survive prison. She asked herself rhetorically, “How do people get through it without God? Maybe they get through it, but those who have God, especially when they leave here, they have had a fuller, more transformative experience. Rather than just getting through, they grow from it.”

For those who do not believe in God, making sense of incarceration is harder. There are fewer answers for life’s challenges, and fewer assurances of comfort and hope. At the volunteer appreciation event I attended, the warden stepped up to the microphone to thank the volunteers: “You know something a lot of people on the outside don’t know – that the population are just women. They are women just like you and me, but they made a mistake.” Prison officials, like atheist inmates, adopt official legal and prison scripts for why inmates are incarcerated – they are locked up for their crime.

Summary

How does religion as a cultural resource support dominant institutional goals? At Mapleside, religious messages recast imprisonment using a neoliberal framework of self-improvement. Incarceration was defined as part of God’s plan, with prison as a space under God’s purview. Religious inmates viewed themselves as daughters of God, compared to secular inmates who viewed their incarceration from a legal perspective. Conceived as part of God’s plan or a test from God, inmates found greater meaning in

imprisonment, and were more compliant with prison rules. Occasionally, religious inmates even interpreted their interactions with state agents as divine intervention. Although cynics look askance at "jailhouse conversion," this chapter demonstrates how religion provided a script for understanding incarceration; whether or not inmates truly bought into that script, their discourse demonstrated the agility with which they used it to navigate their carceral experience. Furthermore, inmates who participated in religious programs interpreted interactions with staff, administrators, and parole boards as guided by God's will. In much the same way as historical penitentiaries used religion to motivate particular methods of punishment, religious programs in today's correctional facilities promulgate neoliberal religious rhetoric of personal responsibility consistent with the values of the prison administration. Certainly most inmates did commit the crime for which they were accused, and many were in need of rehabilitation for addictions and prior traumas. However, the overemphasis on individual rehabilitation in neoliberal religious messages obscures the structural inequality that leads to mass incarceration. Putting the onus on individuals to better themselves, without emphasizing a social safety net or the importance of social welfare and reentry programs in rebuilding a life post-release, fails to account for some of the primary reasons inmates were arrested in the first place. Decades ago, Foucault (1977) argued that public torture of the body has been replaced with hidden torture of the soul. This chapter interrogated how this hidden torture of the soul operates in contemporary prisons. In the following chapter, I show how religion stretches into another private sphere – that of family – to show how religious

messages dictate how incarcerated women “should” feel about motherhood and marriage, while obscuring the racial and social class assumptions around these expectations.

CHAPTER 3

"COME TO MY CHURCH AND FIND A *REAL* MAN": HOW RELIGION, RACE, AND CLASS INTERACT AROUND GENDER, MARRIAGE, AND FAMILY

One afternoon, while sitting on post with Officer McLean, an early 30s black female officer at Mapleside, she complained to me, "One thing that bothers me about this prison in particular is that they look at these women as victims, talkin' about how they [were] battered – They treat 'em different from male inmates." With her Bachelor's degree in criminal justice, Officer McLean felt that the punishment at Mapleside was too tailored to gender differences.

Although flippant, Officer McLean was right. Mapleside did treat female inmates differently than they might have treated male inmates. In fact, prior research on women's prison has continually emphasized that the experience of imprisonment is gendered. Much ink has been spilled on the ways incarcerated women differ from incarcerated men. Scholars have consistently shown that women offenders are punished as women: the prison administration adapts its rules and regulations to norms around femininity, motherhood, and heterosexuality (Belknap 2010; Haney 2010; Hannah-Moffat 2001; McCorkel 2013).

But women's punishment does not reflect only their gender. It intersects with race and class in key ways. For instance, as McCorkel (2013) showed in *Breaking Women*, prison's approach to punishment depended on perceptions of urban, black female offenders, predominately drug dealers, as "real criminals" compared to white female

offenders who were viewed as “good girls.” This approach categorized female offenders intersectionally, making moral distinctions based on race and class with disregard for broader structural changes in sentencing. The prison rules reflected this approach by turning to more punitive measures to reform “criminals,” in contrast to softer rehabilitation of white female offenders in decades past.

Given the ways religion in prison works alongside the prison administration to reinforce the punitive and rehabilitative goals of prison, and – at the same time – the ways religion offers the potential to challenge some prison restrictions, as demonstrated in the previous chapters, it is necessary to turn our attention to the ways religion intersects with race, class, and gender. There has been considerable debate on the extent to which race is salient in shaping the prison experience (Bottoms 1999; Goodman 2008; Kruttschnitt and Hussemann 2008; Kruttschnitt, Gartner, and Miller 2000). This is critical given that we cannot understand American religion of any kind without considering how it intersects with race and class (Wilde and Glassman 2016). I find that race and class interact to shape expectations and meanings around gender and family in prison.

In this chapter, I begin with a discussion of how women’s prison is different from men’s prison. I then describe the racial and class backgrounds of those who participate in religious programs, from volunteers to inmates. I then demonstrate that conservative Protestant religious teachings on gender promote femininity and submission. I show how race and class come to bear on gendered religious messages in prison promoting distinctly middle-class expectations about marriage post-release that are largely unattainable for most disadvantaged inmates. Next, I consider how religion shapes

inmates' relationships with their family members on the outside, in some cases strengthening relationships with children and parents, and in other cases straining those relationships.

How Women's Prison Differs from Men's Prison

One crucial way incarcerated women differ from incarcerated men is the type of crime that lands each group in prison in the first place. Women offenders are seen as less violent, and their criminal behavior is viewed in gendered and intersectional ways (Berger 1991; Bloom, Chesney Lind, and Owen 1994; Giordano, Cernkovich, and Rudolph 2002; Grundetjern 2015; Lauritsen, Heimer, and Lynch 2009; Miller 1998, 2001; Pollak 1961; Simpson 1991). Feminist criminologists point to "pathways" to punishment for women offenders, including high rates of childhood neglect or victimization, domestic violence, and limited human and social capital, which lead to participation in criminal behavior (Belknap 2010; Carbone-Lopez and Miller 2012; Daly 1992; Gaarder and Belknap 2002; Lopez 2017; Richie 1996; Salisbury and Voorhis 2009). As such, there are "blurred boundaries" between women as victims and offenders (Lempert 2016). Viewing women as offenders without considering their prior victimization paints an incomplete picture of their relationship with the criminal justice system.

Compared to male inmates, female inmates have higher rates of addiction and mental illness (Acoca 1998; Teplin, Abraham, and McClelland 1996; Washington and Diamond 1985), which, when considered alongside the association between substance abuse and impulse control difficulties (Watkins et al. 2015), paint a picture of the related

factors that may lead to illegal behavior. Notably few studies have quantified these pathways (cf. Blanchette and Brown 2006; Salisbury and Van Voorhis 2009), so national percentages indicating rates of prior abuse, addiction, and mental health issues are unavailable.

Nevertheless, qualitative and small-scale studies find support for the "pathways" perspective. The relationship between abuse, depression, and drug use lead women down paths of criminal behavior such as running away from home (Chesney-Lind 2000), prostitution, and relationships with men engaging in illegal behavior (Chesney-Lind and Shelden 2004). Although incarcerated men are also structurally disadvantaged and have faced prior trauma, incarcerated women have higher rates of depression and victimization (McClellan, Farabee, and Crouch 1997). For instance, girls are more likely to have been sexually abused by someone in their immediate family, which is associated with a higher frequency of repeat abuse (Faller 1990) leading to depression, anxiety, substance abuse, and other mental health issues (Gelinas 1983). In their study of incarcerated men and women in Texas, McClellan, Farabee, and Crouch (1997) found that over half (57.4%) of women reported deprivation or abuse in childhood, and a full three-fourths (75.2%) of women reported victimization in adulthood, including emotional, physical, and sexual abuse. They found a strong association between maltreatment and depression. Others maintain that women are not merely at the mercy of these forces, but instead have varied ways of entering a life of criminality not simply as victim-offenders or romantic partners of offenders (Kruttschnitt and Carbone-Lopez 2009; Miller 1998, 2001). Overall, a

substantial line of research calls for a gendered understanding of how women become involved in the criminal justice system.

Viewing female inmates as categorically different from male inmates, the state's approach to punishing women is different from that of punishing men. Women's punishment is far more paternalistic. Several powerful ethnographies have detailed the proliferation of paternalism in women's prisons, arguing that the prison administration dictates female inmates' appropriate financial, emotional, sexual, and behavioral decisions (Belknap 2010; Haney 2010; Hannah-Moffat 2001; McCorkel 2013), and that the state controls incarcerated women "through the enforcement of ideals of feminine behavior" (Bosworth 1999: 5; see also Carlen 1983). This top-down approach is viewed as infantilizing and patriarchal compared to men's prisons. Given that scholarship on women in conservative religions points to women's agentic use of religion to resist oppressive narratives (Avishai 2008; Ebaugh and Chafetz 1999; Kurien 1999; Rao 2015), understanding how religion shapes women's prison experience as women generally – and as disadvantaged women of color specifically – becomes even more critical.

The Racial and Class Composition of Religious Inmates and Volunteers

Outside prison, religious institutions are considered the most racially segregated institutions in the United States, and Sunday morning "the most segregated hour" (Dougherty 2003; Emerson and Kim 2003; Emerson and Smith 2001; Hadaway, Hackett, and Miller 1984). At Mapleside, religious programs varied in their degree of racial composition. The Sunni Muslim group of about 50 was entirely comprised of black inmates; the Jewish group of about 15 was entirely comprised of white inmates. Among

the Catholic group of about 70 – of whom about 19 attended weekly – on average, 71% were white, 18% were black, 12% were Hispanic or Latina, and less than 1% were Asian. The conservative Protestants, of about 630 inmates – of whom about 260 inmates combined attended morning and evening worship services each Sunday – were comparatively more racially integrated. On average, 70% were black, 29% were white, and 1% were Hispanic or Latina. Conservative Protestant programs were comparatively more racially integrated than similar churches outside prison.

However, the majority of volunteers, particularly among the conservative Protestant group, who comprised 63% of the total inmate population, were middle- or upper-middle class black ministers from AME, Baptist, Pentecostal, and nondenominational churches in surrounding counties. They often boasted of the graduate degrees they had earned, and some talked about their well-paid jobs. One evening early in my fieldwork, when I left Mapleside after observing a *Purpose Driven Life* course, I chatted with Miss J in the parking lot, where she handed me her business card and climbed into her Mercedes SUV. Miss J was not alone; many volunteers drove shiny new *Lexus* or *Mercedes*, although a handful drove *Mazda* or *Honda* cars in older models.

Most volunteers were women; all of them were well dressed. They wore polished pantsuits or fitted dresses, paired with colorful high heels ranging from pumps to strappy leopard print slingbacks. Most volunteers wore sparkling jewelry. I saw everything from a ruby ring to oversized pearls to dangling earrings. Volunteers' hair was often dyed and pressed, worn straight without a single hair out of place, in intricately-styled braids and updos. Their nails were almost always professionally polished, and their face fully

covered in makeup, bold and pristine. Most volunteers were married, wearing a wedding band to prove it. Reverend Mona, a Pentecostal volunteer, showed up wearing a rotation of glitzy, colorful eyeglasses, almost never repeating a debut. “I love my adornment,” she confessed during a Ministry class she was teaching. “I love my matching earrings and necklaces,” she said. When Reverend Mona and other volunteers entered the room, a waft of floral perfume followed, their presence made known as they stood tall and smiled warmly.

Silence around Race and Class in Religious Programs

Prior scholars have argued that social life in prison is highly segregated by race, and that inmates are treated by officers and staff in racialized ways (Carroll 1974; Jacobs 1977, 1979; Walker 2016). Given the racial composition of religious programs at Mapleside, race was a potentially pressing issue, worthwhile to discuss in worship services and scriptural studies. Yet race almost never came up in religious programs. This was particularly surprising given that the majority of volunteers and religious inmates alike were black women. Instead, religious messages frequently focused on gender while rendering invisible the class and race-based assumptions undergirding the messages. Specifically, race and class interacted when it came to religious messages on family, femininity, and motherhood.

Inmates noticed the volunteers’ class position. Ja, the early 20s black inmate serving a few years for drug distribution, pointed out to me that one of the volunteer ministers was wearing a gold *Rolex* watch. Taryn, an early 40s black inmate serving time for a financial crime, commented on the rare occasion that Chaplain Harper did not look

polished: “The scuff on those shoes! They looked so *old*.” Ja chimed in, eager to share her two cents about Chaplain Harper’s shoes: “It was like a two inch heel. It wasn’t even a kitten heel. It threw the whole outfit off balance.” Taryn sighed for dramatic effect: “It’s so distracting to me, the things they wear.” Without much variety in their prison-issued blue and gray, inmates sized up volunteers based on their clothing and jewelry. Whenever volunteers failed to live up to inmates’ sartorial expectations, they were met with quiet derision.

These volunteers sometimes made statements that were out of touch with the realities of prison life. When assigning homework in her Ministry class, Reverend Mona routinely forgot the inmates did not have internet access. In another instance of being out of touch with the material disadvantage of prisoners, on a brisk January evening, when an early 50s black inmate showed up to Baptist Bible study looking disheveled, Reverend Donna barked, “Fix your collar!” to which the inmate apologized bashfully, “Oh, I’m a mess. I have four layers on right now.”

Religious messages failed to line up with the economic realities of many disadvantaged inmates. As Asabi pointed out to Hanna once during a discussion of money while they were filing paperwork for the chaplain, “If you had that much money, you wouldn’t be here.” With this, Asabi slammed the filing cabinet closed with a dramatic bang. Inmates acknowledged their disadvantage.

Maria, unlike Asabi, felt more secure in her finances. Having served seven of her 25 year sentence, Maria had plans for her release. “My dream is to open up a restaurant when I go home – one with healthy food and live music,” she divulged one morning. This

was not far-fetched, particularly given Maria's experience as a manager in a fast casual restaurant prior to her incarceration. However, when it came to plans to implement her new business, Maria seemed underprepared. She explained, "I'ma take the $50 they give you when you leave outta here and take it right to the casino." When inmates are released from Mapleside, they are given $50 cash to help them on their way, plus whatever they have saved in their account from prison labor. Maria was hopeful, "I know it'll hit – I just know God's telling me He'll take care of me, give me something. And then we can use the money to open up the restaurant." Maria's faith led her to rely on gambling to scrounge up the capital to open a restaurant, a risky business plan that could potentially fall flat. Religious messages like the ones Maria drew upon to rely on faith for financial security ignore inmates' socioeconomic disadvantage, blind to what could realistically facilitate successful reentry.

Likewise, race was rarely mentioned in sermons. Like the neoliberal religious messages that ignored economic structural disadvantage described in chapter two, religious messages were generally silent on issues of racial inequality. However, this lack of discussion of race and class became particularly noticeable given the substantial discussion of gender. In the next section, I articulate the norms around femininity, motherhood, and familial relationships that constituted frequent topic of discussion in Sunday sermons, ministry classes, Bible studies, and even Muslim and Jewish worship services. The intersection of race, class, and gender became salient in talk of being a woman behind bars. In particular, the teachings of middle and upper middle class black

female volunteers regarding marriage and childrearing were out of sync with realistic expectations for working class and poor black inmates.

Religious Messages of Femininity and Submission

"God was the first to put His hands on you. Not your father, not your uncle, whoever molested you. God formed you first," Miss J assured the women attending her *Purpose Driven Life* class one November night. Given the high rates of incarcerated women who have experienced child abuse or intimate partner violence (Belknap 2010; Carbone-Lopez and Miller 2012; Daly 1992; Gaarder and Belknap 2002; Richie 1996; Salisbury and Voorhis 2009), this message hit home. Conveyed in language of God's love, religious messages sought to reframe how inmates constructed intimate relationships, showing how religious values were aligned with conventional, heteronormative romantic and family decisions.

Talia's story illustrates this well. Talia spent a good amount of time in the Main Hall for her custodial prison job. An early 30s white inmate, she had a reputation as a "problem child" among officers. One Thursday morning in late May, while Maria and I were running the Religious Library, Talia stopped in to chat. She must have lingered about 10 or 15 minutes before the conversation got serious. Maria and I had been discussing what she called "sexual sin," and she was describing to me why she relinquished her homosexuality once becoming saved. Talia butted in, rather forthcoming: "See, this is where I should just shut up and keep moving, but I want to say something. I grew up with a father who sexually abused me." Not pausing for acknowledgement, Talia was matter-of-fact as she continued, "And then my mother blew

his brains out . . . It started when I was 15 months old. That's why I ended up [in foster care]. My sister had a child by him. She's a lesbian, because of all that." With this, Talia nodded knowingly and held her hands to her chest. Maria and I listened intently. "I became promiscuous. That's why I have 8 kids. When I ended up here, instead of making it a pity party, I learned about God. I mean – I already knew I had salvation, but I didn't know Christ." Talia attributed her prior attitudes towards sex to her painful childhood, and cited her incarceration as a religious awakening that reshaped those attitudes.

Taking a closer look at beliefs around gender and sexuality promoted in religious prison programs sheds light on this process. Religious messages promoted romantic relationships that conformed to traditional gender roles. Despite its potentially negative implications, research shows that belief in "gender traditionalism" is not associated with negative relationship satisfaction among religious American women (Perry and Whitehead 2016). "Most of us don't know what love is," Minister Jasmine, a late 40s black Baptist Bible study volunteer, taught one February night after Valentine's Day. Indeed, religious volunteers believed they could teach inmates what love should look like. When Pastor O'Neill preached one night at the Protestant service, he encouraged the inmates present, "When you get out, you can come to my church and find a *real* man." Playfully describing the inmates present, he continued, "Your church [at Mapleside] is 60% women and 40%–" At this, he cut himself off and scrunched his face, shrugging. Pastor O'Neill was referring to the male-presenting women in the room, of which there were a substantial portion, and the inmates who were their romantic partners. Inmates

cheered and laughed at this until Chaplain Harper, who was sitting to the right of the podium, chided, "You better start your sermon."[16]

Likewise, Reverend Mona, a Pentecostal minister who taught a Ministry class every Wednesday, repeatedly emphasized a religious rationale for traditional gender roles. She explained, "God set up the order in this world, for men to have dominion." Later, during another class session, Reverend Mona, herself happily married, stated that she did not want equality in a marriage because "God set a natural order. First it's man, then woman, then family. You're not partners, it's not equality." With this religious justification for a "natural order" of the family, Reverend Mona argued that this ultimately benefited women: "I like that because if something goes wrong in a marriage, God goes after the husband first. I'm happy with it that way. I'm glad the bills are in my husband's name. If there's a problem? Talk to him." With this, Reverend Mona pointed her finger to the air next to her, where her husband would be in the fictional scenario she described. She continued to explain that although it seems that men are in control, women actually "have power over men." How so? "Women are supposed to be the educator, the nurturer. Men are the discipliner. The weaker one gets the authority." Straightening up in her chair with pride, Reverend Mona continued, "The stronger one is strong enough to be submissive. The most powerful person is the wife. . . . It's the natural order." This emphasis on the "natural order" set by God legitimized normative expectations for

[16] As described in chapter one, I observed a variety of gender presentations at Mapleside. Identifying as a "boy" was relatively common. As Navaeh told me, "You'll have women that come in, and when they first get here, they're looking for nail polish – they're feminine. Then all of a sudden, before you know it, they look like a boy."

incarcerated women in their relationships post-release, asserting that women are more powerful through their submission. Overall, religious messages explicitly created expectations for what female inmates should look for in a male partner post-release, and how they should submit to a "natural order" of the family to do so.

Out of Sync: Finding a "Man of God" to Marry

Prior scholars have repeatedly demonstrated how the experience of marriage is dramatically shaped by gender and social class (Hochschild 2012; Rao forthcoming; Tevington forthcoming). To facilitate a traditional heteronormative relationship upon reentry, religious volunteers, who were typically middle class and upper middle class, suggested inmates seek a "man of God" to marry. However, this suggestion was largely unrealistic for inmates who were predominately black and working-class or poor. Prior research on marriage has shown that marriage has declined among the working class and poor, while childbearing outside of marriage is rising (Anderson 2000; Cherlin 2014; Edin and Kefalas 2005). The postwar model of establishing a career, getting married, then bearing children – in that order (Fussell et al. 2005) has changed dramatically. This is due to changing social norms in the era of women's labor force participation (Goldin and Katz 2002) including the meaning of marriage as an achievement (Cherlin 2010) after both partners have attained financial stability (Sweeney 2002). This is particularly salient for the working class and poor, who view marriage as a desirable outcome, but struggle to attain the financial stability they deem necessary prior to marrying (Edin and Kefalas 2005; Edin and Nelson 2013; Smock, Manning, and Porter 2005). The middle class and economically advantaged are, therefore, more likely to marry (Harknett and

Kuperberg 2011; Lichter, Zhenchao Qian, and Mellott 2006; Nakosteen and Zimmer 1997; Oppenheimer 2003; Oppenheimer, Kalmijn, and Lim 1997; Raley 1996).

Given this, religious messages that encouraged inmates to find a "man of God" to marry post-release were arguably unrealistic. Former prisoners are not well-positioned to attain the necessary financial stability before marriage given their economic vulnerability post-release in the challenges finding employment (Pager 2003; Loeffler 2013; Ramakers et al. 2014; Western et al. 2015). Furthermore, women who have been incarcerated face higher social stigma than even formerly incarcerated men (Roberts 2004). Finally, specific to religion, men are less religious than women, attending church far less often (Chatters, Taylor, and Lincoln 1999; Roth and Kroll 2007; Schnabel 2015), making it even more difficult to find a "man of God" to marry.

Reverend Mona urged the women in her Ministry class, "[W]hen you go out, seek . . . someone who gives wisdom. God never meant for women to be making decisions by themselves." After a beat, Reverend Mona continued, "We can, but look at Eve." Here, she disparaged women's ability to make sound decisions for themselves, instead suggesting that inmates seek guidance from men post-release. Included in this advice was how to maintain an intimate relationship with a male partner. During a lesson in her Ministry class about the Book of Esther, in which Esther makes preparations to meet with the King, Reverend Mona took the opportunity to explain, "There is a way to prepare your body for a man to enter you. It involves fasting, a certain amount of oils, and a certain amount of bathing. I don't care if you been with 19 men, that will make it feel like he is entering a virgin." A middle-aged black inmate sitting in the back row

cackled, calling out, “Say what oil it was again?” The group of inmates laughed, along with Reverend Mona, who gently replied, “It was the oils that Jesus Christ used to anoint himself: myrrh, frankincense, and certain kinds of bath salts. And if you feel like a virgin every time, he is going to give you everything you ask for.” This received several audible “Amens” from the group of inmates.

Many inmates reported that they planned to start a relationship with a “man of God” post-release. As Coretta, the mid-40s black inmate serving 40 years for murder, assured me she sought “a man of God. . . . I’m looking for a real man who will be the head of the house and all that.” This felt especially poignant given that Coretta’s co-conspirator in the murder charge was her former boyfriend. Likewise, Felicia, an early 30s, ebullient black inmate who participated in a number of Protestant programs including attending the Religious Movie screening every week, where other inmates routinely chided her for talking during the movie, shared that she plans to avoid relationships when she gets out: “I know I want to be celibate when I go home, go out for real, like walks in the park, go out dancing. . . . I got this other friend who say he a Christian, but he don’t get it. . . . I know he’s not good for me.” Although one of her male friends from home is courting her, she plans to resist his ingratiating efforts: “He like, ‘Why you want to be celibate?’ and yet I know he’s not good for me. He asked me the other day, ‘Who been there for you when you been incarcerated?’ I said, ‘God’.” With this, Felicia nodded her head decisively. “He said, ‘Who else?’ I said, ‘God’.”

Some inmates questioned the advice to seek a man of God to marry, finding it unrealistic for their circumstances. Iris, a black Protestant inmate in her early 50s, did not

subscribe to the idea that she needed to find a partner who was already religious. Describing her response to reading *1 Peter*, Jillian said, "I was struck by the discussion about a husband and wife, and how the person you marry can change just from how you act. 'Cause they say you should marry a Christian, but you could be with someone who learns by observing you." Jillian hoped that her newfound religiosity would rub off on her partner.

Indeed, some preachers recognized that seeking a religious partner post-release was impractical. As Miss J warned her *Purpose Driven Life* class, "When you go home all 'God, God, God,' remember those people who have been waiting for you. They'll notice that you've changed. Don't leave 'em behind." She urged the inmates present to include their loved ones in their spiritual growth, because it was these social ties that would matter once inmates went home.

However, messages of finding a "man of God" were not limited to Protestant groups. Sister Shareen, a mid-50s black outside volunteer, spoke authoritatively when she described her relationships since becoming Muslim: "I have never been more respected in my life. Muslim men open doors, when they see you, they ask if you are hungry . . ." Ronnie, an early 20s black Muslim inmate, shook her head argumentatively, "Not all Muslim men are like that. Some people use the Quran for they own benefit, their worldly behavior." At this, Sister Shareen interjected, "And those people are going straight to the Hellfire. Women are respected in Islam, if it's practiced correctly." Maya, a mid-40s black inmate serving a 25 year sentence, herself a learned Muslim, corroborated, "People criticize that Muslim women just have to do what men say. But they don't understand

that if you're with a man of God, he will only say that you have to do something if it will help you."

Despite being isolated from the opportunity to meet new men while incarcerated, Sunni inmates gained a significant advantage over Christian inmates in successfully finding a "man of God": they had matchmakers. A *wadi*, or matchmaker, was a Muslim elder to whom a Muslim inmate could write to request he find her a suitable partner. Absent this liaison in the Protestant community, Christian inmates would have a much more difficult time finding a religious partner when they go home. Muslim inmates saw this as a realistic resource to draw upon. After the Muslim worship service one Friday, for instance, Ronnie, a 25 year old black inmate serving seven years for assault, said "I want to be more on my *din* [religion], and I want a man who on *his din*." Maya, the older, more seasoned Muslim inmate, advised Ronnie that she could tell her matchmaker exactly what she was looking for, even physically: "You can't wake up every morning next to someone who you think is a monster. The sex isn't going to be good and you're not going to be happy. You can absolutely tell him [the matchmaker]. That's the *wadi*'s job, is to find out exactly what you want." Ronnie giggled, giddy with this new information: "Okay, so I can tell him I want a tall, dark man?" Maya smiled demurely. A month prior, while incarcerated, she wed a Muslim man thanks to a *wadi*. Maya said she was in relationships before that she made work, so why not marry a "man of God" and make it work? "Except he can't be ugly," Maya chuckled. Ronnie shook with laughter, as Maya's smile disappeared. "I meant that seriously," she said, "You can't look over at him in bed and go 'Ugh!' You have to be able to live with him." For Muslim inmates, a

matchmaker could facilitate finding a “man of God” to marry. For other inmates, given the changing realities of marriage and the relatively lower proportion of religious men, this middle-class expectation was out of sync.

The Pains of Parenting Behind Bars

“Mommy mommy mommy! Mommy mommy mommy!” a young toddler with blonde curls and big blue eyes cried out while sitting on the changing table in the Gatehouse bathroom. The older woman who was changing her, presumably her grandmother, gently cooed, “She can’t hear you.” The child continued to shout. Kids young and old could often be spotted in the Gatehouse, waiting eagerly to visit with their mothers behind bars.

At least 62% (Glaze and Maruschak 2010), and as high as 75% (cf. Roberts 2004:1284) of incarcerated women are mothers. Incarcerated women are far more likely to have a child than incarcerated men (Glaze and Maruschak 2010; Roberts 2012), with whom they have stronger ties than do their incarcerated male counterparts (Nurse 2002; Ward and Kassebaum 1965). For many women, incarceration means placing children in foster care (Roberts 2012), or at least a dramatic disruption in childcare, often leaving the child in the hands of a substitute caregiver with strained resources (Roberts 2004).

The challenges of mothering behind bars are particularly painful (Bachman et al. 2016; Watterson 1996). Unlike incarcerated men who often have weak, strained ties with their children (Nurse 2002), many female inmates view separation from children as the single toughest adjustment of being in prison (Ward and Kassebaum 1965). As such, “Mothers involved in the criminal justice system can be described as the most vulnerable

women in the United States given their backgrounds of economic deprivation (sometimes characterized by homelessness prior to arrest), histories of childhood abuse, domestic violence, sexual victimization, and substance abuse" (Arditti 2015:171).

For the female inmates at Mapleside, being a mother behind bars was difficult. Financially, it was hard to scrape together enough money to meet daily needs of prison life while caring for children. Deirdre, a young black inmate, explained that it was important for her to provide for her children, even on her meager prison wages: "I don't want they to feel like they [are] going without." Her 11-year-old daughter came to visit, and expressed that she wanted to buy earrings from *Claire's* jewelry store. "I told her, 'Don't worry about it, I'll take care of you.' I mean, it's not essential, but I want her to feel like she [is] taken care of. So I mailed her $50 so she can get some earrings, get her lip gloss. And I sent her little sister $25, 'cause what you do for one, you should do for the other." Providing $75 to her children took a lot out of Deirdre's account. "I've been going with less, but it made me feel good, 'cause it was something they wanted."

Emotionally, being separated from children was immensely painful. This became evident at one of the first Protestant worship services I attended. During the altar call, two late 20s black inmates – newly-admitted judging by the pink "new admit" scrubs they were wearing – stepped forward to receive a blessing from Miss J, who was the volunteer preacher that evening. Just a couple seconds into the prayer, Epiphany, one of the new admits, slumped over, leaning on her friend's shoulder to weep. When Miss J asked her why she was crying, Epiphany put it simply: "I miss my daughter." Another time, when a Bible study teacher asked inmates to envision a "good life," he reported that many of

them said, "'I want a shelter with my kids,' and that was it." Inmates were highly focused on being reunited with their children.

Vanessa, a 25 year old black inmate serving time for murder, experienced a special kind of pain when it came to thinking about her son. She was one of the inmates, alongside Asabi, selected to speak at the Victim's Awareness Event described in the Introduction. "Every time I see my child," Vanessa said, "I remember that my victim had children." She started to choke up. Vanessa stood close to the microphone, her eyes squinting in pain. "I hate visits. I hate phone calls. I hate children's day. I hate family day. Because while I love the time I get to spend with my son, I hate that he has to leave. And that gives me a glimpse, just a glimpse —" Vanessa pinched her forefinger and thumb together to show how small, "into what the mother of my victim feels." Vanessa started sobbing, expressing publicly the feeling of loss both as a mother and as a convicted murderer.

For some inmates, becoming incarcerated meant losing all contact with their children. Hanna, the 40 year old white inmate who was serving a long sentence for a violent crime, worked as the chaplain's clerk, had two young children whom she never saw; they now lived with their father—her ex-husband. Rummaging through one of the drawers of her office desk at 4:45 pm one afternoon, just as she and Asabi were getting ready to finish work for the day, Hanna found a binder full of letters and poems she had typed four years prior. She sighed, "This is a trip down memory lane." Asabi and I remained silent, careful to respect her private moment. Hanna decided to read us a couple of her poems, one of which was addressed to her children. Hanna was on the verge of

tears by the time she got to the following lines: “Mommy loves you and she’s trying to get better for you. I want you to know I love you, even if I can only tell you through a letter.” When she was finished, Hanna handed me the binder to show off the glossy photographs of her two children tucked into the corner of its clear plastic cover.

Isadora, an early 40s Honduran inmate serving a 20 month sentence, was short and squat; her petite stature made her presence disarming. Isadora explained one morning in the religious library how much she missed her four children, aged two to 15 years old. Isadora’s warm, chatty demeanor contrasted the gravity of her emotions: “It’s so hard for me to be away from them. Every day. . . . My mother tells them that mommy is in school, that she is not in jail, she’s in school.” Listening attentively and nodding politely, Maria asked, “Do they believe that?” Isadora shook her head sheepishly, “No.” Isadora said that one benefit of being at Mapleside was improving her English, although when she wanted to ignore officers, she sometimes pretended she didn’t understand what they were saying.

The disruption of childcare sometimes forced inmates to give their children up for adoption or rely on the foster care system (Roberts 2004). Petunia, a late 50s black volunteer preacher, who herself was formerly incarcerated at Mapleside 25 years prior for a drug offense, knew these realities well. A layperson, Petunia phoned Chaplain Harper to ask if she could come preach to share the lessons she had learned after going home. Chaplain Harper said yes. She preached on Pentecost Sunday, and a central focus of her message included the strains of being separated from her children. “Coming here – and I had to come here a few times – not everybody has someone who can take the kids. Not everybody has an aunt or grandmother or a cousin.” Petunia gulped, feeling the pain

anew. “So I lost my kids, the state took ‘em. I was fortunate enough to be able to get my son back later. But that was hard.” Shaking her head, Petunia continued, “And my daughter, it has taken some time for our relationship to be rebuilt.” Feelings of loss and resentment her children felt over her incarceration weighed heavy on Petunia even 25 years later.

Felicia, the early 30s black inmate serving time for assaulting a police officer, struggled immensely with the issue of custody. It was on her mind all the time. Felicia shared that she had been publicly “complaining about my daughter going with her father,” when Chief Sawyer, Mapleside’s Chief of Security, commented, “You should be grateful that your child isn’t being put in foster care.” Felicia gasped for air, tears rolling down her cheeks.

In very rare circumstances, mothers and daughters who have both been convicted of crimes serve time at Mapleside together. This was the case for Audra, a mid-40s black inmate serving time for theft. She parented her daughter from behind bars. “My daughter is here,” she shared. “She’s the type to just sit on something and wait for a solution to fall into her lap. She hadn’t seen her case manager for a *year*. And she was supposed to be up for parole.” Audra shook her head in dismay. “Finally she told me about it, and I called my husband and told him, and he told me to send all the paperwork over to him. He made a call, and . . . now she has her parole hearing in two weeks. But she was waiting a year, just sittin there!” Audra was glad she intervened when she did in her daughter’s legal troubles.

Mother's Day was especially hard. The Gatehouse on Mother's Day was brimming with visitors: parents, partners, and lots of children eager to see their mothers. When I observed Catholic and Protestant services that day, the mood was quiet and sullen. Only about 100 inmates attended, compared to the usual 160. When Apostle Kendra, an outside volunteer preaching that day, asked the inmates who were *not* mothers to stand up and applaud the other inmates who were mothers, only 15 women stood up, myself included. The remaining 85 appeared to be mothers, and their day was not easy. As one inmate told me, tears brimming in her eyes as she forced a smile, "I'm not having a good day."

Anne, a Catholic inmate, skipped the mass on Mother's Day altogether. Bernadette, the early 60s white inmate who usually stuck around with Anne after the Catholic service to chat with me, divulged, "[Anne is] depressed today about her daughter. [Her daughter] is five, and Anne's been locked up since she was two. She's starting to have a hard time with it – she doesn't understand." With a look of sympathy in her eyes, Bernadette continued, "She's getting adopted soon." With a life sentence, this seemed like a good option for Anne. When I spoke about this with Anne the following week, she apologized, "Sorry I didn't make it last week. Mother's day here is just horrible." Wrinkling her nose, Anne explained, "Last week, I was just not having it. I decided I wasn't celebrating Mother's Day this year. No matter where you are and how good a relationship you have with your mother or your daughter, it can be a tough day." Turning her head away, eyes brimming with tears, Anne continued, "My daughter is getting adopted and I was just thinking about how she was celebrating with her new

mom." Perched confidently on a navy plastic chair, knees splayed wide, Anne looked comfortable as she admitted, "I now feel like I'm okay with this. . . . I am bipolar – I mean completely bipolar – and I'm not on my meds out there [outside prison]. And I was an addict. It would not have been a good situation for my daughter." Although painful, Anne felt that her daughter's adoption was ultimately the right thing, based on prevailing expectations around gender, motherhood , and incarceration.

For others, incarceration was a time to pause, reflect, and grow. As Joan, an early 40s black inmate, said matter-of-factly, "I needed this time out. I miss my kids, but I needed this." Joan saw her incarceration as "time to clear my head, time to read, time to learn."

Being Pregnant in Prison

For inmates who were pregnant, the devastation was even more acute. During the course of my observations, I met two pregnant inmates. They suffered an additional measure of discomfort during hot summer days at Mapleside without air conditioning. When I asked Dale, a member of the parole board, about female inmates who are mothers, he explained, "A lot of 'em try to use kids as a reason they want to get out." Shaking his head, Dale sounded cynical. "I tell them, 'Now's not the time to think about your kids. While you were in the streets committing the crime is when you should have been thinking about them."

After giving birth, inmates were allowed to spend one or two days with their newborn in the hospital before they had to be taken by a caregiver on the outside. Often this was the child's father or grandmother. Up until an inmate's child turns four years old,

incarcerated mothers can spend several hours every other week with their child in the prison's Baby Bonding Room. The Baby Bonding Room is in the Main Hall near the computer lab. A large room in the Main Hall, the Baby Bonding Room was painted floor-to-ceiling in pastel pink and mint green, with a mural of *Sesame Street*'s Big Bird on the wall, two bassinets covered delicately with white linen positioned next to the hallway window, and children's toys, blocks, and dolls scattered around the floor. The Baby Bonding Room looked like a cheerful playroom that young children might not suspect was located inside prison.

Laura knew the Baby Bonding Room well. Laura is an early 40s white inmate serving ten years for a sex offense. She was pregnant with her fourth child when she first arrived at Mapleside. A soft-spoken women with curly brown hair styled in a short bob, Laura's presence is disarming. She smiles often, her eyes look genuinely warm behind her thick plastic-framed glasses. Laura described her birth story to me: "I was lucky. I had my baby for three days before they took her away. Most people get 24 hours, but I was really lucky. I had her on a Friday, and the Social Worker wasn't in over the weekend." Two of Laura's daughters are young enough to spend time with her in the Baby Bonding Room. Her son, however, just turned four and no longer qualifies: "It's hard for my son. He's like, 'Why can't I play with Mommy anymore?" Tears started to well up in Laura's eyes. "He sees that his [younger] sisters can still come in." Laura's incarceration has taken a toll on her family. Her husband drives nearly two hours to get to Mapleside for family visits. "[The kids] are all wet when they get here. First I hug 'em real good, then I change them. My husband has to take the dirty diapers out back with

him. They won't let him throw 'em away in here." Laura shook her head. "What are we going to do with dirty diapers? He can't throw 'em away on the property so he has to take them to a McDonalds nearby." These visits took significant coordination from Laura's husband, and she felt lucky: "I am lucky that I have him to take care of them. I know he's struggling – he has his hands full with four kids. . . . But they stole his heart. The little one especially." Laura paused and forced a feeble smile: "And it breaks my heart a little because she *loves* him. She is so happy to see him. I hope she will feel that way about me, too." Laura felt some degree of distance, only seeing them for a couple hours per week.

In order to use the Baby Bonding Room, the children's caregivers must bring them to Mapleside, which could be difficult to orchestrate. One early 20s white inmate said she hasn't seen her son since she was born: "He's four months now, and I haven't seen him since he was two days old. . . . I haven't talked to my mother in about three weeks, but she called me today, and she's going to bring my son on Sunday to our next visit." On "Children's Day," an official event organized by Ms. West, the Volunteer Coordinator at Mapleside, only 87 women signed up to attend out of 1,000, totaling 170 children, who would come to the prison gym to do activities together and receive gifts that were donated from the outside. "Some of the women don't want their kids to see them in there," Sister Harris, a white Catholic volunteer, suggested during a conversation with Ms. West. "Or there's custody issues and things like that," Ms. West added.

Connecting with Loved Ones from the Inside

At Mapleside, many inmates carried around photographs of the children or grandchildren, showing them to me proudly at every opportunity. Some taped pictures of

their children to the back of the IDs they had to wear clipped to their t-shirts. Lexi, the 40 year old white inmate serving time for a financial crime, who lost custody of her son to his father, explained, shaking her head vehemently, "I have to look at pictures of [my son]. That's the only thing that gets me through."

One of the primary ways inmates stayed close with their children and family members was over the phone. Anne, the early 40s white inmate with a life sentence, explained "We do crosswords together. I have the *New York Times* crosswords, and I send her a printout, and we do 'em together over the phone." When Colette, a mid-50s white inmate serving several years for theft, told her daughter over the phone she was considering getting an undercut, "one of those haircuts where they shave half the side of your head – that's really in right now," her daughter joked facetiously, "What are you going to tell your children?" Describing this encounter made Colette laugh. Prison changed her, and changed how she related to her daughter as well.

Tati, a 40-year old a Muslim inmate serving life for murder, has four children. She was another of the inmates selected to speak at the Victim's Awareness Event. Standing tall in a gray t-shirt and denim flares, her pristine white sneakers complementing the off-white headscarf wrapped carefully around her head, Tati looked polished. Peering through her large round glasses, she described her crime as a "robbery gone wrong." Her youngest was only "nine months old when I got locked up," she said. "Now he's getting ready to turn . . . 19. I only know him through phone calls." Her son has never come to visit. Carefully dabbing her tears away from each eye, Tati inhaled deeply. "And I don't blame him. He's not ready to accept who his mother is, what his

mother did." During her speech in front of the audience of 40, Tati repeatedly described her own mother as "there for her no matter what." Her mother was "always there to bail her out of situations." Casting her eyes downward, speaking slowly and quietly, Tati admitted, "There is still one person who I never asked for forgiveness. One person I never apologized to." Tati paused, then spoke louder into the microphone. "Mommy," she paused, "I'm sorry." Tati's mother was sitting in the second row, her head turned down, propped up by her fist. Her shoulders rose and fell with sobs. The white, middle-aged volunteer sitting next to me wept silently. All of the other women prepared to share their stories began crying as well. Three inmates who were selected as volunteer ushers for the event walked around the room with *Kleenex* boxes and rolls of toilet paper, handing out a couple sheets to everyone they saw in tears. The gym echoed with inmates gasping for air between their sobs. Tati's story resonated. Inmates and outsiders alike could relate to the pain of disappointing close family members.

How Becoming Religious Strengthened and Strained Ties with Children

When Anne, the 40 year old white Catholic inmate, was facing a life sentence for murder, she leaned on faith to get through. Anne felt particularly sad because her daughter was only two years old at the time. In these trying moments, Anne turned to religion. Her eyes downcast, Anne recalled how she felt in her early days of incarceration: "Some of my friends made fun of me, like, 'Oh, you went to jail and found religion.' But it's *true*. When else in your life does everything stop and you have time to think?" Anne pushed her left hand out to her side to demonstrate the stop that is incarceration. Raising her voice, sounding increasingly sure of self, Anne nodded, "So

yes, I did find religion here." She said she spent a lot of time talking to Sister Harris, the Catholic volunteer, about her struggles.

Some inmates who became religious while at Mapleside actively sought to share their newfound faith with their children. "People say you found Jesus in prison," Maria began one afternoon in her Discipleship class. "You didn't *find* Jesus while you in here. Jesus was in you way before Mapleside." Peering down her narrow glasses resting low on her nose, Maria glanced at the worksheet she had typed up earlier. "Who needs to hear this message?" she read, glancing up at the 20 inmates present for the lesson. One inmate ventured a guess: "Everybody." Maria looked around for other responses, and after no one else participated, she said matter-of-factly, "Your children. It's your children. If they see you changing, you got to be real."

But children were not always receptive to their mother's efforts. "Lord, soften my daughter's heart to accept me," pleaded Marcela, a late 30s Latina inmate in a letter to Miss J. Marcela had written several letters to Miss J in Spanish. Miss J asked a coworker of hers to translate, and then Miss J would share the testimony in English to her *Purpose Driven Life* class. For Marcela and many other inmates, becoming incarcerated strained their relationships with children. Children found it difficult to accept their mother's imprisonment and struggled with the pain of separation.

Religion was cathartic for Susanne, a young black inmate who sat in the back row during Protestant worship services, received a prophecy from Pastor O'Neill. After his sermon, he called the woman to join him at the front of the gym. "I sense a young soul present with you," he said. Susanne started to cry. I overheard another inmate sitting near

me whispered to her friends to affirm the prophecy: “Just the other day I was telling her to get off the phone! She is having trouble with her son.” Pastor O’Neill continued, “You told your child, ‘Your momma is sorry.’” Susanne’s tears turned into sobs. “But you tell him, ‘But I’m coming home,’” Pastor O’Neill urged. Susanne was overcome with tears as Pastor O’Neill began his altar call, his loving apology hung heavy in the air.

Many inmates described reaching out to their loved ones to spread their newfound faith. Navaeh, the early 20s black inmate serving time for attempted murder, explained, “I was on the phone with my sister and I asked her, ‘Did you raise your daughter right? Did you teach her right from wrong?” Navaeh explained that her niece has “been getting into some trouble lately.” So she told her sister, “Now is the time to get on your knees and pray to God that she gets through this.” Natalie, a Catholic inmate in her early 50s, said “Every time I talk to her [my daughter], I tell her to pray.”

Heather, the late 50s white inmate who was raised Catholic but is now born again, has six children. “None of them are Catholic – I mean they’re baptized, but none of them do anything.” She mimed holding a telephone to her ear: “I ask them all the time, ‘Do you believe that Jesus died for us?’ and they say, ‘Yeah, Mom, we do.” Sighing, Heather explained that her children do not take her new faith seriously: “They think I just found this religion thing in here. One of my sons says . . . ‘She found religion on lock’ because I guess that’s a thing that happens.” With this, Heather rolled her eyes and sighed. Her children just did not get it.

This was especially true for inmates like Sabine, who saved her mother over the phone. Sabine is a 25 year old white inmate serving time for a drug offense. She smiled

cheerfully as she shared, “God is busy today!” She was talking to her mother on the phone earlier, “And at one point, I asked, ‘Mom, are you saved?’” Sabine was nodding as she told the story. “Well, I didn’t say ‘saved’ but I told her ‘I want to see you in Heaven’ and asked ‘Have you said the sinner’s prayer?’” Sabine was beaming. She reported that her mom replied, “I’ve said a lot of prayers, but do you mean like verbatim? I can google it.” Sabine laughed. “I told her, ‘Today’s your lucky day, I can lead you through it.’” Sabine proceeded to save her mother over the phone. “She repeated after me, I said, ‘Lord?’ and she said ‘Lord’ and then the phone cut in.” Sabine imitated a deep, male automated voice: “You have 60 seconds remaining.” Grinning, Sabine continued, “We went through it, and right when we said ‘Amen,’ it cut off.” She seemed proud to have shared her salvation with her mother.

Being separated from their children, inmates who became religious experienced a degree of distance from their children based on their newfound faith. Brigit, for example, the early 20s black Sunni Muslim inmate shared one afternoon during the Muslim worship service, “My daughter is 11 years old, and she a devout Christian. She quotes the Bible and is all about the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.” Brigit waved her hand in a triangle shape to demonstrate. “But you know what? I’ma let her be all about that for now, and learn everything about Christianity. ‘Cause when I get out, it’s gonna be all about Islam.” With this, Brigit swiftly pounded on the desk in front of her for emphasis. Brigit, who converted in prison, felt helpless to convert her daughter from behind bars, but planned to school her in Islam once she went home.

Likewise, Anne said that her daughter, being raised by her adoptive family, is "being raised in the Church of the Brethern, or something like that. I've looked it up. It seems similar. It's not Catholic, but she enjoys it, and they go every week. On Wednesdays she goes to a class and has little friends there. I think it's good." Denominational differences do not make Anne feel greater distance from her daughter. "If she becomes interested in Catholicism later, that's great, but right now it's the basics, she doesn't know about the divisions and differences between groups yet."

For Cassidy, an early 40s white inmate convicted of a financial crime, faith presented a particularly significant obstacle between herself and her son. Cassidy identifies as agnostic. Her 18 year old son, however, is a youth pastor. "I'll have to go to church when I go home, but not because I want to," Cassidy said, shrugging. "But who knows what I'll get out of it?" Cassidy was willing to go to church to reconnect with her son post-release, however, having different beliefs added some distance between them.

Therapeutic Religion and the Case of the Baby Doll

The interconnectedness of religion in prison and motherhood was particularly salient when it came to Bonquesha. Early December was the first time I saw Hanna nurturing Bonquesha.[17] Bonquesha was a black baby doll. "Her name's Boquisha. Bonkisha," Hanna explained, cradling the doll in her arms during work at the chaplain's office one afternoon. She kept messing up the pronunciation. "It's Bon*que*sha!" Ruby chastised, popping her head into the room at just the right time. Ruby is an early 30s black inmate who worked as a custodian in the Main Hall, and, like Hanna and Asabi,

[17] Not a pseudonym. This is the name the inmates selected for the baby doll.

had a lot of leeway in where she could be at any given time. “You better get that baby’s name right! That’s *my* baby,” Ruby sassed playfully.

Hanna sassed back, “We’re gonna have a problem then. That’s my baby, but I let you name her.” She picked him up and patted her bottom every so often, rocking her side to side soothingly. Chaplain Harper and I were still in the room when Hanna explained to Ruby with wide eyes, “I would only trust a few people to say this to, but it’s really helping me. I don’t know why, but it is.” Ruby gazed over at Hanna and said, “You spoiling that baby!” to which Hanna replied gleefully, “Yes I am.”

As a black woman, Ruby had more legitimacy over the baby doll. A week later, in front of Hanna and Adelaide, while we were all volunteering wrapping up bags of Sysco cookies to distribute to inmates at the Christmas caroling event, Ruby chided, “She need to know who her real mother is. With that skin and a name like Bonquesha?” I chimed in, “You don’t think she has Hanna’s blue eyes?” Adelaide laughed, and Ruby replied with a solemn look on her face, “Not in the least.”

It was a busy day in the chaplain’s office. When Maria stopped by, she looked at the baby doll and commented, “That baby’s not wearing socks. She’s gonna get cold!” At one point, Hanna removed Bonquesha’s onesie to wash it in the sink: “It looks like real spit-up. See?” she asked, holding up the onesie to show me how dirty it had been. Even Chaplain Harper played along, warning Hanna, “You better not take that [baby] out there [to the hallway]. It’s gonna get snatched! It’ll get confiscated probably.” Bonquesha was taken from the Baby Bonding Room, and now she lived in the chaplain’s office full time. Later that evening, at Baptist Bible study, a lullaby was scrawled on the chalkboard:

BonQuesha

Hush little baby

Don't you cry…

Mommy loves you!

A month later, I noticed Bonquesha was gone. Missing was the dirty baby doll in a tattered dress, replaced by two twin baby dolls, one black and one white, Gracie and Sherell respectively, purchased by Chaplain Harper from Walmart. Hanna said that Chap noticed how Bonquesha was doing something to comfort Hanna, so she bought the new babies "as a therapeutic instrument. And they are." Hanna said Asabi was disinterested in the baby dolls, probably because "she never had her own children, she got here too young to have her own," though she did change a doll's diaper once to learn how.

The problems began when Reverend Donna saw Hanna cuddling with the doll during a particularly emotional therapy session. Reverend Donna is an early 40s black Baptist minister who volunteers at Mapleside every Thursday to teach Baptist Bible study. "She wanted to make sure I was comforted by Christ and not by an object. It's easy to make an idol of an object. Reverend Donna insisted that Chap take those babies away." Chaplain Harper decided to listen to Reverend Donna and temporarily take the baby dolls away while she prayed about it. "I am so grateful that it was a nice CO [that morning] 'cause I was on the floor crying as Chap was walking away with those babies in a plastic bag. If she had come back I'd have clung to her leg and not let go. My reaction alone tells me that I was relying on them too much for comfort." Bonquesha, as a

personified baby doll, was a significant source of comfort for Hanna, Ruby, and the other inmates who interacted with her.

A week later, Hanna seemed downtrodden. She sat cuddling in Minister Jasmine's arms, another black Baptist volunteer minister in her 40s. The warden decided to take the baby doll away and put in back in the Baby Bonding Room, which was locked, and Hanna was not allowed inside. The case of Bonquesha illustrated how religious staff and volunteers connected with inmates' sense of motherhood, using this pseudo mother-daughter interaction "as a therapeutic instrument." This particular effort attempted to soothe female inmates valorized their identities as mothers, particularly for those closest to the chaplain.

Summary

While prior scholars have shown that the experience of incarceration is gendered, they have overlooked the ways religious messages interact with race and class to dictate norms around gender, marriage, and motherhood. Religious messages that encourage inmates to find a "man of God" to marry after they are released, and subsequently act submissive to their authority, is entirely out of sync with norms around marriage and childbearing in poor and disadvantaged communities. The penalty of stigma among formerly incarcerated women only adds to the unrealistic nature of these messages. Furthermore, female inmates at Mapleside experienced significant pain from being separated from their children. In certain circumstances, becoming religious connected inmates with their children and family members more deeply over the phone. In other cases, becoming religious strained relationships with family members who shared

different beliefs. Overall, religion served as a cultural resource that dictated expectations around gender – with notable silence around race and class – to shape the carceral experience for women in tandem with normative expectations from the prison administration. In the next chapter, I turn to how religion simultaneously facilitates and condemns same-sex inmate relationships, one of the most prevalent coping strategies for incarcerated women. Conservative religious beliefs come into tension with prevalent same-sex relationships behind bars to not only shape the norms around family and motherhood post-release, but also dictate their sexuality while incarcerated.

CHAPTER 4

"GIRLFRIENDS IN THE BACK ROW": RELIGIOUS PROSCRIPTIONS AND POLICING OF HOMOSEXUALITY

Prior research on female inmates has continually pointed to same-sex intimate relationships as a primary coping mechanism while in prison (Akers, Hayner, and Gruninger 1974; Bosworth 1999; Giallombardo 1966; Owen 1998; Rowe 2016; Severance 2005; Ward and Kassebaum 1985). Though reliable estimates are difficult to obtain, 30% to 60% of female prisoners report having had an intimate relationship with another inmate during incarceration (Owen 1998). Additionally, ethnographies of women's prisons have emphasized the state's punitive, paternalistic approach that attempts to dictate female inmates' sexual desires (Belknap 2010; Haney 2010; Hannah-Moffat 2001; McCorkel 2013) and encourage feminine behavior (Bosworth 1999; Carlen 1983). Given the central role of religion in prison social life, it becomes necessary to examine what religious programs in prison have to say about sexuality, and how this works in tandem with prison goals. This chapter describes how, despite the prevalence of conservative religious programs in American prisons, which promote heteronormative ideals about feminine behavior, this chapter demonstrates that religious services are, perhaps unwittingly, the easiest place for same-sex couples to spend time together.

Although same-sex relationships are officially banned (42 U.S.C. § 15601 *et seq.*), the vast majority of corrections officers, volunteer preachers, and most inmates turn a blind eye towards inmates "hooking up" even during the church service. Instead, some of the most religious inmates, many of whom relinquished homosexuality themselves for

religious reasons, take it upon themselves to censure sexual misconduct. This finding tells us how prison religion structures attitudes and practices around same-sex inmate relationships. I first demonstrate how the religious programs that condemn homosexuality are, perhaps unwittingly, the easiest place for same-sex inmate couples to spend time together. In the second section, I consider draw upon literature in the sociology of peer reporting to demonstrate when and how the most devout inmates take it upon themselves to informally police homosexual inmate couples.

Homosexual Sex as Misconduct

"They call it gay for the stay," Bernadette, a 60-something white inmate serving a couple of years for a financial crime, told me with a wry smile. Officer McLean, the young black female officer I got to know well, surmised that about 80 to 85 percent of inmates had same-sex relationships with other inmates, far higher than the 30 to 60 percent estimates of prior scholarship (Owen 1998). Widening her eyes and grinning, Officer McLean revealed, "Some women won't wear their wedding ring except for when they have visits, then they'll put it on."

Same-sex romantic relationships behind bars have long been viewed as a mechanism for coping with the deprivations of prison life among women (Giallombardo 1966; Lempert 2016; Owen 1998; Rowe 2016; Severance 2005; Ward and Kassebaum 1985). However, since the passage of the Prison Rape Elimination Act (PREA) in 2003, sexual relationships between inmates themselves or with prison staff are prohibited formally, with significant sanctions (42 U.S.C. § 15601 *et seq.*). Yet rules need to be made explicit only when they are routinely violated (Erikson 1966).

This became evident when almost half of the three-hour volunteer orientation I attended in preparation for my research was spent discussing the illegality of sex in prison. Sergeant Hodgson, a longtime prison employee and middle-aged black female, was leading the volunteer orientation. She explained, "Inmates are not allowed to have sex inside an institution." She raised her hands to form air quotes: "Whether they say they're in a 'relationship' or not." She continued quickly, "If they want to engage in homosexuality outside prison, fine. While incarcerated, they are not allowed to engage in that act. We still have to treat it as rape. You never know; they may say it's consensual but they may have to do it to stay safe." Sergeant Hodgson's emphasis on power inequality mirrored PREA language, ostensibly designed to protect inmates from sexual victimization, with a potentially discriminatory effect against homosexual inmates (Borchert 2015).

Officer McLean, the mid-30s black female officer I got to know at Mapleside, proposed a different theory. When I asked her why Mapleside condemns lesbian relationships, she explained, "It causes a lot of extra conflict. There's already enough conflict, and 9 times out of 10, the conflict is a love triangle, or a 'he-said-she-said'." Officer McLean described the penalties for engaging in a sexual act, including disciplinary tickets and time in solitary confinement: "[T]here are different levels, but for 100, the highest level, they go in Seg [segregated housing; Mapleside's version of solitary confinement. Some of 'em don't cause any problems and keep their relationship private, and they never get caught."

Same-sex relationships are presumed to be heavily policed. In her interview study with women serving life sentences, Lempert (2016) argued that "correctional sanctions are purportedly swift and decisive for any violations of expected institutional celibacy" (208). Same-sex coupling, even in forms as innocuous as holding hands or hugging, may have been strictly sanctioned in the prison she studied, or her respondents may have reported sanction as an expectation. In contrast, I found that at Mapleside, although prohibited, censure against inmate relationships was hardly enforced, at least in religious programs. However, as I will discuss below, labeling inmate coupling as misconduct had direct ramifications for the most devout inmates.

Couples Canoodling in Religious Programs

At Mapleside, inmates in relationships spent time together at work, in the cafeteria, during free recreation in the courtyard, in voluntary programs, and, occasionally, in their cells if they were roommates. As Anne, a mid-40s white inmate serving time for murder disclosed, sexual acts occurred "in the shower, or they'll do finger stuff under the tables in the rec area. Or Sunday mornings in the yard, or in the mechanical shed." However, since religious programs were far and away the most prevalent of the voluntary programs at Mapleside, many inmates in relationships attended these programs to spend time with their partners (cf. Fleisher and Krienert 2009).

On Sundays in particular, with no work assignments or alternative voluntary activities, religious services were the only place to spend time with a romantic partner who lived in a different housing unit. ." Hooking up in religious programs was so commonplace that it could be considered routine deviance (Smith 2000; Stokes and

Hewitt 1976; Uecker, Regnerus, and Vaaler 2007). Corroborating this point, Sister Harris, a white Catholic nun in her golden years who had volunteered at Mapleside for nearly a decade, explained without batting an eyelash that religious services "can be a place where girlfriends meet." Estrella, highly active in the Protestant programs, explained, "Really it's just the first three rows [who are there for church], everyone else uses it to sit down with their girlfriend." The inmates in the first three rows were closer to the center of the ritual, and likely derived more emotional energy from it, while inmates on the periphery who spent time canoodling not only derived less energy but may have detracted from the most engaged (Collins 2004).In my field notes, I officially counted 26 couples who regularly attended religious programs together, in programs typically drawing groups anywhere between 10 to 200 inmates. During religious programs, couples sat in the corner of the room or the back row, pulling their plastic chairs close to each other, signaling intimacy by touching shoulders, resting heads on each other, grazing their knees, massaging each other's necks, or stroking each other's hair. Occasionally, one inmate would wrap her arm around the other's shoulder, but such overt signals were unusual. More often, couples would simply sit close together and whisper throughout the program. Inmates seemed calm and content spending time with their romantic partners in this way. Although this may seem relatively innocuous to an outsider, inmates were well aware that all forms of touching are prohibited and could lead to disciplinary sanctions. Despite the prison rules to the contrary, religious programs ironically were one of the easiest spaces in which inmates could spend time with their romantic partners.

Lack of Censure by Officers and Volunteers in Worship Services

Although institutionally forbidden, prison staff rarely policed same-sex coupling behaviors in religious programs. An officer patrolled the gym during church only about half of the services I observed. The few officers who did patrol the church service would meander around the perimeter of the room, occasionally identifying inappropriate behavior in an ad hoc manner. Others would sit on a chair by the door or plop themselves atop the composite wooden desk just inside the entrance of the gym for the entirety of the service as inmates exhibited coupling behaviors mere yards away. Though I observed touching and whispering that signaled coupling at almost every church service, I witnessed comparatively few reprimands from officers.

One of the first times I ever witnessed an officer intervene was during the nighttime church service on Christmas, a full eight months into my fieldwork. Although celebrating Christmas in prison felt heavy and melancholy, especially in the morning service, the evening service I observed was full of chatter; I estimated about one-third of the 160 or so attendees talked to each other throughout the service rather than listening to the sermon. The chatter was so noticeable that the first words out of the preacher's mouth that evening over the mic were issued brusquely: "You can talk, but I'll talk over you." There were two officers present that evening, one male and one female, on either side of the room standing behind the last row of chairs. When a couple was seen touching in the back row during the sermon, the female officer thrust her arm in between the two women and barked, "No!" One of the inmates wrinkled her face disgruntledly when she turned

back to face the front of the room, as the other inmate shrugged and moved her chair slightly away from her girlfriend's chair. No one was asked to leave.

In another such instance, at a *Passion of the Christ* screening in the gym the Thursday before Easter, 43 inmates were in attendance. One young black inmate couple sat in the middle of the audience, one woman's arm wrapped around the other's shoulder. Originally the officers asked me to chaperone the movie, as the captain on duty declared, "That's too many [inmates] to be unsupervised." After an officer arrived to relieve my post, she quietly made her way across the gym towards the couple, crouched down with bent knees, to avoid disrupting the movie viewers. The officer tapped lightly on one of the inmate's backs then stepped back about one foot. The inmate did not respond. Seeing that the inmate had not noticed, the officer leaned down again and tapped the inmate once more. This time, the inmate turned around, disgruntled with raised eyebrows, unaware that it was an officer who tapped her. The officer waved her hand towards the woman's arm in reprimand. The inmate immediately took her arm off her girlfriend's chair. They didn't touch for the rest of the movie, although they continued to sit close to each other. But such actions were the exception. Coupling behavior in religious programs was only lightly reprimanded by officers.

Officers were not oblivious. Officer McLean told me she was well aware of illicit coupling behavior in religious programs. "You can tell which [programs] are serious," Officer McLean asserted, naming programs that were used for couples to meet. "Lutheran? That's couples. There used to be a Wiccan service, but they don't have that anymore. They weren't taking it serious and it was all girlfriends. Or if there's only two

inmates who come to a service, and I know they a couple, I just stand there outside the door, and make 'em real uncomfortable." Officer McLean said she could easily identify which programs were being used for genuine religious reasons. She said she took it upon herself to make couples "real uncomfortable," although she did not appear to write disciplinary tickets for this illicit behavior. Miss J once shared a rumor that "[the warden] shut down a [religious] class because she went in there and said 'That's not Bible study.'" This action was so rare that it was newsworthy; Miss J seemed to relish possessing this knowledge of a sexual scandal. In fact, religious programs were rarely shut down for same-sex sexual activity, and most inmates who attended religious programs to hook up successfully avoided punishment.

Like officers, prison staff and volunteers turned a blind eye. Over the course of the 25 Christian worship services I observed at Mapleside, I heard no other explicit reprimand of homosexuality, despite the conservative leanings of the nondenominational Protestant services, which theologically condemn homosexuality (Olson, Cadge, and Harrison 2006; Whitehead 2010). I even watched as Chaplain Harper said nothing to a particularly overt couple touching each other in the front row of her Ministry class of about 55 attendees; one inmate in the couple was a high-ranking church official.

Although both chaplains on staff and conservative Protestant volunteer preachers condemned homosexuality in principle, overt censure of inmates was rare. The only reproach I witnessed from an authority figure came at the Mother's Day Sunday church service, when Chaplain Harper took the podium to preach: "Don't just be one of those people who go to church to hook up. Be who God wants you to be. . . . Someone in here

who been goin' through the motions, I challenge you to walk in the power of God's love."

Furthermore, despite her public critique of attending religious services for intimate partner meetups, Chaplain Harper only once chastised an inmate directly for such an indiscretion: One day in early December, while sorting through Chaplain Harper's mail to summarize each letter to her while she worked on other tasks, I found a letter from a distraught inmate complaining that she was banned from religious services through early January for "being inappropriate with another woman during the service." The inmate advocated for herself, writing, "I am being discriminated against because of my sexuality. I admit I have a friend. A lot of women do." When I read the contents of the letter aloud, Chaplain Harper shrugged and raised an eyebrow: "Oh, this is the one I banned. Well, if the warden wanted to reverse it, she would have." The inmate's ban persisted through January. Chaplain Harper's unconcerned response betrays her dispassionate attitude towards policing homosexuality in religious services.

Rarely did volunteers acknowledge same-sex touching during their Bible study and Ministry classes. For instance, in Miss J's *Purpose Driven Life* class, she routinely glanced around the room, making brief eye contact with couples who were touching, but almost never said a word about it. Only once did Miss J chastise a couple in her class. She pointed to the cameras in the room, blaming external authority for the reprimand, and ordered, "Don't do that in here; there's cameras." Miss J pointed out that because her class took place in the visiting room, "Just remember, we in the only room with cameras. Big Brother is always, always watching." Another time, Miss J made light of the

girlfriend meetups in her classroom by talking about her pedagogical philosophy: "I could stand up here and read the book page by page. But you'd be bored out of your minds! You'd sit there, massagin' each other, whatever you do." Miss J's levity indicated that she did not mind inmate couples touching each other during her class, but blamed the surveillance cameras for why inmates should avoid this behavior. Overall, direct censure of same-sex inmate couples by religious volunteers and staff was rare.

Becoming Religious, Relinquishing Homosexuality

Nevertheless, some inmates who were the most actively involved in Protestant programs shared "conversion narratives" (Moon 2005) about their transition from engaging in lesbian relationships to becoming religious.

Maria, for example, the late-50s black woman with a 25 year sentence for murder, identified as lesbian well before her stint at Mapleside: "Every day for 30 years, I would pray the same prayer." She paused. "I said, 'If it's wrong God, make me right.'" Maria tried to stop engaging in homosexual relationships before prison, but admitted, "I played around a little when I got here." Maria shared her story with me one morning in the religious library.

What changed for Maria was a transformative night in her cell. She described it vividly: "It was midnight; it had just become my birthday. I was alone in my cell." As she told me this, Maria clasped her hands together in prayer, and drew her knees in towards one another. Maria lifted her chin and looked up to the ceiling, "I thought, 'There has to be more. This isn't it for me.'" This was her turning point. Placing both her hands flat atop her chest, Maria confessed, "I used to be a homosexual. I'm not anymore. After that

night, I never engaged in homosexuality again. I didn't want it anymore." Now, years later, Maria mentors three younger inmates who are trying to stop engaging in homosexual relationships. In fact, Maria is so proactive that she plans to start a "Same Sex Attraction" ministry in prison called "All Things New" to work towards "deliverance from homosexuality."

Asabi, the mid-30s black inmate sentenced to 25 years as an accessory to murder, shared a similar conversion narrative with me while we were doing office work for Chaplain Harper together. She put it simply: "I used to engage in homosexual activity. It was like a light switch. I don't do that no more. It just stopped." Asabi snapped her fingers for emphasis.

Several months later, Asabi opened up to me even further, sharing the full story. It was the day before Thanksgiving, and Chaplain Harper was out of the office, so neither the chaplain's inmate clerks nor I had any work to do. Instead, we sat in one of the Main Hall classrooms, where I sat huddled near the radiator in the corner, since the building was chilly on that early winter day. Asabi paused to collect her thoughts:

> As you know, I was a lesbian before I got here, and I never thought there was anything wrong with that. Or, I knew it was wrong, but I didn't think I had to change anything. When I first came to Christ, I thought I could keep doin' it. And when I first started working for [Chaplain Harper], I thought I could hide it from her.

Asabi laughed, and looked me right in the eye, "One day, I was sitting on the floor in my room reading my Bible when my fingertips started to feel like they was on

fire." She began to wiggle her fingers in the air. "I threw my Bible on the ground. I was scared; I didn't know what was happening. I picked it up again and my hands felt hot. That's deliverance. I was delivered." I asked what she meant by deliverance, and Asabi clarified, "it's when you're released from a stronghold, released from your demons." Asabi smiled, "And when I came to Chap about it, she received me with love . . . and not with condemnation. And she knew all along." A peaceful smile fell upon Asabi's face as she described this.

For these inmates, the imperative to choose faith over homosexuality was linked to salvation. As Navaeh, the early 20s black inmate serving time for attempted murder, insisted in our interview, "If you know better, you gotta do better. I used to think that as long as I was a good person, it didn't matter if I was a lesbian, I could still go to Heaven." Things changed for Nevaeh as she learned more about God: "But now I know I can't have eternal life if I practice that lifestyle. It's deception." She told me about her religious journey:

> I was baptized [in college] . . . but I didn't get serious until I got here [two years ago]. It wasn't until last year that I decided to stay away from women. It took me ten years to get to this place. I was just saying a few days ago, I can't believe where I am spiritually right now. If you'd have told me, I wouldn't have believed you.

She shook her head ruefully, "I couldn't have done it on my own. It helps to have a group of people here going through the same thing, supporting me." Fingering her black

leather-bound Bible, Nevaeh shook her head, “I don’t want to go to Hell, for real. So I stay away [from intimate relationships with women].”

Navaeh told this conversion story time and again for a number of audiences. One afternoon while leading Youth Bible Study, she shared, “God told me to give up homosexuality. It was hard as Hell, that’s all I’ve ever known.” Navaeh smiled and shook her head. “Let me just say this, I’m in the ‘Women in the Bible’ class, and we learned that women are made from bone, we are not made from dust like man. And we actually run the world, we actually control everything, we’re just taught by society not to believe that. And our teacher asked, why would you want to be dust instead of bone?” Gesturing to the other inmates in the room without making eye contact, Navaeh continued, “And I don’t mean no offense to the *doms* [dominant partner in a sexual relationship] in here, but why would you want to be dust?” Other inmates in the room chuckled in support. She adopted the belief that it was better to be feminine (bone) rather than masculine-presenting (dust). Maria, Asabi, Navaeh, and numerous other religious inmates shared narratives of shirking homosexuality in favor of salvation.

Still other inmates did not see their sexuality as limiting their religious practice. During Youth Bible Study one afternoon, one young inmate started complaining about the “girlfriends in the back row” in church. This was a typical conversation topic for Bible study. Rita, a young black inmate who routinely attended this Bible study with her girlfriend, Cinnamon, piped up defensively, “Not *all* girlfriends. I go to church with my girlfriend, and we really pay attention.” Cinnamon, who was sitting next to Rita, chimed in. A young, perpetually effusive black inmate serving time for armed robbery,

Cinnamon was well-liked by her tight-knit social clique, but disdained by other inmates who said she and her friends "ran up" on unsuspecting new admits to steal their shoes. Cinnamon explained, "We go [to church] together, but she really listen. Rita is humble. She is always listening to the preacher, and I'm the one doing the talking. If we're talking, we'll talk about what we're hearing in the sermon." Rita and Cinnamon may not be the typical couple, however, being active participants in religious programs while openly gay. Cinnamon continued, "[Rita] listens to the Word [of God being preached]; I do too. We sit in the second row now, because we've been distracted by people talking behind us." The informal inmate policing culture marked couples who attended religious programs to spend time together as illicit. Not all inmates agreed that this was necessary, but were still well aware of the atmosphere that pitted what was viewed as "genuine" religious participation against same-sex inmate coupling. In the absence of official censure from officers and religious censure from volunteers and the chaplain, some inmates took it upon themselves to police same-sex coupling, engaging in censure ranging from direct confrontation to anonymous peer reporting.

Sociology of Peer Reporting

Even though the prison prohibition against intimate touching went largely unenforced, some inmates took it upon themselves to censure same-sex couples. Previous research argues that snitching is infrequent, and that when inmates do snitch, they are seeking material advantages. The findings presented in this chapter urge prison scholars to redefine snitching and consider that inmates who police other inmates may be motivated by moral boundaries, not material benefits.

Prisoners notoriously condemn snitching (Åkerström 1991; Gartner and Kruttschnitt 2004). A "snitch" is one who "goes to the cops to do their own retaliatory dirty work" (Kefalas, Carr, and Clampet-Lundquist 2011:56). Snitching, however reviled, yields tangible benefits for the snitch (Hunt et al. 1993). Although a prevalent fear in vulnerable communities (Kefalas, Carr, and Clampet-Lundquist 2011; Vaidyanathan 2012), snitching is relatively rare, not due to shortage of knowledge about misconduct, but rather because of the high risks of retaliation with low concomitant benefits to the snitch (Duck 2009; Solis, Portillos, and Brunson 2009). Snitching may take several forms, from "hard snitching," which involves direct tattling to "dry snitching," wherein an inmate provides a corrections officer enough hints to piece together the transgression (Hunt et al. 1993). Like male inmates, female inmates disdain snitching, viewing it as an act of disloyalty to other inmates (Gartner and Kruttschnitt 2004). Inmates snitch strategically to garner favors from corrections officers (Hunt et al. 1993) or to finagle better work assignments (Haney 2010).

Since corrections officers routinely fail to detect misconduct, enforcement of prison rules is inconsistent, much to the dismay of inmates (Ross 1981). Just as workers blow the whistle rather than relying on internal operations intended to detect violations (Sparrow 2008), inmates snitch to staff when corrections officers fail to deal with misconduct. Viewing officer censure as an internal legitimate mechanism of enforcement in prison, inmate snitching, then, becomes akin to peer reporting and whistle-blowing.

Peer reporting occurs in cases as wide-ranging as academic cheating (Trevino and Victor 1992), Honor Concept violations among U.S. Naval Academy midshipmen

(Pershing 2003), and police officer misconduct (Long et al. 2013). Scholarship contends that peer reporting is deemed acceptable when the potential consequences of the misconduct are severe (Trevino and Victor 1992). Yet even when peer reporting is deemed ethical, the reporter is routinely viewed as unlikable (Trevino and Victor 1992). Whistle-blowing, defined as "the disclosure by organization members (former or current) of illegal, immoral, or illegitimate practices under the control of their employers, to persons or organizations that may be able to effect action" (Near and Miceli 1985:4), becomes a useful analogy here.[19] Research on whistle-blowing examines how individuals report misconduct of an institution to external groups (Glazer and Glazer 1989; Gummer 1985; Miceli and Near 1992). Most research on whistle-blowing contends that workers are complicit in organizational wrongdoings by buying into organizational hierarchy and company narratives (Beamish 2000). Workers turn a blind eye in order to meet organizational goals (Iszatt-White 2007; Vaughan 2004) and to avoid career penalties and social sanctions (Beamish 2000; Ellsberg 2010; Shore 2003).

The vast majority of this literature on peer reporting, snitching, and whistle-blowing asks why individuals *fail* to report the misconduct of their peers. This literature finds that misconduct is normalized, particularly for individuals deeply embedded in the organization, and snitching makes a worker unlikeable (Carrell, Malmstrom, and West

[19] An important distinction between snitching and whistle-blowing is the position of the wrongdoer and the recipient of the reporting. Snitches report peer misconduct to legitimized internal mechanisms, whereas whistle-blowers report organizational misconduct to external sources. Yet by conceptualizing whistle-blowing as an effort to thwart misconduct by reporting to an authority capable of intervening, the analogy of whistle-blowing becomes even more salient to the case at hand.

2008; Lehman and Ramanujam 2009; Merton 1938; Vaughan 2004). In general, peers defer to each other and diminish penalties for wrongdoings committed by insiders (Davis, Lundman, and Martinez 1991; Fragale et al. 2012). Workers expect that an "audit culture" will eventually catch rule violations without having to catch them themselves (Iszatt-White 2007; Vaughan 2004). The limited scholarship on when and why peer reporting *does* occur points to cases where public interests outweigh personal interests (Ferdinand et al. 2007; Trevino and Victor 1992), and when it seems more likely that reporting will lead to change (Near and Miceli 1995).

Yet this literature fails to account for moral cultural beliefs that could override the prisoner stigma against peer reporting. Moreover, it has overlooked the range of behaviors that could fall under the category of snitching. In this chapter, I show how heteronormative religious scripts that promote traditional, even patriarchal, sexual partnerships create an atmosphere in which inmates who ascribe to this belief system feel compelled to censure inmates who engage in same-sex relationships. These inmates informally police those exhibiting same-sex coupling behaviors, typically by employing strategies that would not traditionally be defined as snitching. These findings parallel urban sociology's longstanding focus on dignity among the poor and disenfranchised (e.g. Duneier 1992; Jones 2010; Ralph 2014; Rios 2011), which argues that individuals attain status by enacting moral boundaries (Anderson 2000; Flores 2013; Zelner 2015). How inmates enact moral boundaries around sexuality improves our understanding of when and how peer policing happens in contexts that otherwise discourage it.

Informal Inmate Policing of Homosexuality

The most active participants in Christian programs at Mapleside reported negative feelings towards the other inmates who attended religious programs to spend time with their partners. As Navaeh complained to me, raising her eyebrow without a trace of a smile: "I know you see a lot of girlfriends in here, girls sitting together real close. That really bothers me." Officer McLean told me that "[S]ome of the older – and when I say older, I mean they been here longer – inmates make [couples feel] uncomfortable. They don't allow that. They kick 'em out." Highly religious inmates took it upon themselves to police couples who attend religious programs to spend time together.

For instance, after an inmate couple sat in the back row of Catholic mass together, talking to each other for the majority of the service, Anne, the mid-40s white Catholic inmate serving a life sentence for murder, felt compelled to take action. Anne herself had never had a same-sex relationship in prison. She explained, "We're the minority here – they call us strictly dickly." Deeply involved in religion, singing in the Catholic choir every Sunday, Anne said nothing to the couple in the back row, but instead planned to seek administrative action. She asserted:

> I am going to write the warden about this. They say you aren't supposed to say anything but you cannot mess with my church service. This is what keeps me going through the week. This service recharges me. I can't have people coming in here exchanging drugs or doing girlfriend stuff in the back row.

Anne blamed the laxity of officers for this "girlfriend stuff." She shook her head, looking disgruntled:

> I'm gonna request that [officers] go back to checking the list. They used to check the list and you had to be on the Catholic list if you were gonna get in. But now they don't check and anyone can come. But that's why we got the girlfriend activity today.

Frustrated at the lack of officer enforcement of prison rules against coupling behavior, Anne took it upon herself to report inmate misconduct to the warden, explaining that the religious service was "what keeps me going through the week." Anne, a strong-willed inmate who prided herself on being fiercely independent, told me, "I don't consider anyone a friend [at Mapleside]." Her willingness to snitch to the warden to complain about "girlfriend stuff" might reflect her defiance of the collective prisoner identity.

Likewise, religious inmates who felt frustrated by homosexual activity in their worship services sometimes reported homosexual activity to Chaplain Harper in a manner that would be defined as snitching. During my year of observation, several religious inmates reported homosexual activity to the chaplain either in one-on-one meetings or by dropping an anonymous note in the chaplain's mailbox. For example, one afternoon while sorting through Chaplain Harper's mail, I noticed a letter from a Protestant inmate complaining about hypocrisy within the Protestant group: "All the choir members have girlfriends, and they think it's okay because their leader does." The inmate closed the letter with a plaintive query: "When will this end?" The anonymity of this note reveals the lack of material motivation for snitching – impossible to trace the note back to its author, she received no material advantage, but she also avoided the social penalty for snitching on another inmate.

In another instance of direct snitching, Chanel, an early-40s black woman serving time for a financial crime, was ousted from teaching the weekly Discipleship class when another inmate reported to Chaplain Harper that Chanel had a girlfriend. As described earlier, Discipleship was an inmate-led class on how to be a disciple for Christ, taught by three inmates: Maria, Rashida, and Chanel. Topics included prayer, personal testimony, love, obedience, the will of God, Christian fellowship, and victory over sin. When I first noticed that Chanel stopped attending, I asked Maria why. Maria shrugged and replied flippantly, "Yeah, she is seeing a girl. So she stepped down."

Rashida corroborated Maria's story, but added that Chanel did not truly "step down" by choice. In hushed tones, Rashida glanced around the computer lab where we were standing to see if anyone else was listening. She leaned forward and told me that Chanel "got into a relationship. She wasn't forced out, but she didn't feel comfortable. You know there's a feeling that people are looking at you, some people in here seek a feeling of acceptance . . . She might have felt condemned for her lifestyle. I didn't judge her, but other people did." Rashida then faced me and mouthed the name of the inmate who she believed snitched on Chanel. The alleged snitch was a highly devout Christian inmate.

Four months later, this issue returned. One Thursday morning, when I was shelving books in the religious library with Maria, who was still teaching Discipleship with Rashida, Maria calmly told me, "I still haven't spoken to Rashida. She is not in her walk [with God]." Maria meant that Rashida's behavior was out of sync with her religious path. She went on, "I'm trying not to judge. I'm trying to make sure to approach

her in love, but it's hard." She leaned in towards me, and in a pitch above a whisper, divulged "[Rashida] is in a relationship with a woman. Now I've known about this, but I didn't want to do anything until I had proof, until I was sure." Maria took issue with the fact that "[i]n the past, there was another teacher who this same thing happened and [Rashida] ran to [Chaplain Harper] to tell on her. It's hypocritical." Maria insinuated that it was Rashida who had snitched on Chanel. Maria, who herself had given up homosexuality, distanced herself from this form of policing by explaining, "I'm not trying to rat her out or anything. A lot of people drop notes in Chap's box; I don't do that, don't think that's right. I just don't know how to handle it." Ultimately, the two discussed it privately without any intervention from Chaplain Harper. Rashida continued to teach the class, and Maria felt satisfied having aired her grievances to Rashida. In this case, jockeying for a coveted teaching role in a Christian class – a position of moral authority – encouraged some inmates to actively police homosexuality in the name of faith.

In another incident of policing, Violet, an early 50s black woman serving time for murder, was accused of having intimate homosexual relations with a female staff member. Violet described the incident to me with a worried look in her eyes, then told me it was ultimately resolved and the accusation was dropped by the administration. Sighing, Violet shook her head: "After that I just backed away from everything. No church, no Bible study. . . . [Recently] I've been going to church about once a month. I still do what I can on my own: I read, and I still know God's looking out for me." This incident threatened both her religious attendance and her trust in other inmates: "People always be lying on me. . . . I don't trust anyone in here. No one. Not my roommate, I ain't got no

one I would consider friends." Violet's experience of being snitched on left her devoid of trust in other inmates. Allegations of sexual misconduct were an easy target given their prevalence.

In addition to reporting misconduct to staff or the administration, particularly zealous inmates policed "girlfriend activity" during services themselves. This reveals the way inmate policing can redefine our understanding of peer reporting. For instance, at a jovial Christmas caroling event one cold December evening in the prison gym, two young women started grinding on each other while most inmates were dancing to the upbeat music blaring out of the *Peavy* speakers. The mood was light; inmates were singing carols, talking, and dancing energetically throughout the event. Hollis, the 50 year old black devout inmate serving 10 years for burglary, who was the church official in charge of operating the microphones that night, stepped forward, away from the microphone station, and waved her hand, calling out, "Uh huh, none of that!" The inmates complied and stopped grinding. Likewise, when dancing in a Bible study graduation became too rowdy, the pastor chastised, "No twerking! Not for Jesus!"

In another such instance, during communion one evening at the Protestant worship service, one middle-aged black inmate was walking back to her seat after receiving communion and spotted a friend in the row behind me. She called out, "Love you boo!" Although this sentiment seemed rather mild, another middle-aged black inmate sitting clicked her tongue and spat out, "Do that later. This is church." These examples illustrate direct censure of behavior deemed inappropriate for religious programs.

Conversely, Estrella, a devout Christian who herself had never had a homosexual relationship, was not bothered by fellow inmates using church services as a space to meet up. As she explained in an interview:

> I used to be angry about it, but I've started to approach it better, and tell everybody, "Now listen, y'all gotta keep it down." And really, all sin is the same. All sin will prevent you from reaching the Kingdom. If someone is a lesbian, and I lie, we're just as wrong. I think people treat it differently because it's visible, out in the open for people to see. But that ain't right. They should be treated without judgment.

Estrella believed same-sex couples should not be policed more than any other sinner. She went on to consider that exposure to the religious service could spiritually impact these couples: "And you never know what seeps in [to their minds] during the church service. So I don't think they should be prevented from coming [to church]." Notably, Estrella's opinion on this issue was atypical, and her comments reveal that she "used to be angry about it," and that approaches to inmate-on-inmate policing may change over time.

Summary

Ironically, religious programs were one of the primary sites that facilitated the romantic rendez-vous that were so prevalent at Mapleside. Although the institution formally prohibited sexual relationships between inmates, official censure was largely unenforced. Even the chaplain and religious volunteers who theologically condemned homosexuality in favor of normative, patriarchal family structures, rarely chastised inmates for their homosexual behavior, even when it happened in front of their eyes.

Those inmates who became the most devout conservative Protestants while in prison relinquished their homosexual behavior in favor of salvation, sharing "conversion narratives" that reified their decision. These and other religious inmates reported feeling resentful when inmate couples expressed romantic affection during religious programs, and informally sanctioned them through verbal and written complaints. In this way, conservative Protestant religious programs worked seamlessly with the prison context to facilitate complementary institutional goals around gender and sexuality. This finding contributes to our understanding of how religion structured even sexual relationships behind bars, by prescribing norms and expectations for feminine behavior in heterosexual relationships post-release, and by cultivating an atmosphere in which religious inmates felt empowered to condemn inmates who used religious services to spend time together. The next chapter delves even further into how religion reproduced inequality in the prison experience by unevenly distributing material and social resources across the inmate population.

CHAPTER 5

"OBEDIENCE IS A SURE FAVOR":

HOW PRISON RELIGION LEADS TO MATERIAL AND SOCIAL INEQUALITY

Rashida, a mid-40s black inmate serving time at Mapleside for a financial crime, put it succinctly: "The Religious Department is the best organized department in this institution." Nodding, she continued, "And not just the spiritual side. If you need counseling, hygiene, whatever, you go to the religious department *first*, because it's quicker and better quality." Having served multiple stints in prison, Rashida knew that she had to ask for what she needed. She identified as an Apostolic Christian, attending worship service and Bible study weekly.

At Mapleside, participating in religious programs yielded material benefits. Although vast research that considers how inmates adapt to the "pains of imprisonment" (Clemmer [1940] 1958; Harer and Steffensmeier 1996; Heffernan 1972; Irwin and Cressey 1962; Thomas 1977; Owen 1998; Sykes [1958] 2007), largely highlighting how inmates draw upon social networks inside prison to adjust to material deprivations (Giallombardo 1966; Heffernan 1972; Owen 1998; Ward and Kassebaum 1965), they have overlooked how individual inmates draw upon religion to improve their living conditions, which reproduced inequality among the inmate population based on religion

Conservative Protestant inmates were the most resource-rich group, with more programs, outside volunteers, and institutional visibility than any other group, due to their substantially greater numbers and the support of both the full-time and part-time chaplains, both of whom were black Protestant women. Protestant inmates described the

material benefits they received as “provisions” or “favor” from God. By contrast, non-Protestant religious participants garnered some material benefits beyond non-participants, but they were far less substantial than conservative Protestant material benefits.

Although secular options were available, they were much more limited in scope, size and availability – and furthermore, dominated by those who participate in religious activities. Secular inmates reported a lack of commensurate benefits. As such, participating in religious programs not only functioned as a method of coping with the hardships of imprisonment, but also operated as a stratifying feature among the inmate population.

Resources Available to Conservative Protestant Inmates

Living in prison means living without many daily creature comforts that make life easier. Inmates described to me how they longed for comfortable beds, colorful clothing, their favorite foods, cellphones, internet, a glass of wine, and so on. Even toilet seat covers are contraband. Small pleasures become immeasurably valuable in this space of deprivation. Anne, the 40 year old white inmate serving a life sentence, showed just how enjoyable the little things could be: “My day started out great, actually,” Anne described smiling. “I was up at 4:30, had my cup of coffee, feeling good. . . . Mind you, it’s not good coffee, it’s no Starbucks.” Then, reality struck: “I step out into the hallway and all this negativity [was] coming at me. There’s so much negativity here, you can’t escape it.” Anne’s morning coffee put her in a good mood before facing the challenges of living in prison. The feeling of arming oneself with a hot cup of coffee

Broadly, conservative Protestants garnered the most material resources from

participation in their religious programs. For instance, when a big-name Pentecostal preacher visited Mapleside, she brought *Victoria's Secret* body lotions for the Christian inmates who chose to attend the service. A massive amount of Christian reading material was available to inmates *gratis*, including weekly newsletters, informational pamphlets, graphic novels, scriptural analyses, and poetry. Those who attended Bible study received free copies of self-help books, prayer guides, textbooks, and decorative journals. Chaplain Harper even kept a stack of recent issues of Oprah's *O Magazine* for inmates to borrow, if they knew to ask for it.

Any inmate who participated in the nondenominational Christian weekend retreat, for which inmates' names were drawn by lottery, received a bag of nine cookies made by Sysco, the food distribution company – three oatmeal, three sugar, and three chocolate chip. When Chaplain Harper had extras cookies leftover after the retreat, she handed them out to the graduates of her own ministry class. Likewise, Mid-December brought with it a special event called "Cookies and Caroling," in which the gym was crowded with any inmate from the general population who wanted to come sing Christmas carols and get a bag of cookies to take back to their cells. At the end of the event, the chaplain drew about 20 names from a box to win an extra prize: a choice between a book or a *Bath and Body Works* body lotion.

Material benefits of religious participation emerged in interactions with prison staff as well. For example, after a pair of scissors went missing, there was a "shakedown" in the cellblocks. The scissors were found; a young inmate had pinched them to give haircuts to fellow inmates. Asabi, the inmate described in the introductory chapter, who

was sentenced to 25 years as an accessory to murder and is now a devout Baptist, moped for two days because an officer confiscated some of her items during the shakedown, including her contraband clothing and books. But the following morning, Asabi waltzed into Chaplain Harper's office, exclaiming, "Lieutenant Turner gave me all my stuff back – even stuff I wasn't supposed to have! And you know why she did? She told me, 'It's not *who* you are, it's *whose* you are.'" Asabi grinned ear to ear, thrilled that Lieutenant Turner identified her as a child of God, and, consequently, returned her contraband. Asabi's joy in this moment typifies how religious inmates enjoyed their experience of greater control over their own outcomes.

Extra time spent out of the cell was another coveted material perk. This was desirable given that inmates were locked in their 7' by 10' cells except during work, mealtimes, and recreation. Because they had the most programs available, conservative Protestants had the most opportunities to leave their cell. Table 3 shows the availability of programs to inmates.

[Table 3 about here]

As Jocelyn, a senior white inmate who volunteered for the chaplain on Thursday afternoons explained to me, "I asked Hanna [the chaplain's inmate clerk] if there was anything I could do to help the chaplain. Just like you – photocopying, whatever. I'm sure she has stuff. Apparently they were back-logged on these crosses." Jocelyn held up a two-inch needlepoint cross as evidence. "Women can write in and request a cross," Jocelyn continued sullenly, "So I offered to do it. It's nice to get out of my room. I'll do anything; I don't like to be in my room."

Maria's Day: Religion as a Tactic to Stay out of the Cell

Many religious inmates knew how to work the system to stay out of their rooms. Maria called it "lingering and loitering," a cheeky reference to its lawful ambiguity. Like Jocelyn, Maria felt empowered to control her schedule. Maria, introduced in chapter one, is the late-50s black Baptist woman convicted of murdering her intimate partner, and has served seven of her 25 year sentence. On Thursdays, if she worked it right, she could stay in the Main Hall – out of her cell – for about 12 hours. Maria managed it like this: she woke up at her usual 4:30 am, and either ate breakfast in the cafeteria or waited in her room, watching television, reading, or praying, until 8:30 or 9:00 am, when she was allowed to report to the Main Hall. There, she volunteered from 9:00 to 11:00 am in the religious library, tasked with checking inmates' passes with a pre-printed an attendance list. Maria was authorized to decide whose turn it was to enter the library; only two were allowed at a time.

Since the Chief of Security preferred that Maria not run the library alone, I sat with her every Thursday morning for six months, although admittedly the three hour volunteer training I underwent did little to prepare me to negotiate matters of order and safety. Maria forbade me from reshelving books. At first I thought she was reluctant to put me to work given our legal status imbalance, but Maria later disclosed that she wanted to reshelve the books herself starting at 11:00 am. If she looked busy, Maria explained, most officers would let her stay in the library until lunchtime. Otherwise, she would be sent back to her cell. Around 11:30 am or 12:00 pm, Maria picked up a late lunch tray from the cafeteria and ate it alone in the religious library.

Next, if Maria was on good terms with the Main Hall officer, she could "piddle" around, as she put it, until 1:30 pm, when she would teach Discipleship class to other inmates until 3:00 pm. Appointed by the chaplain, Maria taught lessons on prayer, personal testimony, love, obedience, the will of God, Christian fellowship, and victory over sin. Then, if Maria stuck around, chatting with the chaplain's inmate clerks until 3:30, when "count" began, the COs had no choice but to let her stay until 5:00 or 5:30 pm, when count cleared. If Maria made it "through count," she was home free. She would remain in the Main Hall for 5:30 dinner, then report straight to 6:30 pm Baptist Bible study, which lasted until 9:00 pm. Though perhaps an extreme case, Maria's jockeying of prison rules was not uncommon among other inmates who used religious programs to stay out of their cells for hours at a time.

Additionally, conservative Protestant inmates, if they served as church service ushers or members of the choir, got to wear shiny gold and purple floor-length robes during the Sunday services. Members of the dance ministry each got flowy, stretchy Spandex dance costumes in several colors: I spotted royal blue, deep purple, bright white, and pink Hibiscus flower costumes over the course of my year of observations. Mime and drama ministries could wear special makeup and costumes as well. Since inmates complained about the blandness of their gray uniforms, ministry outfits were coveted. Lexi, a Jewish inmate, once eyed my outfit then despaired, "I miss clothes. I'm so sick of gray." Chuckling, she shrugged in defeat, "We call it 50 shades of gray." When I complimented Lexi's blue eyeshadow, she boasted that each inmate received an eyeshadow palette in their Christmas gift bags last year, and that she traded her

commissary with other inmates in exchange for their palettes. Eyeshadow had not been available for purchase in the commissary for a while – the available of products waxed and waned in no discernable pattern. Likewise, when I complimented Estrella's magenta winter gloves on a brisk November evening, she grinned broadly, "I love 'em – they're not gray!"

Finally, when I was tasked with sorting through letters from inmates to Chaplain Harper, the lion's share requested a Bible or to have their name added to the list of one Bible study or another. One afternoon, I read a letter in which an inmate complained, "It's BORING on lock," and proceeded to request a Bible, a hygiene bag, and a book of crosswords. These items would be hand-delivered to the inmate when the chaplain made her rounds, visiting the women on lock every Thursday morning. Finally, in the letter, the inmate pleaded for Chaplain Harper to arrange for her to meet the woman who administers the HIV test. She had trouble accessing the HIV test any other way. As this request for an HIV test implies, a final benefit of participating actively in religious activities is the authority of the chaplain to vouch on an inmate's behalf. Chaplain Harper occasionally allowed inmates to make a phone call for free on her land line. When the television reception in the cells became spotty, two religious inmates complained, and it was the Chaplain Harper who addressed this problem by calling the cable company. In many ways, the Religious Department was responsible for improving inmates' quality of life, particularly for inmates who established rapport with the chaplain.[22]

[22] I consider the policy implications of the Religious Department as responsible for the distribution of resources in the conclusion of this dissertation.

Of course, participation in religious programs did not come without costs. Protestant inmates had to wake up early on Sundays in time for the 8:30 am church service, rather than sleeping in. Instead of basking in the sunlight on warm spring days during free recreation, religious inmates were stuck inside the Main Hall, proving their devotion to religious programs. Likewise, when they felt sick, inmates attended religious programs for fear of losing their good reputation with Chaplain Harper. Shivering and miserable, huddled under their denim jacket for warmth, I witnessed several inmates suffer through religious programs while physically ill, rather than retreat to the warmth of their bed. Yet overall, inmates continued participating, reporting that the benefits outweighed the costs.

Religion Language Defines Material Provisions as God's Favor

Inmates used religious language to explain these disparate material benefits. Theologically, conservative Protestant messages included promises like "When praises go up, blessings come down." This is consistent with increasingly popular prosperity gospel preachers who define religious blessings as material gains of health and wealth (Bowler 2013). As a black female Pentecostal preacher described it in a Sunday sermon, "It's the job of the church to make provisions for you. You are not only gonna be saved from the fires of Hell, but you gonna see provisions in this life. It has got to start now, in here [prison]." These "provisions" were highly specific. For example, at a nondenominational prayer service one May evening, about one-third of the 170 inmate attendees sauntered out of the room at 8:30 pm to head back to their cells, although the service was scheduled to go until 9:00 pm. Rather than chastise those who left early,

Chaplain Harper outstretched her arms warmly, widening her eyes, and said "I pray five times the favor over all of you who are still in this room." She called it a "small act of obedience" that would lead to "seeing favor" rather than "getting the bare minimum [from God]" for those who stayed until the end of the service.

In another illustrative case, Rashida, the 40-something black inmate serving time for a financial crime, was writing a book about growing up as the daughter of an addict. Each time I saw her, she eagerly handed me a new chapter to read, which I read eagerly and gave her feedback. The book detailed poignant moments of struggle and sacrifice from Rashida's childhood. When the manuscript was complete, Rashida prepared to send copies to potential publishers. She needed 26 stamps – two stamps per letter – to cast a wide net. Rashida did not have enough money in her commissary account, and initially planned to procure the stamps illicitly. She shared, however, that "I was walking over about to get some stamps when I heard God say – as clear as I'm talking to you – He said, 'I cannot bless this book out of thievery'." Through faith, Rashida decided to postpone the mailing until she had enough stamps. She continued, "I was telling this [other inmate] about it, and . . . she came back later and said, 'God told me to keep two and give you the rest.' So I got eight stamps right then and there." Rashida clutched her hands to her heart in gratitude. Maria, who was in the room at the time, cited scripture from *Luke 6*, commenting, "Obedience is a sure favor." Rashida's example demonstrates how she viewed specific material provisions as a reward for Christian behavior.

A similar example of God showing "favor" occurred at the secular victim's awareness event described in the beginning of this dissertation. During the question and

answer period, a petite black nondenominational preacher with long dreadlocks pulled back into a high pony tail, wearing teal African robes, got on the microphone. She thanked all of the inmates who had just shared their stories and apologized for their crimes: “God loves all of you. And I don’t mean to diminish that, but sometimes his favor isn’t fair.” She shook her head and raised her brows: “Sometimes He shows favor to prove his power. And to you, the one sitting right there, what’s your name?” The minister pointed to Vanessa, the 25 year old black woman serving time for a brutal murder charge. The minister continued with a prophecy: “Well, Vanessa, God is going to show you favor soon. He’s going to do something real big for you soon.” Vanessa was beaming. She closed her eyes and nodded her head once, then looked back at the preacher and quietly replied, “I receive that.” Religious language infused even secular events like this one. Vanessa “received” the prophecy of being shown “favor” by God.

Everyday material perks were likewise cast in joyous religious language. For example, when a part-time employee who helped Chaplain Harper with her paperwork gave Hanna, Chaplain Harper’s inmate clerk, an extra apple from the officers’ dining room. Looking up at the ceiling with a huge grin, Hanna outstretched her arms to her sides and cried out, “This is the day the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it!” Hanna defined the apple as an opportunity for religious gratitude. Similarly, Nevaeh, an early 20s black inmate serving time for attempted murder, explained that she acted obediently towards officers in the hopes of better treatment: “If you humble yourself before God and man, God and man will show you favor.” Explained another way, Protestant inmates believed that if they made certain sacrifices, God would reward them

handsomely. As Estrella, the late 30s Latina Pentecostal inmate serving time for drug distribution, explained, “What you give up is tiny compared to what will be returned to you.” Pinching the air between her fingers, Estrella continued, “It’s just this much compared to what you’ll get.”

Not every action was described religiously, however. Hanna, for instance, who expressed religious gratitude for the extra apple, explained once that she was allowed to roam freely around the Main Hall during the day, not because of divine intervention, but because she knew how to work the rules of the prison. For example, one afternoon, when Hanna was preparing to go to the officer’s cafeteria to make a salad for the chaplain, as was one of her daily tasks, even though inmates were not allowed in the officers’ cafeteria. Hanna stalled when she spotted Chief Sawyer, Mapleside’s Chief of Security, in the hallway. “[Chief Sawyer] don’t say nothing to me [when I break the rules], but I don’t want to have to put him in that position.” Hanna said that she would have been bending the rules to go to the officer’s cafeteria, so instead she waited a couple minutes until the Chief Sawyer returned to his office. “That’s why people like me,” Hanna explained proudly, “because I don’t put them in a position for them to *have* to let me do what they let me do.” Hanna’s language fell squarely in the secular, prison adaptive realm.

Yet the instances in which inmates did describe their material perks in religious language reveal the way inmates understood material disparities in prison. Inmates understood disparities from an individualized perspective, in which God showed a single inmate “favor” as a reward for her actions. Conservative Protestant inmates did *not*,

however, view it as categorical favor from the Religious Department, which provided them more resources than secular inmates and inmates of other faith traditions.

"It Makes them Feel Important": How Religion Reproduces Social Inequality

At Mapleside, religion structured the social status hierarchy among inmates, leading to interactional inequality based on religious affiliation and level of practice. Prior prison studies, which have extensively analyzed the factors that generate the social order of prisoners, have focused on interpersonal relationships while ignoring the role of interconnected institutions, such as religion, in shaping the status hierarchy.

Indeed, one of the most contested questions in prison scholarship asks what organizes social hierarchy in prison. Countless prison studies on male and female offenders alike have categorized inmates based on the extent to which they obey or deviate from prison rules (e.g., Garabedian 1963; Giallombardo 1966; Heffernan 1972; Kruttschnitt and Gartner 2005; Sykes [1958] 2007). This is a particularly compelling, intuitive approach, as individuals embody highly-structured roles within the total institution of prison (Goffman [1961] 2007) and norms of situational deference (Collins and Arnnett 1975). However, these classificatory schemes are limited inasmuch as they are static and non-exhaustive, assuming that inmates fit neatly into a typology and do not change their roles over time.

Additionally, the social order of men's prisons is marked by gang violence and intergroup conflict (Colwell 2007; Edgar and O'Donnell 1998; Jacobs 1983; O'Donnell 2004; O'Donnell and Edgar 1998, 1999; Parenti 1999; Skarbek 2014). However, women's prisons are viewed as less violent than men's prisons. As described earlier,

men's prisons are seen as largely governed by gang activity (Black 2009; Colwell 2007; Dubler 2013; Edgar and O'Donnell 1998; Jacobs 1977, 1983; O'Donnell 2004; O'Donnell and Edgar 1998, 1999; Parenti 1999; Skarbek 2014). Contrasting this, scholars have pointed out that gangs are hardly present in women's prisons (Skarbek 2014), perhaps given gendered barriers to violence (Jones 2010) and gang activity (Miller 2001). Arguments and conflict inside women's prisons are interpersonal but not gang-related (Griffiths, Yule, and Gartner 2011). Inmate social groups, despite prevalent conflict, fulfill a prisoner's need for social connection and participation in a collective world.

Yet the multitudes of studies on the prison social order have largely neglected the role of religion in defining status behind bars. This is partially due to the overemphasis on individual-level prison deprivations at the expense of intermediate-level group allegiances such as racial, religious, and political affiliations (Jacobs 1975). The few studies that do consider religion focus on Islam's protective, gang-like function among male inmates in the U.S. and Pentecostalism's same function among male inmates in Brazil (Johnson 2012). Only one of the classic women's prison ethnographies addressed religion: In *Society of Women* (1972), Heffernan asserted, "To prevent inmate confusion of the interviewer's role as researcher and as a member of a religious order, any questions on religion were deliberately omitted in the schedule" (140). Despite actively omitting questions about religion, when inmates brought up religion on their own, Heffernan found that inmates used religion to keep busy, although many religious inmates avoided official religious programing, believing that too many other inmates used them for secondary social benefits.

Observing daily life and quotidian interactions among inmates, I noticed two key functions of religion among female inmates. Being religious elevates an inmate's status by giving her two things: 1) a position of power within prison, and 2) social support. Advantageous to those who participated extensively in religion, this status distinction caused a substantial amount of interpersonal conflict. Again, this operated to the greatest extent among conservative Protestant inmates. Generating both feelings of community and social hierarchy, religion both brought inmates together and drove them apart. By contrast, secular inmates lacked this same level of social support, with fewer avenues to gain status in prison.

Church Officials at the Top of the Social Hierarchy

While prior prison studies have emphasized the need to adapt to the material deprivations of incarceration, they have overlooked the way inmates actively draw upon resources from non-penal institutions – in this case, religion – to facilitate their adjustment. The following chapter delves into the social system of the inmates who participates in religious programs, showing how disparities in the carceral experience are not just material, they are also profoundly social.

At Mapleside, the primary way religious programs influenced social hierarchy inside prison was through its system of "church officials." Every inmate with a special position of power in religious activities in prison is called a "church official." Each group has them – there are Catholic church officials, Jewish religious officials, Muslim religious officials, and so on. When inmates referred to "church officials," however, they

meant conservative Protestant church officials. This was the largest and most noticeable group of women who hold power over other inmates.

On a rotating voluntary basis, church officials were tasked with jobs during the Sunday church service, like serving as MC, introducing outside guests, and reciting an opening prayer or reading introductory scripture. Church officials, even if they are not tasked with anything on a particular week, could always show up to the gym half an hour early, and leave later than everyone else. They could order white t-shirts with the church logo printed on it for $10, and wear these shirts to Sunday worship services.

Wearing the white church shirt also signaled that an inmate had a special role in the church service, a status symbol for those who aspired to such a position. Church officials also got an extra ID card to wear to tell officers that they were allowed to come to the gym early and leave late, and were allowed to attend both morning and evening Protestant church services: 8:30 am – 11:30 am and 6:30 pm – 9:00 pm. If they had a job to perform, church officials are expected to attend; if not, they can skip, but most enjoy the energy of the service, the opportunity to sing and pray, and the extra time out of their cells. Weekends are otherwise the most "boring" part of the week, as one inmate put it, because, "There's literally nothing to do. At least during the week I'm busy with work."

To become a church official, an inmate must join a ministry: adult choir, young adult choir, the praise and worship team (who sing at the beginning of the service to set the tone), dance ministry, drama ministry, mime ministry, banner ministry, the team of ushers, or equipment set-up team. Then, to demonstrate active participation in religious programs, she must attend at least one Bible study a week. There was a special sign-in

sheet for church officials, and Chaplain Harper sent out warning letters if they skipped Bible study for a month. If a church official continued to skip Bible study after the warning letter, or if she switched religious affiliation, she risked being demoted from church official status.

The perks of being a church official were apparent even to those who did not participate in religious programs, As Jessica, the mid-40s spiritual but not religious Cuban inmate I interviewed serving time for drug possession and theft, explained, "People want to get out of their pod. Church officials can do anything. They get early feed, baby privileges that we care about."

Church officials had power over other inmates: they ordered them to sign in (and inmates always must sign in to any voluntary activity), told them where to sit, and reprimanded their behavior during religious activities. When I interviewed Sister Harris, a white Catholic nun in her golden years who had volunteered at Mapleside for nearly a decade counseling inmates, she warned me, "You give women a little power here and they run with it. There was one woman in a class I taught who was the sweetest, kindest girl. And I gave her the job of running the attendance list, and she became a *bear*." Sister Harris widened her eyes and laughed, lurching forward, demonstrating the bear-like qualities of this sweet, kind girl.

Catholic and Jewish inmates alike complained about Protestant church officials. Bernadette, a Catholic inmate in her 60s doing time for writing bad checks, resented that church officials cut lines in the cafeteria, using the excuse that they need to eat dinner first so they can go to the gym early to set up for church. Bernadette shared a story with

me, using air quotes, “Last Monday, four of them cut in line, ‘Church official!’ they said.” Bernadette raised her hands and puffed out her chest, mocking, “And I said to them, ‘Have you ever read Matthew 16 that says ‘The last shall be the first and the first shall be last?’ and I butted in front of them.” Anne, another Catholic, who was sitting in on our conversation, threw her head back and cackled at Bernadette’s brazenness. Lexi and Dorinda, the most active Jewish inmates, complained to me during their Friday night service that the Protestant devotees were shown “favoritism.” “They feel like they get more,” Lexi explained. Dorinda agreed, “They also do it to feel important. They get to boss other inmates around and tell them to sign in.”

These opinions were widely shared. Heather, the late-50s white inmate serving time for a financial crime who spearheaded the beekeeping program, also resented the church official hierarchy. She was raised Catholic and got saved while on lock, and now participates in Protestant programs. During our one-on-one interview, Heather complained, “What bothers me is the church official stuff. What’s bad is that a lot of people are not who they seem. And I know everybody’s human, but it really bothers me. I stopped going to it Bible study on Thursday night, because they would seem one way in the Bible study, then they’d act a certain way back in the housing unit.” Heather pursed her lips and sighed: “I know they’re human but I don’t like it.”

Church officials’ privileges were so well understood by other inmates that they were occasionally mocked. On Good Friday, as a large group of inmates was filing into the gym after dinner, I observed a young black inmate I had never seen before lift her arms to the ceiling and call out “Church official! Church official!” She pushed her way

past the lines to get into the gym first. Though she was not actually a church official, other inmates allowed her to pass, seemingly unfazed by the request. Church officials' line cutting was so well known it gained an almost myth-like status among inmates, frequently discussed as fact.

Resentment around the church official social hierarchy is perhaps best exemplified by the following incident. One mid-December afternoon, church officials volunteered to distribute Christmas bags, along with outside volunteers, in the gym. Every inmate, regardless of her faith, would receive a bag full of donated goodies, such as pens, notebooks, a calendar, lotion, and chenille winter gloves, not to mention a couple Protestant Christian proselytizing pamphlets. Chaplain Harper prepped us before the hordes of inmates would arrive, which was expected to be quick and chaotic. "No exchanges. What you get is what you get," she instructed the group. Chaplain Harper anticipated that inmates would want to exchange their bags based on the color of the gloves that were placed randomly in each bag. One benefit of handing out the bags, I noticed, was that the inmates who volunteered could set aside a bag for themselves before any other inmates got to them, with whichever color gloves they wanted: purple, pink, brown, black, or white. I sat behind the table with Esther and Adelaide, both veteran church officials with long sentences for violent crimes; we sat ready for battle. Deprived of colorful accessories, these bright gloves felt special, a coveted possession.

Early on in the bag distribution, Esther and Adelaide left me alone to pick up their lunch trays from the cafeteria – submarine sandwiches that came with chips and soda, which normally cost $3 but were included for free today. I was about to hand an inmate a

bag with brown gloves in it when she asked, “Can I get the pink gloves?” She pointed, and I looked down and saw there was a bag with pink gloves in it right next to the bag with brown gloves. I handed the one with pink gloves to her. It wasn’t exactly an exchange, but why not make someone happy, I thought. After all, the brown gloves were so drab. The inmate grinned appreciatively when I handed her the pink gloves.

Later, after Esther and Adelaide returned, I sat with Hanna, the chaplain’s inmate clerk and likewise a church official. We distributed the Christmas bags while Esther and Adelaide ate their subs. Hanna handed a white inmate who walked with a cane, whom I’d never seen before, a bag with black gloves in it. The woman frowned and asked “Can I get the purple gloves instead?” Hanna was reaching down for a bag with purple gloves in it – they were a deep, pretty purple – when Esther stopped her. Choking down a bite of her hoagie, Esther shot up from her perch on the gym’s bleachers and bolted forward towards the table, crying out: “No exchanges!” She addressed Hanna, “Don’t let them use you.” Then she turned to the older woman, who had to be at least 20 years her senior, and shook her head: “Sorry, no exchanges. Those are the rules. I’m just being obedient.” The woman fought back, “But it would have been just as easy for her to hand me that other bag.” Esther did not waiver: “No exchanges, sorry.” The woman protested, muttering a grievance about perceived favoritism: “I’m sure you’re doing it all the time, but okay.” Esther wouldn’t budge. The woman’s face was flushed, and for the next ten minutes, she stood near the entrance of the gym, eyeing everyone’s bag to see whether they had purple gloves and would trade with her. She finally gave up – no one wanted her black gloves.

I witnessed a similarly contentious exercise of power during my shift at the religious library. Maria, the late 50s black Baptist inmate serving 25 years for murder, was a church official who volunteered as religious librarian on Thursday mornings from 9:00 to 11:00 am. Around 11:30, Maria sidled out of the religious library to pick up a late lunch tray. Sandee, a fellow Baptist Bible study attendee along with Maria, came to the religious library at this time to check out books. Sandee herself was not a church official. She told me she had gotten her pass late from the officer, and though the library was technically closed, I let her in. Maria was surprised and a little dismayed to see Sandee browsing the shelves when she returned with her lunch tray. "You got three minutes then we're closed," Maria shouted over to Sandee from the vestibule. Sandee looked up from the bookshelf raising both her brows and opening her mouth in a look of feigned shock. Maria did not notice. The officer sitting at the Main Hall desk just outside the vestibule spotted Sandee's indignation, and laughed and turned to Maria, "You sound like us!" Maria's power play was so overt that both Sandee and the officer on duty reacted as if Maria was a surrogate corrections officer.

Maria, for her part, felt that church officials were held to an unfair standard. While teaching her Discipleship class one afternoon to other inmates, Maria aired the following grievance: "People are watching church officials all the time. And it's not just us – anyone who follows the rules in here, anyone who does what they're supposed to do, gets persecuted." Maria felt unfairly scrutinized, while other inmates who were not church officials seemed to resent the hierarchy created by the system.

Religious Prisoners Get More Social Support

Protestant church officials developed a community of social support exclusive to those who participated in the most in religious programs. Adelaide's story illustrates this well. Adelaide is an early 40s black woman serving a life sentence for first-degree murder. Her round face, soft features, and chin-length black braided hair give her a youthful and approachable appearance. She could often be seen sitting quietly in the back row of the room during Protestant Ministry class, or squinting towards the ceiling in prayer during Sunday worship services. Adelaide had been a veteran church official and served on dance ministry until she was put on lock; rumor had it an officer had been putting money on her books. When she got off lock in late spring, she was as boisterous and chipper as ever, but I thought her voice seemed raspier and her hair a little grayer, the corners of her eyes softened by wrinkles; being locked in a cell 23 hours a day for a couple months had aged Adelaide.

Though some inmates shared with me the details of their case, Adelaide never did. All I knew was that her mother had been serving time alongside Adelaide, until she died at Mapleside a couple years back. Nevertheless, Adelaide was always saying how "grateful" she was, and how she survives "only by the grace of God."

One weekday afternoon, Hanna told me that Adelaide had been dealing with a major family issue: "Saturday night around 9 pm, Chap [Harper] got a phone call from a chaplain at [a nearby men's prison]. Adelaide's baby's father is locked up there. The chaplain told her that Adelaide's daughter had died. Well, she came right down here, that late at night, and called up Adelaide to tell her." Hanna shook her head, pursing her lips: "We didn't know what happened, but we started preparing because we knew it couldn't

be good. The officers gave us grace and we stayed up all night in a vigil for Adelaide." Hanna, Adelaide, and a number of other active church officials, like Asabi, Estrella, Maria, Esther, all live in the same housing unit: the honor pod, for women with long sentences and good behavior. They prayed together until morning.

Hanna went on, "The next day, Chap went on Facebook and wrote to people asking if they knew anything about Adelaide's daughter. Lo and behold, around 2 pm, Chap gets a phone call. It was Adelaide's daughter – she was alive!" Widening her eyes, anticipating my amazement, Hanna continued, "She asked to speak to her mother. Now this is where it gets even crazier. The week prior, Adelaide had written on her prayer card to pray that she could talk to her daughter again. They hadn't spoken in seven years, and her daughter wouldn't return her calls or letters." That week, Chaplain Harper had prayed over the prayer requests, including Adelaide's. Hanna believed God had answered Adelaide's prayer. Hanna relayed that in the Sunday sermon that week, Chaplain Harper delivered Adelaide's good news to the congregation and said, "I don't know *why* it had to be something like this, but maybe that's what it took to reunite them." Hanna had even more details to convince me that this was the work of God. Smiling a wry smile, Hanna continued, "Now, Estrella doesn't remember saying this, but at one point on Saturday night, she came in and said, 'Why are you looking for the living among the dead?' [from *Luke 24*.] She doesn't remember because she was channeling the word of God." At this, Hanna nodded lightly, stating the facts as they occurred. The outpouring of support gave Adelaide comfort.

Of course, social support between religious inmates came at a cost. When I interviewed Heather, the white former Catholic who got saved while she was on lock, she was critical of the exclusiveness of the most religious inmates at Mapleside: "A lot of times they leave people out. They're such a group, that they forget that there are other people around. Like when they thought Adelaide's daughter had died, they all gathered around to support her. But what about if someone else's daughter died?" Heather was suggesting that Adelaide got an enormous amount of support because she was part of the church official clique, indicating that social support and hierarchy are two sides of the same coin.

Attending Bible Study for Social Support

While religion generated a status hierarchy inside prison, it also facilitated a substantial amount of social support between inmates who actively participated in Protestant programs, as well as inmates and outside volunteers. Beyond their spiritual functions, scriptural studies and other small-group religious activities served as ad hoc therapy sessions for groups of inmates, as well as individualized messages for particular inmates.

Religious programs condoned inmates sharing of grievances and conflicts in everyday life. Classes normally began with a prayer and a short analysis of scripture or the day's lesson before an inmate would raise her hand to share a story. As long as the inmate related the story back to a scriptural lesson or couched it in religious language as a "testimony" or a way in which God had helped her overcome the struggle, this was an acceptable format for sharing problems. These testimonies often elicited tears from the

sharer, followed by words of comfort or support from the outside volunteer and other inmates sitting in the room. Of the 111 religious study sessions I observed, including Bible studies, Protestant Ministry classes, Jewish studies, and Muslim studies, I coded 47 as used, at least in part, as an ad hoc group counseling session, totaling 42% of all sessions.

A typical instance of airing grievances is exemplified by a Quranic study session one Friday in late May. Eight black inmates were present, some cloaked in simple, pale headscarves and others covered head-to-toe in richly saturated burgundy scarves, shining in their sequined sleeves. Sister Shareen, a black Muslim outside volunteer in her mid-50s, began the day's lesson on fasting and the life of Mohammed. The class was broken up halfway through by midday prayer, during which the inmates set up a prayer mat in the corner of the room, facing Mecca, and prayed side by side with their shoes removed. Because I am not Muslim, I sat quietly in my chair watching their prayer. Once they returned to their seats, they sat in silence. Sister Shareen wrinkled her brow and asked brusquely, "What did we talk about last time? No shyness!" After a moment's paused, a mid-30s black inmate timidly raised her hand halfway up and began speaking: "Ok I got an issue. I know when we pass a sister we are supposed to *salaam* [greet] them. I always do that. My issue is when a sister passes without *salaaming* me. Like if she enters the room here, she is supposed to *salaam* me. It's just some people up here don't do that and it gets to me." The volunteer smiled warmly and comforted, "Who gets the blessing? The person who *salaams* first. So you should always *salaam* a sister. And if she don't *salaam* you back? It's between her and Allah. You never know if someone is having a bad day –"

The inmate interrupted, chortling, “Every day?” Sister Shareen nodded, “Some people have a bad day every day.” The whole group of eight laughed, understanding this grievance full well. A lot of women seemed to have bad days in prison every day. Because they did not all living in the same housing units, the Muslim worship service and Quranic study were the only two times during the week that these inmates could spend time together. As such, it was a valuable session during which they could establish a “community of fate” (Goffman [1961] 2007) to identify similarities in the daily incivilities they face; in this case, feeling ignored by a fellow Muslim.

Beyond daily frustrations, religious activities could be used as an opportunity to share major life challenges. One of the most popular religious activities was a five-week course on Rick Warren’s bestselling book *Purpose Driven Life*, taught by Renée Jennings, affectionately called “Miss J” by inmates, is a mid-50s upper-middle class black Pentecostal preacher. Miss J is a vivacious woman who works for the government, and normally comes to Mapleside straight from work, dressed in a pants suit and heels. She is open about her middle-class status, sharing numerous times with inmates how much money her husband makes, how many cars they own, and how they like to take their boat out every weekend. Miss J once joked that Wednesday mornings she is full of energy at her job because those are the evenings she gets to come teach class at Mapleside: “People at work are like, ‘You excited to be goin to *jail*?’ and I’m like, ‘Yes!’” Sharing this made a couple inmates laugh and a handful applaud.

Church officials did not attend Miss J’s class because they viewed it as the “first step,” as Estrella put it. “It’s like, we took *Purpose Driven Life* ten years ago.” What

everyone does respect, however, is that Miss J is a prophet. Even Estrella, who admitted to disliking the class, believes in Miss J's prophecies: "It was real accurate. She knew a lot of details, and she knew the name of my son. You hear her tell people they getting out – and then they do."

Purpose Driven Life was a five-week course that normally drew a crowd of anywhere between 20 to 50 inmates. The class met in the prison's visiting room in order to accommodate the large number of attendees. On a particularly sweltering September evening, with the window air conditioning units broken, 32 inmates attended the class, a group about evenly split between black and white inmates. We sat in two concentric circles, with the outer circle filled first – few inmates wanted to sit in the front row. Miss J began her lesson on avoiding temptation and finding a mission wherever you might be. She preached a call to action: "Minister to officers. You can touch them – not with your hand, but you never know. Don't just stand around, *do* something. Help me help you find what you need to get started [in your mission]. Look around! You are some of the strongest women I've know in my entire life. Some of the things that have happened to you – I'd have hung myself!" The hot late summer air hung heavy in the room with Miss J's words.

After a pause, Gemma, a petite white inmate with long, brown hair worn in braided pigtails, raised her hand to participate. She was sitting in the inner circle and was visibly pregnant, her belly full and round in contrast to her thin frame. Within a couple seconds of speaking, Gemma was on the verge of tears. Gemma is in her mid-30s, and has been in trouble with the law since her mid-20s, when she began getting arrested for

attempts to sell narcotics. Her most recent trial involved assault of a police officer along with intent to distribute drugs. She started attending *Purpose Driven Life* while awaiting her sentence. Gemma swallowed the lump in her throat as she began, "I almost stopped coming [to this class] because I received my sentence, twenty five years without parole." Suddenly, tears started pouring out of Gemma's eyes, streaming down her face. Gemma began sobbing, lowered her head and covering her mouth with her hand and she gasped for air. Coretta, a mid-40s black inmate serving time for murder, who ran the set-up of the class and attended weekly, quietly stood up and went to the handicapped bathroom in the hallway to fetch some brown paper towels for Gemma. When Coretta returned, Gemma looked up at her gratefully, accepting the paper towels and wiping her face. Another inmate sitting next to Gemma rubbed her gently on the back. Miss J addressed the class knowingly, gesturing towards Gemma, "She needed to share that. She been holding that in for the last hour. She been waiting to share that." Miss J hinted that she had prophetically known Gemma needed to share; more on Miss J's prophecies later. After class, three other inmates approached Gemma to give her a hug. I did too, and found out she is 8 months pregnant, and it's a boy. "I'm tryin to keep him in as long as possible," Gemma told me, patting her belly gratefully, knowing that she would have only two days with him behind bars before he would be taken outside to live with his next of kin.

That same night, Miss J, the middle-class black preacher, demonstrated the limits of using Bible study as a therapy session. Inmates should only share their stories if they could relate them to a religious message or teaching. Diamond, mid-30s black inmate,

raised her hand. Diamond was not a regular class attendee; Miss J did not know her well. Diamond began to share, “I had a painful experience this week –” Her eyes reddened as she trailed off. Miss J interrupted, “Ok don’t share the details of the experience, ‘cause I don’t want you to relive it, but tell us how it relates to this, what you’re taking away.” Diamond complied and continued, “When we have a painful experience, God uses it.” In this case, Diamond was cut short of a cathartic opportunity in Bible study. She complied with Miss J’s command to keep her language vague. Perhaps because Miss J did not know Diamond well, or perhaps because Miss J wanted to move on with her lecture, this was an instance where a religious program did not serve as a therapy session. Nevertheless, in this instance as in others, both Diamond and Miss J understood Diamond’s intention – it was well within the realm of normalcy for a religious class. These examples demonstrate the range of ways religious activities could be used to establish camaraderie between inmates and emotional support.

Similarly, one emotional night in Bible study, Minnie shared, “God is able to hear, which is something that I need –” With this, she tapered off. Minnie’s face reddened, and tears welled up in her eyes. The room was silent. Shortly, Minnie took off her glasses and pushed her fingers against her eyes to stop the tears. She shook her head, “I’m not much of a talker.” Reverend Donna, the early 40s black Baptist volunteer teaching the class was supportive. “When that person cries out for God, He will hear and He will answer.” Minnie nodded vigorously twice. This seemed to be all the comfort she needed, as Reverend Donna resumed her day’s lesson.

Religion’s Individualizing Function

Whereas prior scholarship has focused on the deindividualizing effects of prison (Visher and Travis 2003), religion in prison serves an individualizing function. The best illustration of prison's goal of deindividualization was at the volunteer orientation required for all volunteers hoping to work in a state correctional facility. At the orientation I attended, there were 16 volunteers from a range of programs, preparing to enter men's and women's prisons throughout the state. Sergeant Hodgson, a longtime prison employee and middle-aged black female who led volunteer orientation, warned us against "individualizing" or "familiarizing" ourselves with inmates. She explained almost flippantly:

> First it starts with familiarity. And they *will* try. They'll ask you what area you're from. Or it could be real subtle, like they could ask who you voted for at the polls yesterday. And what district are you from again? He's getting leverage over you. And familiarity leads to fraternization. Which leads to sexual misconduct.

Sergeant Hodgson's primary concern was the safety of both inmates and volunteers. As she explained about sexual relationships: "When you start to feel like you're looking forward to seeing an inmate, it's a problem. No one just starts off by sleeping with an inmate. It starts off with that personal information. Just because they're incarcerated doesn't stop human emotion. And believe me, officers notice. If you start feeling smitten, it's a problem." A volunteer sitting in the row behind me, who planned to teach a course on financial literacy, asked incredulously, "Is this a *common* occurrence?" Sergeant Hodgson replied simply: "Yes."

Individualization was to be avoided because it could lead to uneven distribution of resources, attention, or counsel. This could lead to unequal treatment of inmates. Sergeant Hodgson urged, "There should be no individualization with any inmate. Nothing about one inmate that should be individualized. The program can be adapted, like tutoring, to different inmates, but it should be mirrored." Summarizing the institutional view of prisoners, the sergeant warned, "It's not your job to find out why they are here. It's not your job to judge. And that individualizes inmates. It doesn't matter the security level of an inmate, or their gender, they are all very dangerous. It's not important what they've done."

Failing to heed this directive, religious volunteers personalized their attention and focused on how inmates should find their own strengths. Religious messages taught that inmates' lives were important and that they were personally cared for. For example, Miss J would always tell the group at the start of every five-week session of her *Purpose Driven Life* course, "Some of y'all haven't had a visit since y'all been here. I'll be here for you every Wednesday. I'm your visitor for the next five weeks."

During a lesson about *Job*, Miss J expounded, "Have you considered my servant Job?" She took a couple steps then put her hand on Carla's shoulder, "Have you considered my servant Carla? If He don't show it through you, who He gonna show it through? You the best God got." This message emphasized Carla's individual importance in God's eyes as not only worthy, but "the best God got."

This seemed true across the range of religious programs at Mapleside. At one of the first Catholic masses I attended, a Catholic lay volunteer said the following in her

sermon: “When Moses led the Exodus, he set apart one of the tribes of Israel to service in the holy temple. This was the priestly tribe of Aaron. We are all part of the royal priesthood. Since there are no men here, we are all princesses of the Heavenly Father.” She instructed, “You are all special. Take a moment to say to yourselves in your heads, ‘I am special.’” Some inmates closed their eyes. One young white Catholic inmate, who had recently given birth behind bars, mouthed to herself, “I am special.”

One afternoon in early February, Reverend Mona, a well-heeled black Baptist minister in her 50s, polished to perfection in bold lipstick and sparkling jewelry, who taught a Ministry class, came in with a message for Esther, a late 30s white inmate serving a life sentence for murder: “When my church came in [to volunteer] that Sunday in December, one [of my fellow volunteers] prophesized that a blessing is coming your way. She didn’t know your name, but she described you to a T.” At this, Esther’s face contorted, appearing deeply moved by what she heard. She listened intently as Reverend Mona predicted, “A blessing will be poured over you. She prophesized this.” Esther was already folded in half, her face misshapen before the tears came. Soon, Reverend Mona stood up and walked over to Esther, placing a soothing hand on the top of her back.

Later that same day at *Purpose Driven Life*, Laura, an early 30s white inmate, approached me excitedly: “I have my appeal hearing in February!” Tilting her head towards Miss J, Laura noted, “She prophesied that. A few months ago, she said that a door would open for me.” In another instance, however, Laura couched this same situation in legal language. In *Discipleship* class one afternoon, I overheard her telling another classmate about her appeal: “I talked to my attorney, who said they don’t have

enough evidence, so I have a good chance." Regardless, Laura attributed her appeal hearing to personalized attention from Miss J.

Another way in which volunteers individualized inmates was to pray specifically for them. I witnessed countless instances of volunteers and inmates, when leading prayer, asking God to "watch over" or "protect" a particular person. Or, if for instance, someone knew that another inmate was ill, or that her child was going through a hard time, they would pray in front of the group for that specific request of healing. This was personalized prayer that made them feel cared for. Occasionally, they would pray for me and my project, and that always made me beam.

Personalized attention was not always positive, but it was attention nonetheless. For instance, in Baptist Bible study one evening, Reverend Donna, an early 40s black Baptist volunteer, turned to Sandee, an inmate who does custodial work in the hallways by the warden's office, and asked frankly, "Can I be real honest with you?" Sandee shrugged, "Sure, go ahead." Reverend Donna commented, "When I talked about forgiveness, you got convicted. I saw it in your eyes." Reverend Donna used the term "convicted," in this context, to refer to "conviction of sin," when the Holy Spirit makes someone feel accountable for a moral transgression. Sandee nodded, "I was" and started to tell the group that she struggled with forgiving others. Reverend Donna instructed, "It's up to you if you want to go the extra mile or not." Even though Sandee could have interpreted Reverend Donna's comments as critical, instead she used it as a springboard

to share her feelings.[23]Not everyone enjoyed this individualization. Dorinda, one of the Jewish inmates, found it to be problematic. Describing a nondenominational Christian weekend retreat in the prison library that she had attended, thinking "nondenominational" meant all religions rather than all Christian denominations, Dorinda complained cynically, "The volunteers would come and hug inmates and inmates would tell them things and cry to them, but they aren't qualified and they aren't social workers." She questioned their sincerity: "They fill a need for these women who are down and out, but it's not genuine. The effect doesn't last. They are taking advantage of a need to feel heard and supported." Dorinda attributed the religious outcome of individualization to inmates' need to feel important: "It doesn't do anything. Maybe that's the cynicism in me. . . . It makes them feel important; these women are cheaters, liars, thieves." Dorinda gave me this description during my first month of fieldwork. In the subsequent 11 months, I would witness countless instances of religion making "them feel important." Whether or not this is good or bad is a value judgment; certainly Dorinda thought it was unmerited. But her keen perception was a dissenting glimpse into one of the most important outcomes of religion in prison.

Prophecy as Personalized Attention

[23] When I interviewed a Catholic volunteer at a men's prison to assess how religious programs differed, I asked him what he hoped incarcerated men would learn from his program: "The ministry wanted them to know that there were people thinking about them and praying for them; that they could be forgiven and that they still had value. I know that sounds corny, but sometimes knowing that somebody you don't even know is out there praying for you to turn your life around can be the push you need on the days it seems especially hopeless." Individualization seemed to be an important goal of religious programs in prison broadly.

Prophecies were one of the most individualizing aspects of religion in the deindividualizing environment of prison. When a minister "prophesized on" someone, she would shower her with public attention and give her a message destined uniquely for her. Like opening a fortune cookie or reading a horoscope, prophecies ranged from general to specific, from a general audience to a particular individual.

Miss J prophesized at almost every session of *Purpose Driven Life*. As she explained it, "When I pray for you, when I lay hands on you, it's *done*. Because I have the faith. I was given the gift of the seer, the power of healing." Another time, we had five minutes left in class, and she remarked, "Oh good, we have time for a miracle! God needs to do a miracle in here, otherwise some of y'all wouldn't believe it [religion]." Miss J proceeded to "lay hands" on one young white woman in her early 20s: "I'm going to heal you of a medical issue today. Does that sound good to you?" Miss J asked. Miss J proceeded to raise her hands and pray for God to heal this inmate of headaches and neck pain. She hoped this miracle of healing would help solidify inmates' believe in God's power.

At the altar call during a *Purpose Driven Life* graduation, Miss J prayed for each of the 11 women who timidly approached, holding her palm to their head. She "read" them, asking one white woman to put her hand over her heart, and praying about lung and breathing issues. To another she said, "You're young but you have high blood pressure." To another young black inmate, Miss J, "Handmaiden. Everybody been telling you your whole life you are supposed to serve. This is the last time [you will be told], the time you'll do it." To another, Miss J prophesized, "I see you writing. Writing a book, poetry,

screenplays. Writing. You'll use ink to serve Him." Another time, Miss J asked her class to stand in a circle. We held hands as she went person to person to say a prayer for each of us individually. The first few readings were quick, with Miss J telling Carla she saw her becoming a minister, and Mia she envisioned working with children, and to Ja, she said, "People don't know it, but you can read a lot from a situation." She spent more time prophesizing on Marcy, a quiet white brunette in her mid-30s serving 10 years for a sex offense. Miss J started reluctantly: "I don't want to offend you, but a lot of times when people look at you, they don't see your intelligence. But you are real smart, and I don't know where down the line you thought you supposed to hide that from people. But you need to share what you know. There are people who need to hear what you have to say." Marcy kept her eyes closed the whole time, a serene calm cast over her face. She did not seem offended by Miss J's reading.

In class another evening, Lucy, a young white inmate with long brown hair pulled into a messy bun, timidly raised her hand. She began, "This is my first time here. I've been going through some things –" Miss J interrupted, "I'm gonna stop you right there." She continued dramatically, "I can sense that you're in a lot of pain." Lucy nodded and started to well up, pursing her lips. "Come up here," Miss J said, and the girl approached the middle of the classroom. "Put your hand on your heart," Miss J instructed, and the girl obliged. Miss J prayed for her, and for "someone in your life who is holding you back, preventing you from doing what you should be doing." As she prayed, Lucy started crying, snorting back her runny nose, and lifted her glasses to the top of her head so she could push her tears away with her palm. Then Miss J said, "Put your hand on your

stomach," and she prayed for Lucy's blood flow. "Put your hand on your hip," Miss J instructed, and she prayed for the problems in her legs. After she finished praying, both of them opened their eyes and had a conversation. Miss J asked if she had any problems with her legs. The woman tearfully said, "Yes, I have nerve damage all down my leg, and I have a scar on my side and on my back." With this, the woman lifted up her shirt to reveal a scar along the side of her torso. She pivoted in place so the whole class could see. Miss J said, "Wow. And I couldn't have known any of that. Did you tell me any of that before?" she asked. Lucy shook her head and with a nose full of snot said, "No, I've never met you before." Miss J dismissed her back to her seat by saying, "Wow. Thank you." Miss J asked the woman to show her scar to the class again the following week, to further illustrate for those who missed it that she prophesized something that was true.

Miss J often solicited confirmation of her prophecies the following week. One evening, she asked her class, "Several of you had prophetic readings last week. Does anyone want to share a testimony about what happened this week? Has anyone's life changed?" One white inmate tentatively raised her hand: "Last week you prayed for my legs, and now I've had so much less pain, all of a sudden I can get my shoes on now, the swelling is down." Miss J was thrilled, crying out "Amen!" as the rest of the class applauded. Coretta raised her hand and, placing her hand on her stomach, shared with a toothy grin, "My stomach problems went away and I've been feeling better." We applauded again.

Conservative Protestant prophecies gave inmates personalized attention in the otherwise deindividualizing prison environment. Inmates seemed to appreciate

volunteers' emotional support. This level of individualization was only available to inmates who participated in conservative Protestant programs in which preachers believed God spoke to them directly.

A typical example of a prophecy for a general audience occurred one afternoon during a class on Joyce Meyer's bestseller *Battlefield of the Mind*. That day, about 40 inmates were present, although the group energy was low in the mid-afternoon lull. Some inmates sat slumped in their seats while others took notes diligently. Towards the end of class, Reverend Mona prophesized, "This year, your enemy is gonna bless you. The next time I see you, at least seven of you gonna tell me that your enemy blessed you. I don't know why, but 2014 is the year it'll happen." The inmates present smiled, seeming to appreciate this message.

"We Go Without": Fewer Material Benefits and Perceived Inequality by Non-Protestant Inmates

To a lesser extent, Jewish, Catholic, and Muslim inmates garnered some material benefits for their participation, including special food, special clothing, and extra time out of the cell. During my very first interview with Chaplain Harper, she said offhandedly, "There have been times when there's only one Jewish woman, but once they started with kosher meals a few years ago, all of a sudden there are 15 Jews." Dorinda, a Jewish inmate in her early 60s serving time for attempted murder, complained that a couple years back, "Someone brought in doughnuts for Chanukah and suddenly everyone who is signed up as Jewish showed up," even though normally only one to three inmates show up for Jewish programs. According to Dorinda, the kosher meals used to include fresh

fruit and vegetables, but now everything comes from a can, making them far less desirable – she even removed herself from the kosher list. Out of concern for insincere affiliation with Judaism, Mapleside instated a three strikes rule for Jewish inmates: if an inmate ordered three non-kosher items from commissary or any non-kosher food in the cafeteria line, she was permanently removed from the kosher meal plan. Passover was the only time when it paid to be Jewish food-wise, since they got "delicious and fresh" meals, replete with fresh broccoli and other delights.

Halal meals were not available, despite Muslim inmates' efforts, so the most devout Muslims opted for a vegetarian meal plan. During Ramadan, Muslim inmates had to file paperwork to qualify for early morning and late night meals – only to be kicked off by the chaplain if they were spotted in the cafeteria during daylight hours.

Muslim inmates were the only religious group permitted daily sartorial modifications. They were permitted to own up to four headscarves and two *khimars*, which flow down to about the waist. However coveted, practicing Muslims felt this perk was abused by insincere practitioners. As Maya, a mid-40s black woman convicted of multiple counts of attempted murder, and practicing Sunni Muslim, complained, "Officially, about 25 are registered [as Muslim]. There are more who say they are Muslim, but just because they want the scarves and the oils." Certainly the oils smelled lovely and the colorful bright scarves, too, sometimes even sparkly and sequined, appeared dazzling next to standard gray and blue prison-wear. But misuse of these religious objects was a sore subject for practicing Muslim women. Brigit, a 20-something Muslim woman serving time for murder, complained to the other two inmates present at

the Friday worship service, “It upsets me when I see sisters using a towel to pray when others got they prayer mats using them as a rug, and non-Muslims be walkin’ on them.” In the face of finite resources that could be withdrawn at a moment’s notice, religious inmates resented what they viewed as insincere use – in this case, using an official prayer mat as a rug in one’s cell.

Overall, Catholic, Muslim, and Jewish inmates felt deprived of special perks. One practicing Catholic inmates complained that the pews are packed on Palm Sunday, unlike most Sundays that drew 50 inmates at most, “‘cause they want the palms.” Catholic inmates said they petitioned the chaplain for a vegetarian meal on Fridays during Lent, but had been unsuccessful thus far. Bernadette, a Catholic inmate in her 60s doing time for writing bad checks who sang in the choir, lamented, “We get treated like we are lesser. It’s because Chaplain Harper is Protestant. And every other group gets their things, like the Muslims have their special meals for Ramadan and even the Wiccans have their lavish feasts.” Anne, a Catholic inmate in her 40s serving a life sentence for murder, who also sang in the choir, nodded, corroborating, “We go without.”

Maya, the devout Sunni inmate, was something of a spokesperson for the Muslim women at Mapleside, since she was the most learned and was in charge of setting up the service each week. Maya complained that the Muslims group had to watch antiquated VHS tapes while Protestant inmates frequently watched recently-released DVDs donated by Christian groups. “I blame the prison,” Maya stated confidently, “It shouldn’t be like this. Our TVs shouldn’t play only VHS. . . . I think it’s a political issue . . . they shouldn’t use all their finances towards the Christian programs when we’re left without.” Muslim

inmates believed they were getting the short end of the stick. In large part, they blamed Chaplain Campbell.

Chaplain Campbell, herself a mid-50s black Baptist, was Mapleside's part-time chaplain who worked the night shift and was responsible for overseeing Jewish and Muslim groups. The Muslim inmates felt that she misunderstood their needs and was largely unavailable. Maya complained:

> It's her *job* to provide us with what we need. But we'll order stuff – I wrote requests to Muslim communities outside who donated $40 or $50 worth of books and they sent 'em but she keeps them in her office. And it's her hours. She only comes in Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday from 4 or 5 to 8 pm. And we meet during the day. So we can't get in.

Maya continued, comparing available resources for Protestant inmates with those of Muslim inmates, "The Christians have the dance ministry, the theatre ministry, three kinds of choir – youth, middle, and adult choir. . . . [Chaplain Harper] can write to anybody and ask for something . . . and they will send it in. She could type an email today." Maya waved her fingers in the air to mimic typic, then continued, "But we don't have someone like that for us. Chaplain Campbell won't go out a limb for us." Bridget, an early 20s black Muslim inmate serving time for murder chimed in that she believed it was "Active discrimination. – the chaplains are both Christians." Ronnie, a 25 year old black Muslim inmate serving seven years for assault, agreed, "They don't give us what we need."

As for perceived inequality among Jewish inmates, the Friday night Shabbat

service for provides an illustrative example. The resources available for this service included small white candles, *Kedem* grape juice (in place of wine), and *matzah* (in place of *challah*). These were material benefits, although far from ideal: for instance, the *matzah* box was stamped with an expiration date of two years prior, but Jewish inmates used it nevertheless.

Every week, to obtain these items, Jewish inmates had to request that the officer on post in the Main Hall fetch the key to the closet where these items were stored, which usually required her to abandon her post for about five minutes, since only one officer was on duty on Friday evenings. Next, they would have to request that the officer secure a lighter from a locked room past the metal sliders where inmates are not permitted, then come to the classroom in which the service was being held to light the candles while they said a prayer. Before disbanding the service for the evening, they had to ask the officer a third time to come to the classroom to blow out the candles, since traditionally, a Jew cannot extinguish fire on Shabbat.

One Friday, Dorinda, who attended weekly and spearheaded most activities, forgot to ask Office McLean, the early 30s black officer who was on post that night, herself a Seventh Day Adventist, to get the lighter at the same time as the closet key. When Dorinda asked Officer McLean, "Could we get the lighter for these candles?" Officer McLean shook her head, "Uh huh. No way. I'm not going back up there." Later, after Dorinda returned to her housing unit, Officer McLean attempted to save face by explaining to me, "She [Dorinda] don't get that lighter every week. She only gets it on – what's that holiday – Rosh . . . Hashanna?" According to prison guidelines, Jewish

inmates were indeed supposed to light candles each week. Several months later, the chaplain switched from candles to battery-powered tea lights, which allowed Jewish inmates to perform the ritual of candle-lighting every week, but Dorinda complained that lacking the warm, comforting glow of real fire made the practice feel less authentic.

Indeed, the process of obtaining material resources was so onerous that Jewish inmates routinely opted against requesting anything. One week early in my fieldwork, after a lull in conversation, I asked the inmates present for the service that evening, "Do you want to light Shabbat candles?" Dorinda started laughing and said, "I don't know if I feel like it. You're going to write 'The Jewish inmates didn't even want to get the candles from the closet." But I understood from prior observations how much work it took to request the candles, and empathized with Dorinda's reluctance.

As these examples demonstrate, inmates who participated in smaller religious programs felt deprived of their needs, although they received more material resources than inmates who participated in no religious programs at all. These inmates reported that their religious practice was restricted compared to that of conservative Protestant inmates. Overall, the Religious Department was responsible for a substantial amount of distribution of material resources in prison. For example, the chaplain distributed hygiene packs to indigent inmates – those with $5 or less in their account – stuffed with shampoo, soap, toothpaste, and a toothbrush, regardless of their religious affiliation. Yet, as described in the next section, inmates who did not participate in any religious programs at Mapleside nevertheless were impacted by their existence; secular inmates knew they were losing out on material perks.

Why Some Inmates Avoided Religious Programs

Although religion brought support and status for some, others – including spiritual inmates – found it alienating. Social boundaries were drawn based on participation in religious programs, and even inmates who participated in these programs felt left out of the core group of church officials. For instance, Pepper, a late 50s black Methodist inmate serving life for murder, complained to her Christian Witness Training classmates, "I know people watch me, they want me to fail. I been praying in tongues because I don't want people to hear what I'm saying." Pepper did not flaunt her religion, but instead living in close quarters made her feel judged by other inmates. It did not keep her from attending formal religious programs, unlike a young black inmate who said she avoided Sunday worship services because "A lot of people in the church want to judge."

Anne, a Catholic inmate who attended mass for religious reasons, told me she was tempted to avoid religious service because:

> I do *not* like to be touched. So during that "Peace be with you" part where everyone is hugging, today I just didn't even want to bother with it, so I went to the bathroom during that time. . . . Nine times out of ten they don't have soap in those bathrooms. I just think about those germs. Like the few times I've stood and held hands, [I'm] just thinking about the germs that are coming from this one, and the demons coming from this one. I have enough of my own demons, believe me.

While telling me this, Anne looked side to side, repulsed by the germs emanating from the hypothetical person to her right and the demons from the hypothetical person to her left. I remembered earlier that day, hearing her flip flops echo through the gym as she left

her seat just before the "Peace be with you" part of mass. She returned before the benediction prayer.

One thing that bothered Anne is when women come to the services with ulterior motives: "It *really* bothers me when they come to do drug transactions. And there's always that girlfriend stuff. I don't know if you've seen it. Especially in the nondenominational Protestant service."

Likewise, Cassidy, an early 40s white inmate convicted of a white-collar crime, who was raised Southern Baptist but now identifies as a non-believer, resented the social aspect of religious services as well: "I can't stand to see them [other inmates] flopping around like Lake Trout, then misbehaving on the compound. I just can't stand that. And when they put their hands on you it's like, 'Um, no, *excuse me*?'" Cassidy felt frustrated by what she perceived as hypocrisy by religious inmates, and did not want to be physically touched by them.

Another inmate told me she avoided well-attended religious programs because, as she put it, "I don't like to be around that many females at once." While working at the religious library one day, a senior black inmate I had never seen before came to check out some religious CDs. When I asked her why I had not seen her in religious services, she told me matter-of-factly, "I don't do religion anymore. I just work on my relationship with Christ. It takes the pressure off."

Perceptions of hypocrisy were likewise socially alienating for non-Christian inmates. As Lexi, a 40 year old Jewish inmate explained, "When people are up here [in the Main Hall], they're on their best behavior. Like going to their parents' house." With

this, Lexi laughed and shifted up in her seat to illustrate this performative poise. Karen, a fellow Jewish inmate, added, “Then they go back to their housing units where they are their true selves,” with the caveat, “There are a few who are genuine. That one woman who does the laundry, she’s always praying, always about God.” It turned out Karen was referring to Rosemary, a devout Baptist white inmate serving 15 years for theft.

Kifa, an early 40s black atheist serving time for armed robbery, felt alienated by the hypocrisy of religious inmates. Furrowing her brow, she complained, “They one way on Sunday, another way on Monday, another that way on Tuesday. Evil is evil, and some of them are pure evil in their hearts. If they [are] truly spiritual, then they shouldn’t be selfish, they should be selfless. But I see people do selfish things all the time. Even the people who work up under Chap.” She continued to gossip a bit more about someone who works for the chaplain but “everything she does serves her. It’s for her own benefit.” On another occasion entirely, Rashida insinuated the same thing. When Chaplain Harper was out of town for the week, Rashida chortled, “When the cat’s away, the mice will play.”

Though she has dabbled in religious programs here and there, Kifa is not a devout inmate. She feels this relegates her to second-class social status. Kifa illustrated this frustration with a story: “Like for instance, I went up to the chaplain, and she was talking to someone, one of her church people. I asked her for five minutes to talk. And she kind of brushed me aside.” Kifa flicked her wrist away from her quickly to demonstrate the dismissal. She continued, “That was two weeks ago; I still haven’t heard from her.” Kifa wanted the chaplain’s attention and some of her time for counseling, and was denied both

since she was not one of the chaplain's "church people." Mocking with a hint of dismay, Kifa raised her hands in false surrender and said sarcastically, "I see mass murderers in here who are *blessed*."

It was never easy for all 1,000 inmates at Mapleside will get along cordially. Conflict between inmates who participated in religious programs was likely given repeated, forced interaction between inmates. Interpersonal conflict found its way inside religious programs, often masked in religious language. The longstanding tension between Hollis and Maria, two late 50s black inmates who were both active Protestant church officials, illustrates the socially alienating potential of religious programs. When Maria annoyed Hollis during a Christian Witness Training class one afternoon, Hollis muttered, "Ain't nothing but the Devil." Suggesting that the Devil may be guiding Maria's actions was offensive to Maria as a devout Christian. Maria later complained to me that all she did to warrant this comment was pass a class handout to Hollis. Later in that same class session, when Maria walked in after Hollis was already seated, Hollis called out incredulously, "Why is *she* in this class? This is a sacred class. Why is *she* here?" Although Hollis did not mention her by name, Maria looked hurt. She waited a few moments, and then motioned for Asabi, who was teaching the class that day, to join her in the hallway to talk, presumably about what just happened. A couple moments later, Asabi appeared at the doorway and motioned for Hollis to join Maria and herself in the hallway. They stayed out there talking for several moments, and all came back smiling. But fully five months later, Maria complained to me about Hollis, using the same pattern of religious language to express emotions: "I'm not calling her selfish, I'm just saying

she has a selfish spirit." While Maria did not stop participating in religious programs, it caused her emotional anguish. Taken together, these examples demonstrate how, while building social cliques around participation in religious programs – particularly among the group of church officials – religious programs also caused interpersonal conflict, defining the boundaries of who is and is not part of the core group of religious inmates.

Limited Availability of Secular Benefits

Inmates who were not particularly religious were fully aware of the benefits of religious participation. For example, Jessica, a 40-something Cuban inmate serving time for theft and drug possession, revealed that though she does not participate in any religious programs, she attended Protestant programs when she first got locked up: "It was nice – got me out of my room. But I felt bad about it, like I was being false. So I wrote into the chaplain about it, telling her to take me off the list."

Instead of religious programs, inmates could turn to secular programs at Mapleside for similar advantages. However, these programs were available to far fewer inmates. Participants were selected by the prison staff who oversaw these programs. Compared to 500 inmates attending worship services each week, only 5 inmates were selected to participate in the honeybee preservation program, 10 in the service dog training program, 13 in the cat companionship program, 14 in gardening club, and 44 in the highly-competitive college education program. Open attendance programs including yoga and Alcoholics Anonymous, both with arguably religious undertones, nevertheless drew 25 inmates at most. Moreover, religious inmates constituted a substantial percentage of the secular program participants; many who participated in voluntary

programs participated in both religious and secular programs. Finally, secular programs met less frequently than religious programs, as Table 1 suggested, convening once a week or less, compared to the ample religious programs almost every day of the week. As a result, the impacts of secular programs were less pronounced in prison life. Again, the availability of religious and secular programs not funded by state correctional dollars depended on willing volunteers to lead these programs.

Though much more restricted in scope, material benefits of secular programs loosely matched those of religious programs. For instance, Dorinda, the early 60s Jewish inmate serving time for attempted murder, waxed nostalgic for the days of knitting club, which ceased convening after the outside volunteer could no longer make the commute: "[The volunteer] always brought the most beautiful yarns and beautiful patterns. Sometimes she would have a party and bring food. It was so much fun." A participant in numerous programs, Dorinda also praised gardening club, throwing her head back in delight: "We have a vegetable garden, with some strawberries, some chard, some zucchini. Last year we had the most *delicious* tomatoes."

Similarly, secular events like volunteer appreciation day culminated with a reception of sheet cake, snack-sized bags of potato chips, and a vegetable platter. Inmates selected to attend this event tucked some vegetables into the bottom of their shirt for later. Furthermore, illustrating the human capital benefit of education programs, Shelley, a 50 year old white Christian inmate who also volunteered to work in the religious library, boasted, "I've gotten $11,000 worth of education [in prison]. Coming here I

would have never guessed they had that available for us." Shelley was referring to the free college education classes she was enrolled in.

Like religious programs, some secular programs allowed inmates to spend more time out of their cell. For instance, there was Heather, a late-50s inmate serving time for a financial crime who regularly attended church and Bible study. Six years earlier, Heather petitioned the warden for a honey bee program. She explained, "I want to do my part to save the environment. There's a real danger with the bee population. It's my way to help the world, my way to help my family from in here." After six years of planning, Heather saw the fruits of her labor when 45,000 bees were delivered to the prison to live in hives to pollinate flowers in the courtyard. Heather and only four other inmates got the privilege of being trained in beekeeping, and were allowed to tend the hives along the perimeter of the prison compound at certain times during the day, supervised by an officer.

Likewise, when I observed a yoga class one afternoon, the outside volunteer teaching the class urged, "Be present." She smiled and paused, taking her time with this lesson as we inhaled and exhaled intentionally. "The past is over and done with. . . . But the present is all we have." The message to inmates dwelling over their criminal past is clear.

Similarly, Dina, a non-religious middle-aged white woman serving a life sentence for spousal murder, grinned ear to ear as she told me how she survives prison: "I have a cat." 13 inmates were selected to care for cats from a local shelter, living in the inmate's cell insofar as both roommates agreed; the inmate would take the cat home with her upon

release. “We saved them; they were gonna be put down. They were cats on death row,” Dina explained. Widening her eyes as if alarmed, Dina shared, “When I first got [my cat], I was like, ‘I can’t believe I can have this much comfort in here. As women, we need to be able to care for something.” The cat program caused substantial resentment; several inmates complained the cats are “treated like queens” and are fed better than the inmates. But for Dina and the other 12 inmates in the cat companionship program, the emotionally comforting benefit of participation was unparalleled.

Socially, secular programs likewise provided social support and conflicts over positions of power. For example, a group for inmates over the age of 50 planned “grandmotherly activities,” as Constance, a 70 year old black woman serving time as an accessory to drug distribution, explained. Constance was elected as chairperson for this senior women’s program, and was also active as a church official and bible study attendee. Constance described the program: “We focus on all the issues of being an older person in the institution.” However, Constance’s election caused a stir. Bernadette, a mid-60s white inmate active in this group, who also sang on the Catholic choir, wanted to run for chairperson. When a new member decided to run against Bernadette and Constance, Bernadette checked the rulebook and found that participants were required to attend for three consecutive months before running for a position. The new member was miffed. “[This woman] went around telling everyone that I was a horrible person, and a snitch, and that they shouldn’t trust me,” Bernadette explained, sighing, “It was so bad that I got moved [to a new housing unit]. There’s a lot of bullying here.” Ultimately, Constance was elected over Bernadette.

Thus, in most ways, the material advantages of participating in secular programs mirrored the advantages of participation in religious programs. However, unlike religious programs, secular activities yielded a highly-coveted benefit: they could shorten an inmate's sentence. Margo, for instance, was a spritely 24 year old white woman convicted of drug distribution, theft, and assault, landing her in prison for a second time, this sentence for several years. When I asked whether she participates in religious programs, Margo smiled wryly to consider how frank to be. Then she shrugged: "I don't get any good time for them." "Good time" means days off an inmate's mandatory sentence. Instead, when Margo wants to leave her cell, she explained, "I come to work – I work in the kitchen. I come to work even on my days off. That gives me up to 10 days of good time." Secular programs yielded some material benefits for inmates; some of these benefits were highly desirable (like "good time") while others mirrored those of religious programs (e.g. time out of cell, special food). Yet the highly restricted availability of secular programs meant that far fewer inmates benefited. Unlike the constitutional guarantee of religious freedom for all inmates (42 U.S.C. § 2000cc), which allowed all inmates to access the potential benefits of religious programs, secular programs were much fewer and further between.

Summary

Overall, administrators and staff generally favored religion at Mapleside. As the Director of Religious Services for the state's Department of Corrections explained to me once in a matter-of-fact tone, the more religious inmates there are in prison, the more likely there is to be a "tranquil, calm mood in the facility." Officer McLean, the

corrections officer I got to know best during my fieldwork, herself a Seventh Day Adventist, explained that once inmates began participating in religion, "they calm down," pressing her palms flat through the air, down towards her desk to demonstrate this calming effect. The privileged position of religion, both constitutionally and in the eyes of the prison administration, protected it against criticism for its uneven distribution of material resources among the inmate population based on denominational affiliation and level of religious participation. Conservative Protestant programs yielded the most material benefits, followed, to a lesser extent, by other religious affiliations. Secular programs, by contrast, were far more restricted in access, such that resulting material resources benefitted only a sliver of the inmate population. The material experience of life at Mapleside, then, was shaped by the way religious programs distributed resources across the inmate population – whether or not an inmate participated, she was aware of this unevenness.

Our understanding of what governs the prison social world is incomplete without a consideration of the role of religious programs. Previous research on the prison social order has emphasized the role of fictive kinship, same-sex romantic relationships, and friendships. These studies, while valuably examining the interpersonal relationships that develop in prison, have overlooked how inmates draw upon available institutions such as religion to shape their social world.

While providing much-needed social support among inmates and between inmates and volunteers, countering the deindividualizing aspects of prison life, religious programs simultaneously created a social hierarchy based on the "church official"

system. A portrait far from rosy, at Mapleside, religion shaped the complexity of the inmate social order, experienced tangibly not only by those who participated in programs, but also as alienation by those who were not at the top of the hierarchy. While bringing inmates together, religious was also the source of significant conflict. In the conclusion that follows, I consider some alternatives that could more constructively facilitate inmate rehabilitation without overemphasizing individual failure in the shadow of profound structural inequality.

CONCLUSION

> "Are the souls of those entombed in the City Prison less valuable? Are these men and women less reclaimable? . . . The idea would seem to have taken possession of the public mind that prisoners have no souls and no sensibilities." R. N. Havens, 1846, *Report of the Prison Association of New York*

The problem of mass incarceration looms heavy on the American conscience. In July 2015, President Barack Obama became the first sitting President to visit a prison when he toured Oklahoma's El Reno Federal Correctional Institution. Afterwards, when asked what struck him the most about his visit, Obama replied, "[T]hese are young people who made mistakes that aren't that different than the mistakes I made . . . That's what strikes me – there but for the grace of God" (White House 2015). The religious tenor of Obama's remarks echoes centuries-old religious notions of what it means to be imprisoned.

Summary of Findings

"We are locked in, but not locked out" was a common refrain among inmates at Mapleside Prison. This rallying statement indicated that inmates felt a sense of engagement with outside society and a feeling of active participation in the making of their own worlds. One of the primary ways this happened was through religion.

At Mapleside, inmates who practiced religion gained material benefits, social outcomes of power and social support, and an alternative framework for interpreting incarceration. This framework redefined incarceration as part of "God's plan," and provided inmates religious language for dealing with hardships and legal decisions. Religious messages sought to dictate norms around gender and sexuality, working seamlessly with prison goals towards complementary aims. Furthermore, the uneven

distribution of material resources and social status between religious and nonreligious inmates meant that nonreligious inmates were nevertheless impacted by their presence. Because religious programs were the most pervasive option for voluntary programming in prison, they were central to the inmate experience in prison, and provided tangible advantages – real and perceived – to those who participated, compared to secular programs, which are highly selective in admission.

Being religious inside prison yielded tangible advantages; moreover, inmates actively used religious language and programs to make a slightly better life for themselves inside prison. From Maria who used religious activities to stay out of her 7' by 10' cell, to Adelaide who turned to her religious friends for emotional support, to Geraldine who used religious messages to make sense of the trauma and addiction in her past, the incarcerated women at Mapleside found a multiplicity of ways that religion could improve their social lives.

Those who did not participate in religion were left out of these advantages. Being adept at navigating these resources, along with disparities in the availability of resources by religious denomination, meant that some inmates had access to more resources than others. This stratified the inmate experience by whether or not an inmate participated in religion at all and their denominational affiliation. But participation did not come without cost. Being highly religious also meant waking up early on Sundays, being perceived as "holier than thou," and relinquishing romantic relationships that could otherwise provide comfort. Religion acted as an adaptive mechanism in prison that benefited inmates

unequally, leading to material and social disparities between inmates based on religious affiliation.

Theoretical Contributions and Broader Implications

About four months after I stopped conducting observations, I received an email from Chaplain Harper, requesting the recipients, mostly religious volunteers, to pray for Mapleside to build "a fully equipped chapel." Chaplain Harper wrote, "This is in agreement with the [state's] . . . goal to reduce recidivism because we believe a changed heart will cause a changed life." One major debate in the contemporary carceral system concerns whether prison should be punitive or rehabilitative. Is prison meant to punish? Or is it meant to change inmates' behavior so they will not commit crime after they get out?

At Mapleside, many aspects of prison intended to be rehabilitative. From viewing incarceration as part of God's plan to encouraging inmates to seek a "man of God" to marry post-release, religious messages sought to improve inmates' lives enough to help them desist from a life of crime. Religion operated as an adaptation to prison that promoted rehabilitative messages. Institutions like religion operate alongside the sociolegal aspects of the prison institution to reinforce prison goals.

My findings based on how religion works in prison apply to other institutions in prison as well. Family, for example, can function in similar ways. Materially, families can send care packages to inmates and visit several times a week, enabling inmates to spend time out of their cell. Visits, letters, and phone calls with family members may provide emotional support. Furthermore, inmates who are mothers find that their

relationships with their children are challenged and transformed by being in prison. The extreme difficulty of mothering behind bars means punishment is not only levied against inmates as individuals, but also as families. This has the potential to transform the very meaning of incarceration.

Education is another institution that could operate in a similar fashion to religion. Education classes provide tangible benefits in terms of credentials to help procure employment post-release. Inmates who take classes together may find an intellectually-stimulating environment of like-minded women who provide emotional support. Furthermore, given the highly-selective nature of college education courses in particular, participation could bring with it elevated social status and even a feeling of superiority.

Yet family, education, and other institutions like health care or labor are different from religion in prison in key ways. As detailed earlier, religion available to all inmates, given the constitutional mandate of religious freedom for prisoners (42 U.S.C. § 2000cc). Health care and GED classes are likewise universally available, but family ties and college education classes may be more limited. Additionally, religion – as construed in this study – is practiced collectively as a group of inmates, as opposed to the individual experiences of family and health care, for instance. This potentially makes religion more transformative of the prison social structure than other institutions. Moreover, examining the complex intersections of religion with race, class, and gender (e.g. Ellis 2015; Emerson and Smith 2001; Wilde and Danielsen 2014; Wilde and Glassman 2016; Wood 2002) suggests the importance of considering the way individuals draw upon religion within a population disadvantaged in all three categories.

Inmates actively drew upon religion to shape their social experience of prison. This contributes to our theoretical understanding of how incarcerated women draw upon available resources to adapt to the hardships of incarceration. Inmates' readiness to draw upon available institutions matters in light of decades-long debates on whether agency – defined as resisting prison rules or negotiating power – is possible in the highly constraining setting of prison (Bosworth 1999; Carlen 2002; Goffman [1961] 2007; Hannah-Moffat 2001; Kruttschnitt and Carbone-Lopez 2006; Law 2009; Mathiesen 1965; McCorkel 2013; Schaffner 2006).

Prior scholarship on prison life has focused on individual-level mechanisms of adaptation, largely ignoring how inmates are embedded within many institutions: family, labor market, education, and health care, to name a few (Lara-Millán 2014; Western and Pettit 2005; Wildeman, Schnittker, and Turney 2012). Furthermore, the notion that inmates experience prison unequally depending upon the institutions to which they have access tells us a great deal more about a deeply disadvantaged population than the more unilateral, individualistic adaptive tactics presented in prior prison studies.

"[T]here are as many prisons as there are prisoners – that each man brings to the custodial institution his own needs and his own background and each man takes away from the prison his own interpretation of life within the walls," wrote sociologist Gresham Sykes in his classic ethnography of New Jersey State Prison ([1958] 2007: 63). In this dissertation, I show that the "interpretation of life within the walls" is not entirely up to the individual inmate. Outside institutions profoundly shaped the social experience of prison as punitive or rehabilitative, and as such, understanding the role of religion – as

a case of institutional embeddedness – is essential to understanding how women adapt to prison life.

Policy Implications

Given federal support for religious programs in prison, understanding their impacts has direct criminal justice policy and practice implications. The limited existing research on the effects of religious programs in prison tends to focus on formal faith-based initiatives (e.g. Sullivan 2009). Instead, I examine the far more common informal, unfunded, volunteer-led religious programs.

Although the voluntary nature of participation deems constitutional the relative advantages of participation in religious programs (cf. Sullivan 2009; *Americans United v. Prison Fellowship Ministries*, 2007), such unequal benefits may not be the most practical tactic for improving inmate quality of life. Prison administrators should develop additional secular programs with comparable advantages to religious programs. Furthermore, at Mapleside, Muslim, Catholic, and Jewish religious programs yielded noticeably fewer benefits, real and imagined, than conservative Protestant programs. Variation in advantages by denomination appears to undermine the primary goals of religious freedom and, furthermore, underscores the importance of religious programming above and beyond personal faith.

Below I suggest three implications for policy and practice based on my findings.

1. *Governmental funding should support secular programs with benefits comparable to religious programs.*

Beyond religion's coping function (Kerley 2014; Maruna, Wilson, and Curran 2006), my study finds an array of benefits of religion, including material perks, social status, and social support. Federal and state governments should consider funding secular programs that can yield similar benefits to religious programs. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan and Attorney General Loretta Lynch took the first step in lending support to college-level courses behind bars by giving Pell grants to inmates ("Justice Department Announces First-Ever Second Chance Fellow" 2015). Additional measures should be taken to ensure that inmates who choose not to participate in religious programs are provided with equally appealing and equally beneficial secular alternatives. The secular alternatives should provide material benefits (time of out cell, special clothing, extra food), social support (both among inmates and with outside volunteers), and social status (related to achievement in these programs).

2. *Prison administrators should ensure that all religious groups gain equivalent benefits from their programs, such that one religious group is not privileged over another.*

I found an unequal distribution of resources between religious groups. Administrators should consider this to better understand the *mechanics* of religious practice in prison. Conservative Protestants had the best access to material resources, the most volunteers and subsequent programs to attend, and the support of the chaplain, who herself was a conservative Protestant. Muslim, Jewish, and Catholic groups, lacking a staff advocate, felt alienated by the administration and believed they could not adequately practice their religion. Jewish inmates encountered obstacles to acquiring candles, grape juice, and bread for their weekly Sabbath meetings, with only one officer on duty who

could not abandon her post to fetch those items from a secure location. Federal and state policy should do more to ensure that different religious groups have access to similarly beneficial resources, and prison policy should consider the particular needs of each religious group when determining where to store sacred objects.

3. *Community interventions for disadvantaged women, particularly with respect to pathways to imprisonment, including homelessness, drug addiction, lack of employment opportunities, childhood and domestic abuse, should consider adding faith-based lessons.*

One major finding of this dissertation is that female inmates define their incarceration as part of "God's plan." Time and again, inmates reported that "God saved me putting me here," or "I wouldn't be alive if I didn't get locked up." Communities, nonprofits, and local governments should consider crafting faith-based interventions that would resonate with disadvantaged women prior to incarceration. Despite their potential to reinforce neoliberal ideology of self-improvement and productivity, religious messages could alternatively promote positive change, as will be discussed in the section that follows.

Given the staggering number of repeat offenders with prior arrests, this could occur within the numerous opportunities for intervention prior to an offense that leads to incarceration (Tahamont et al. 2015). Improving the quality and availability of drug treatment programs, educational opportunities, vocational opportunities, and intimate partner violence and childhood victimization interventions, and adding a faith-based component would assist these programs in resonating with the disadvantaged, devout

women they intend to reach. These earlier interventions would improve disadvantaged women's safety, health, and self-efficacy before prison becomes necessary.

How Could Prison Religion Avoid these Pitfalls?

Despite its drawbacks, namely the colorblind, neoliberal ideology prevalent in Mapleside's religious programs, religion does have the potential to help improve prisoners' lives. There may be ways of achieving this that are not devoid of structure. Research on religion in social activism gives us some clues as to how this might work.

Outside prison, social movement scholars have demonstrated how religion can promote social activism (Brown and Brown 2003; Pattillo-McCoy 1998; Smith 1996; Wood 2002; Young 2002; Yukich 2013). The black church has historically been at the forefront of major political activism (Barnes 2005; Calhoun-Brown 1998; Gilkes 1998; Higginbotham 1993; Lincoln and Mamiya 1990; Swain 2008), including its key role in the Civil Rights movement (Chappell 2002; McAdam 1986; Morris 1984; Williams 2002). Black Christian theology of freedom and deliverance (Cone 1969; Levine 1977; West 1982) encourage community action (Pattillo-McCoy 1998; Wilmore 1998). Certainly religious groups vary in the extent of their activism based on a number of structural, socioeconomic, and theological factors (Baumann 2016; Billingsley 1999; Cavendish 2000; Chaves 1999; Harris 2001; McRoberts 2005; Savage 2008).

In the prison context, religion could potentially operate in the same way. Upon reentry, faith-based community organizing has been shown to use theology to fight for social rights of the formerly incarcerated (Flores and Cossyleon 2016). Pentecostalism in men's prisons in Brazil serves a collective, gang-like function (Johnson 2012) that is far

less individualistic than what I observed at Mapleside. Likewise, Nation of Islam (NOI) historically developed as collective resistance to the racialized inequality of the criminal justice system (Dubler 2013; Mamiya 1982). NOI not only provided an alternative framework of resistance for viewing incarceration, but also embedded inmates in a network of social support. Despite concerns of radicalization, NOI promoted obedience to prison authority: "Muslims know that they are suppose [sic] to obey the law. Muslims is not going to try to break and run from the prison houses, he's not doing to do that, or make an escape, he's not going to attack the guard or try to free himself and others" (Muhammed 1993:44) . Nation of Islam serves as a model that could promote obedience within a collective, mobilizing theology.

Similarly, instead of theologies that cast prison as part of God's plan, religious programs could promote Catholic liberation theology, which seeks freedom from socioeconomic and political oppression (Gutiérrez [1971] 1988). Jewish inmates could focus their theology on "tikkun olam," or repairing the world (Shatz, Waxman, and Diament 2005), which may focus on the striking inequalities of mass incarceration. Progressive black churches could promote resistance to the racialized carceral state (Alexander 2012; Olzak and Shanahan 2014; Wacquant 2009). These models of collective action could be reproduced in contemporary American prisons, given the right conditions. Due to their discretion regarding security precautions, prison administrators can select which religious groups they allow inside. Inmate-led programs could pick up the slack; where volunteers are not allowed, inmates are constitutionally protected in forming religious groups as long as they do not threaten the security of the prison. This

effort could be volunteer-led or inmate-led; either way, it is possible to envision alternative religious programs that encourage collective action and awareness of structural factors that lead to systemic mass incarceration of disadvantaged individuals.

METHODOLOGICAL APPENDIX

Getting Access to Prison

When I first decided to conduct my dissertation research in a women's prison, my ambitions were met with mixed responses. One scholar in the discipline told me that it would be "very difficult and maybe even impossible." Yet with my committee's support and a strong commitment to the project, I proceeded with caution. At the time, I did not anticipate the nine months it would take to gain IRB approval from my university and almost six months for permission from the Department of Corrections itself. It was a catch-22: before agreeing to my project, the prison's internal review board wanted approval from my university, and my university wanted approval from the prison. Further, the prison's review process was opaque, so I felt both disheartened and confused when my initial proposal was rejected without explanation. Not ready to give up, I asked if I could revise and resubmit my application. Countless phone calls, two batches of oatmeal chocolate chip Christmas cookies, and three revised research proposals later, I finally got my foot in the door.

I was granted eight weeks of preliminary access to the women's prison for fieldwork. It was now my job to get to know the prison staff, administration, and inmates. I first sent handwritten thank you notes to all those involved in granting me access. On the last day of my preliminary eight weeks, the chaplain agreed that I could continue my observations if the Assistant Warden approved. "The ladies [inmates] have loved having you," she explained. Building relationships with inmates had not been a strategic maneuver to prolong my access, but in retrospect, it seems to have been crucial. Though

there are no guarantees, I would have never successfully gained entrée to a closed institution without equal measures of persistence and the unbelievable generosity of those who held the keys.

Perhaps even more importantly, I got along with Chaplain Harper early on. I offered help her with office work for a few hours every Wednesday, but maybe out of politeness, she never took me up on it. It took walking into her office and asking, "What can I do for you today?" for her to put me to work. By the end of my 12 months of access, I was helping Chaplain Harper with office work anywhere from one to seven hours per week. I helped with photocopying, filing, mailing letters, making phone calls, taking phone messages, and even sitting in as an outside volunteer at religious activities, which some prison staff called "babysitting." My office work allowed me to witness Chaplain Harper counseling inmates, managing volunteers, organizing programs, and wading through seas of paperwork. These activities made me a familiar face, which granted me access to almost every room in the Main Hall.

Data Collection and Analysis

What I Observed

The vast majority of the data presented in this dissertation is drawn from ethnographic observations inside Mapleside Prison. Administrators granted me permission to observe activities in the "Main Hall" of Mapleside, the building that houses the dining hall, classrooms, gym, computer lab, religious library, and chaplain's office. I observed a range of everyday activities, from watching inmates eat lunch to teasing each other in the hallway, to writing essays for college courses in the computer lab. Because I

could position myself in a variety of rooms and corridors in the Main Hall, I witnessed countless interactions between inmates, both in front of and beyond the sight of prison guards. Likewise, I observed the lion's share of religious activities available to inmates for a wide range of denominations. My goal was to uncover the varieties of religious experience available to inmates; these observations painted a full picture of religious life in prison. During each and every observation of religious programs, I paid attention to scriptures cited, tone of preaching, forms of prayer, emotional responses such as tears, shouting, and laughter, and the racial, age, and social class composition of attendees. When I conducted observations on major holidays, including Good Friday, Easter, Pentecost, Mother's Day, Father's Day, Thanksgiving, and Christmas, I got just a small taste of what it must be like for inmates to be away from their homes and their families.

How I Conducted Interviews

Formal interviews were highly restricted. Bureaucratic restrictions meant I was prohibited from bringing a tape recorder inside the facility. Moreover, the lack of privacy in prison and inmates' highly regulated schedules made interview logistics difficult. The 18 sit-down interviews I did conduct were made possible thanks to significant coordination and flexibility by officers, who picked up the phone and called specific inmates to the Main Hall, and gave us permission to sit in the classroom closest to the officers' post. Sometimes we were allowed to close the door. During these interviews, I prepared a list of questions, and I scribbled down quotes and notes feverishly in real time while my interviewee spoke. I let the conversation flow, guided by key themes I knew I wanted to address, largely about religious background and daily life at Mapleside.

More often, I used the technique of "interviewing by comment" (Snow, Zurcher, and Sjoberg 1982), a method in which the researcher comments on the situation, implicitly inviting a response, either in disagreement, agreement, or elaboration. I found it fruitful given that prisoners are a vulnerable population, and I was careful to avoid any methods of requesting information that appeared coercive. In situations of unequal power, asking a question can be coercive in the sense that the respondent feels compelled to reply. Interviewing by comment is disarming; inmates need only reply if they wish. For example, when I once commented "That was a nice service this [past] Sunday," Asabi, a practicing Christian inmate, laughed and shook her head. "It was *different*. . . . This time the [Holy] Spirit didn't flow." Asabi's reply guided my subsequent probes to find out why she found this Sunday service less meaningful than most.

How I Analyzed the Data

Data analysis was based on the nearly 900 single-spaced pages of field notes I wrote over the course of the year. I printed out these notes and read them. Then, I reread the entire 900 pages while drafting a list of emergent topics. This included topics like alienation, anger, beauty, behavior in church services, bending the rules, conversion, deprivations, family, freedom, friendship, guilt, health, innocence, jealousy, joy, men, money, parole, rapport, roommates, security, sexuality, snitching, trauma, volunteers, womanhood, and worship styles. Then, line by line, I coded my field notes using the qualitative software program *Nvivo*, identifying the topic or topics related to each sentence. Throughout the initial data coding, I searched for disconfirming evidence to disprove the patterns I observed and strengthen internal validity.

Next, I analyzed which codes yielded the highest frequency, which codes co-occurred most often, and which codes occurred less frequently than I expected. Reading through memos that contained every instance a given code was mentioned, I identified evidence and disconfirming evidence for the most relevant themes (material benefits, social status, social support, sexuality, and God's plan). Ethnography is an iterative process, in which writing about prison culture required continually revisiting data, rereading existing literature, and comparing the utility of different theories. I repeatedly returned to the literature to compare my preliminary results to prior empirical findings and theoretical predictions. While writing, I incorporated and reflected upon disconfirming evidence.

How I Wrote about What I Saw

All names of people and places are pseudonyms. There are no composite characters. I reported what everyone said and did as best as I could. When I could not recall the exact phrase I person used, I summarized their comments rather than quoting them. For clarity of reading quotations, I removed "ums" and "likes," but I did not edit other substantive terms. To the extent possible, following Pattillo-McCoy (1999) I tried to recreate language as spoken, including "the pronunciation of words through the use of contractions and notations that signal when the speaker dropped a syllable or sound" (9; see also Brown and Casanova 2014). However, without a tape recorder, I relied only on my handwritten jottings of quotations, which were far from perfect at notating pronunciation. The result is, unfortunately, an inconsistent notation of pronunciation in

this manuscript. I tried to represent the voices of those in this study as best I could despite this limitation.

There were times when I had partial information about a person or a situation, and I reported it as such. I did not use composite characters. The convenience of a coherent narrative is not a luxury available to ethnographers. Sometimes, people directly contradicted themselves, like when Maria said, "They [officers] treat us like animals" and later called Mapleside "Camp Cupcake" to disparage how easy life was there. All people are inconsistent, and I tried my best to reflect that reality. In fact, I was glad to find moments when people contradicted themselves – it meant I was paying attention for long enough.

In Defense of Reflexivity

When ethnographers talk about how conducting the research affected them personally, it is often derided as self-centered or unimportant (see Black 2009; Desmond 2016; Dubler 2013; Waters 1999 for thoughtful reflections on this matter). In many ways, I agree. I have tried to foreground the voices of prisoners and prison staff in this dissertation – voices that are all too often hidden from public view. That I picked up Taco Bell for my drive home every week after Thursday night observations of Baptist Bible study is irrelevant to the analysis, even though it appears in my field notes frequently (except insofar as I could sympathize when inmates talked about craving Taco Bell or Panera).

Yet every observation I made was shaped by who I am and what I have been trained to notice. And, perhaps more interestingly, the experience of conducting this

research has transformed who I am and what I notice. For instance, early on in my fieldwork I noticed that the sound of keys jingling meant an officer was walking down the hallway, and surveillance was imminent. This typically did not alter anyone's behavior, but most inmates' ears perked up. What took me longer to notice was that when the jingling stopped, it meant that inmates were supposed to look towards the door to acknowledge the officer's presence. It wasn't until the officer wanted my attention that I realized I had been doing it wrong the whole time. When an officer approaches, the obedient thing to do is to make eye contact. Prison norms like these are highly microinteractional, learned with attention to status and power that I became more attuned to over time.

As such, I believe that it is important to reflect upon how my attributes and identities have shaped this research. I additionally believe it is useful for other ethnographers learning the trade. Moreover, at conferences, libraries, and departments across the country, sociologists are always asking each other, "How did you get interested in this topic?" It's a question that often provokes more personal answers than, say, it might for a neurologist studying epilepsy. For all the positivist critiques of hyper-reflexivity, this is an unavoidable question.

An Outsider Ethnography

Some prison scholars have argued that a true ethnography is impossible without living inside prison (see Owen 1998). Living in prison was entirely unfeasible, despite numerous friends joking, to my dismay, that I "could always get locked up." Were it possible to get a bunk in a cell, outsiders' clothing taken away, to be treated as an inmate,

I would have certainly learned a lot about prison life. This approach has produced a number of incredibly rich and fruitful studies by "convict criminologists," who have firsthand experience as former inmates (e.g. Borchert 2015; Irwin 1985, 2009; Ross and Richards 2003).

Yet the present study is not insider ethnography. Much of what I observed I simply could not have observed as an inmate. I got to talk to corrections officers and prison staff as an outsider, hearing things I would have never been told as an inmate. I got to observe programs for almost all religious affiliations, whereas inmates must choose one and only one affiliation, and are prohibited from attending religious programs outside of their affiliation. Through the lens of research, I got to talk to inmates from a range of backgrounds by race, age, educational attainment, religious affiliation, social class, and sexual identity. As an outsider, I did not have to find a place for myself in a given clique, and, frankly, I was under less scrutiny than might be a fellow inmate who was attempting to befriend others. Ultimately, with my sociological training in mind, I believe it was beneficial to be an outsider. As Ronnie, a young, black Muslim inmate put it, "I'm interested in an outsider's take on what it's like here." Many inmates acknowledged the struggles of prison life, and sought external validation, eager to hear what their fellow inmates had to say about it in a closed-door interview.

The concern is that I may not have seen what prison is "really" like. In fact, numerous inmates and volunteers warned me that I was not seeing "real prison" in the Main Hall. When I asked what that meant, Lexi, one of the Jewish inmates explained to me, "When people are up here [in the Main Hall], they're on their best behavior. Like

going to their parents' house." Lexi shifted in her seat to sit up straighter, illustrating this "best behavior." Karen, another Jewish inmate, chimed in, "Then they go back to their housing units where they are their true selves." Estrella corroborated: "Yeah, some of it's a façade. There are a lot of bad apples." Throughout my fieldwork, I was highly aware of this limitation. Indeed, when I toured the entire prison compound, I saw a stark contrast between the sterile, relatively peaceful Main Hall and the clanging, noisy, overheated, dark spaces of the housing units. When I first began my fieldwork, inmates routinely approached me with a friendly hug. The most talkative told me how great religious programs were at Mapleside and how everyone got along. Yet over the course of 12 months, the cracks began to show. Inmates would mock preachers in front of me, complain to me about other inmates and prison staff, and sometimes even argue or fight in front of me. Certainly they did not see me as a fellow inmate, yet over time, I witnessed a high volume of negative interactions in the Main Hall that were a lot more like "real prison" than my first couple months of fieldwork led me to believe.

Gaining Rapport as an Outsider

I have never been incarcerated. That I know of, only one member of my extended family served brief stints behind bars. That said, it was not difficult to establish rapport with the incarcerated women in my study. Of all my demographic characteristics, I think my young age and petite stature were most beneficial. Those features, along with my smiley demeanor, proved disarming to inmates, who never blustered or fronted dominance to me. To illustrate, the first time I met Brigit, a young black Muslim inmate serving time for murder, she plopped down next to me during Quranic study, and rested

her chin on her hands as she playfully intoned, “I got some questions for you, little woman.” Brigit seemed comfortable probing me about my research and personal religious background. Only once over the course of my year of fieldwork did an inmate “mess with me” – while walking down the hallway with Hanna, the chaplain’s inmate clerk, a young inmate whom I had never met before jutted her arm out in front of my face, presumably to trip me up. She cackled, and Hanna giggled sheepishly to help me save face. She shook her head and commented, “Inmate mentality.”

Being a woman granted me access to many spaces inside prison that may have otherwise been off-limits. It helped me connect, woman to woman. However, based on observations of male volunteers and female inmates, I watched men charm their way into rapport in this “society of women” (Giallombardo 1966). There is always more than one way to establish rapport (Stuart 2016; Waters 1999). Indeed, I found many inmates were warm and welcoming to any volunteer who showed care about their well-being.

As a young, white woman getting a Ph.D., inmates who had college or graduate degrees saw me as an ally and confidante. As Anne, a 40-year-old inmate with a Bachelor’s degree, commiserated, “It’s nice to have an intelligent conversation with someone; it’s *really* rare in here.” I made sure to talk to inmates from a variety of socioeconomic, racial, and ethnic backgrounds. Aspects of my background clearly shaped the way I interacted with the people I met at Mapleside. I established rapport with more black inmates than white inmates because black women were more heavily represented in religious programs, even though Mapleside demographics were about evenly split between black and white women. That said, given the relative racial integration of

religious programs at Mapleside, race was normally approached with performative colorblindness (Bonilla-Silva 2014).

Yet, as is typical in ethnography, developing connections with inmates did not happen without missteps. In October 2014, after I traveled to Indianapolis, Indiana for an academic conference, Maria was eager to hear all of the details. I shrugged and said, "It's just Indianapolis." Her expression turned cold and she raised one eyebrow, "*Just* Indianapolis?" I immediately understood the faux pas; Maria has been restricted to the square mileage of Mapleside for seven years now. Another time, about four months into my fieldwork, Chaplain Harper had to step out for a meeting, and bestowed her large, shiny keyring to me. While she was away, Hanna and Asabi, her inmate clerks, asked me to unlock the equipment closet in the gym to retrieve the microphone and speakers that were stored inside. I fumbled and fiddled with key after key on that big ring – none of them worked. Hanna called out playfully, "I guarantee you it's on there [the keyring]!" I jimmied and jiggled and nothing would open the closet. The clock inched closer and closer to the start time of the event that afternoon, for which Hanna and Asabi needed the audio equipment. One key finally turned, but would simply not unlock. I pushed and pulled against the door to no avail, as Asabi stood next to me. I looked over at her in defeat, to which she politely guessed, "I bet it's the one that turns." Feeling embarrassed and frustrated, I asked her, "Want to give it a try?" At this, Asabi's face turned stony as she replied softly, "I can't touch those." These gaffes were one major reason to conduct fieldwork for 12 months, to be discovered and worked out over time. I knew I had

established the right level of rapport when, about nine months in, some inmates started acting dismissive or annoyed with me.

My religious background also shaped this study. As is common in ethnographic studies of religious groups (Chong 2008), some inmates and religious volunteers viewed me as a potential convert, particularly in light of my interfaith background, half of my family being Jewish, the other half Catholic. At a Protestant worship service, for instance, the pastor led a prayer for me: "Lift your arms up toward her. Let's pray that not only will she successfully complete her project, but that her spirit will find Christ in the process." Esther, the lifer sitting in the front row, lifted both her arms towards me and furrowed her brow calling out, "Yes, God!" Because of my interfaith background and because I remained outside the prison social order, several inmates divulged religious struggles and doubts with me more than they might a coreligionist. I was aware that my affiliation with the chaplain could have influenced respondents' candor concerning their religious beliefs. When one inmate took to calling me "Chaplain in Training," I doubled down on reminding everyone involved about my role as researcher. I instead found that many inmates viewed me as a trustworthy outsider, to whom they could vent complaints about other inmates and about the religious department.

Identity Rupture in Establishing Rapport

In addition to establishing rapport with inmates, I made significant efforts to befriend corrections officers and staff. I engaged in a form of "inconvenience sampling" (Duneier 2011) throughout. "Inconvenience sampling" is the effort to go out of one's way to talk to respondents who are not only difficult to reach, but also potentially jeopardize

the identity already cultivated as an ethnographer in the field. Stuart (2016) effectively engaged in this form of sampling by conducting "walk alongs" with police after having extensively observed residents of Skid Row who were frequently the subjects of overpolicing.

In my case, the identity rupture was omnipresent. I did not begin my work only speaking to inmates, but rather tried to establish rapport with inmates and officers simultaneously. This was no easy task. But I knew the story of Mapleside would be incomplete without officers' perspectives. I prided myself on friendly relationships with officers throughout my research. Mid-way through my field work, I ran into one of the officers at the State Fair, only to receive an enormous, warm hug from her and a grin, ear to ear. I felt gratified that I was establishing relationships on both sides of the system.

It wasn't until Officer Candi, who normally controlled the sliders from behind a glass window, was patrolling the compound on foot, and spotted me in a classroom and came to hug me in front of a group of 20 inmates, that I ran into trouble. Estrella, who witnessed the hug, chided me, "You know the officers, too!" Eager to see my reaction, I shrugged and shook my head, trying to downplay it to minimize the damage. I do not know how effective that was, but Estrella continued to confide in me for the remaining six months of my fieldwork. Furthermore, not every officer warmed up easily. There were several officers who routinely ignored my requests or corrected my behavior, which may have helped inmates view me as an ally.

Emotional Vulnerability in Ethnography

Additionally, I shared personal details about my life with inmates. The official, mandatory volunteer orientation cautioned against this, but it was unavoidable on a practical level. When I got a costly speeding ticket, I couldn't help but complain about it to Maria. She teased me about my "lead leg" for the next several months, and she had every right to. When I said goodbye to Maria on the last day of my fieldwork, she smiled as she told me, "We appreciate you. People like you coming in here, we can talk about what's going on, what it's like in the real world. It makes me feel like I'm not locked up!" Maria turned away from me and laughed. She lifted her finger up underneath her right eye to dab it, and said, "Look, I'm going to cry."

Asking research subjects to share intimate details about their family, relationships, faith, sexuality, trauma, and crimes is inherently one-sided. Sharing personal details in return made it feel a little more balanced, even though I was highly aware that vulnerability can be a tool ethnographers use to establish rapport. After several months in the field, I felt I knew inmates well enough to act more natural in sharing personal details; I believed I could let up on my stronghold of impression management, something difficult to sustain rigidly for nearly 500 hours of fieldwork. For instance, conducting fieldwork the day after a difficult breakup, I was entirely unable to withhold that crucial detail when Coretta asked me how my "man was doing." We were waiting for Miss J's *Purpose Driven Life* class to begin that Wednesday night. She comforted me and recommended I order a pizza with pineapple toppings. The experience gave me a taste of the camaraderie available in this "society of women" (Giallombardo 1966). The following week, apparently Miss J had heard the news, and she invited me up in front of

the class of 28 students to share how I had overcome the struggle. She said to the class, “Rachel has been going through some things, too. You can see someone looking perfectly happy, Rachel is always looking like she’s good, but there might be things under the surface. Do you want to come up and share with the group?” Miss J was looking for a religious testimony, and though I was nowhere near emotionally prepared, I obliged. That experience was even more eye-opening to what inmates are subjected to all the time: gossip spreads fast, and you are put on the spot in religious programs to share personal details in front of acquaintances in the name of rehabilitation.

Conducting this research took an emotional toll. The trauma these women faced consistently shocked and dismayed me, and I found myself dwelling days later on the violent stories inmates described about their childhood, families, and setbacks. Along with melancholy, there was also boredom. After a few months, the routine got repetitive, and I found myself bored during Bible studies, desperately wanting to race back to my car to look at my cellphone and all the mindless distractions and instant connections with loved ones it contained. There were days when it took all the energy I could muster to enter the cold, scrutinizing place that is prison. Creature comforts were thrown into sharp relief when I talked to inmates who missed the cozy aspects of life. I learned to cherish my warm bed and soft pillows, the way my skin cooled down by splashing water on my face in the morning, and the feeling of a hot mug of tea in my hands while I sat on my sofa at home during afternoons off. In mid-December, I was struck with a brutal, congested, runny-nosed cold. Reluctantly convincing myself to persist in my research, I arrived at Mapleside to find that several other inmates had a similarly nasty cold. When I

saw Asabi curled up in the corner of the drafty gym, covering her shoulders with her denim jacket, trying to warm up on a plastic chair, I realized how lucky I was to be able to go home to my cold medicine and a fuzzy blanket.

"One visitor is leaving the compound," the corrections officer would report into her walkie-talkie as I left for the night after a long day of observations at Mapleside. This let other officers know to expect me safely in the Gatehouse, and that I was cleared to leave. I had to wait for two heavy, metal "sliders" and two chain-link gates to open, then walk through the Gatehouse to return my volunteer badge and collect my driver's license before I got to leave. All told, it usually took at least five minutes to get out of the building. I relished my long drive home. Sometimes I needed that time to decompress, to breathe in fresh air, to absorb how much wider the sky felt outside prison walls. Other nights, particularly after negative interactions with officers or feeling emotionally drained from impression management and tireless politeness, I used that drive to return to reality. And although I occasionally felt guilty that I was allowed to leave while inmates were still confined, I understood that I was but a blip. While inmates seemed to enjoy our interactions and value conversations in which I showed I cared about their wellbeing, I always reminded myself that inmates had lives outside of me. In writing my dissertation, rereading field notes, strategizing on how best to ask certain questions, the women of Mapleside were at the center of my life for a year. But these women had families and friends, lives outside of my research project. I never allowed myself to overinflate my importance in their lives. Their words and experiences made this dissertation possible; I

was someone nice to talk to a couple times a week. I only hope that this project makes the women of Mapleside feel heard and understood.

TABLES

Table 1. Religious and Secular Programs at Mapleside Prison

Frequency	Conservative Protestant Programs	Programs for Other Religions	Secular Programs[25]
Meets weekly or more	Worship service[26] Scriptural study[27] Bible Institute Discipleship class SHAPE class[28] Religious Movie Grief Counseling Celebrate Recovery Recovery in Christ Mime Ministry*[29] Praise and Worship Team* Adult Choir* Youth Choir* Dance Ministry* Drama Ministry* Banner Ministry* Usher Ministry* Equipment Set-Up Ministry* Christian Witness Training *Purpose Driven Life* *Battlefield of the Mind*	Worship service Scriptural study	Yoga Zumba Alcoholics Anonymous Al-Anon Chemical Dependency Anonymous Gamblers Anonymous Alternatives to Violence Program Emotional Awareness Program Toastmasters Crocheting Cat companion program* College courses* Gardening club* Service dog training program* Beekeeping program* Behavioral groups (divided by age)
Meets twice a month or less	Living an Amazing Life Kairos Religious Retreat Christian Mentoring Program		Girl Scouts Meditation Book Club Writers' Club Civil Legal Workshop Storybook Project[30]

[25] Excludes official social work, addictions, education, reentry and case management programs, which are not voluntary, since case managers sign inmates up to attend.
[26] Available for each religious affiliation.
[27] Available for each religious affiliation.
[28] "Spiritual Gift, Heart, Abilities, Personality, Experiences" by Rick Warren.
[29] Asterisk indicates selective admission to the program.
[30] Inmates record themselves reading a book, which is then sent to their child/children.

Table 2. Religious Affiliation of Inmates at Mapleside Prison (percent)

Religious Group	Percent Affiliated[31]
Conservative Protestant[32]	63
Catholic	7
Sunni Muslim	5
Lutheran	4.5
Wiccan	3.5
Seventh Day Adventist	3
Jehovah's Witness	2
Nation of Islam	2
None	2
Jewish	1.5

[31] Official records of the entire prison population in January 2015, coded by author. Every inmate, upon arrival to prison, fills out a religious preference form, which allows her to attend religious studies and worship services for that group. She may select only one affiliation. Religious affiliation may be changed every 60 days. Parameters are presented in percentage form to disguise distinguishable characteristics of the prison (ie. exact size of population). Percentages do not total 100 due to rounding and exclusion of smaller groups that did not hold services at the time of the research (e.g. Native American, Moorish Scientist).

[32] Includes African Methodist Episcopal, Apostolic, Baptist, Pentecostal, and other denominations. Worship services are held jointly for these groups under the "conservative Protestant" umbrella; Bible studies are held separately.

Table 3. Most Active Protestants Compared to Total Prison Population

	Most Active Participants	Total Prison Population
Age Range	24 – 58	18 – 80+
Average Age[33]	40.8	36*[34]
Percent Murder Offense	75	16*
Percent Drug Offense[35]	0.08	17*
Sentence Range	10 years – Life	1 year – Life
Average Sentence	29 years	11*
Stay Range	3.4 – 33.3 years	1 month – Life
Average Stay	14.6 years[36]	3.5 years

[33] All averages presented as means. Although not ideal, the Department of Corrections only provides means in official statistics.
[34] Numbers marked with an asterisk are rounded to protect the identity of the prison.
[35] Possession and/or distribution
[36] Thus far

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