

All the Wiser: Dialogic Space, Destigmatization, and Teacher-Activist Recruitment

The Prison Journal
93(2) 163–188
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DOI: 10.1177/0032885512472654
tpj.sagepub.com



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Abstract

This article examines instructor training for The Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program®, an organization that brings “outside” college students into prison, joining incarcerated men and women who become “inside students” for an undergraduate course. Ethnographic data revealed a purposeful stigma reversal for a group of men serving life sentences and a concomitant shift in moral career for instructor trainees. Through structured encounters with these men, trainees come to *see*, *speak*, and *behave* in ways that subvert conventional understandings of the stigma imposed on those in prison. The alteration of self and perspective experienced during the training drives participants to incorporate this activist ethos into their own teaching.

Keywords

Bakhtin, Goffman, moral career, stigma, the wise, total institution

Introduction

This research examines how the selves of “normals” are transformed through mixed-contact interactions with “deviants” in total institutions where the

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shame of a stigma is temporarily suspended (Gardner & Gronfein, 2005). We focus on how instructors are trained to teach as part of The Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program® (hereafter Inside-Out). Our analysis reveals that the most powerful aspects of the training are the mechanisms used to lift the stigma from incarcerated men. In this article, we explain how events, where negative labels are set aside and civility is reestablished, affect the moral careers of instructor trainees.

Our primary thesis is that instructor training for Inside-Out utilizes a series of encounters where the voices of the stigmatized are incorporated into trainee self-dialogues. As selves are restructured through this process, trainees begin to assume the status of “the wise” (Goffman, 1963). While Goffman and others have discussed the wise in relation to the stigmatized, this is the first analysis of the cultivation of wisdom in a moral career.

Theoretical Framework

The self is a relational phenomenon shaped through interaction where individuals replicate the distinctive behaviors and attitudes of their reference group while differentiating themselves from others in that group (Blumer, 1969). Aboulaflia (1986) described it as a “phenomenon of reflection dependent upon the significant symbol, upon sociality, upon being able to take the role of other” (p. 10). She notes that selves are cultivated through a process of reflexive appropriation where individuals recognize themselves as social objects eliciting responses from others. The process begins in face-to-face interactions that generate habitual patterns of self-awareness. These patterns integrate the fact of the other, as well as their attitudes, so deeply into the framework of self—in the form of a generalized other—that they impact behavior even when those others are absent (Blumer, 1969; Mead, 1967). From this perspective the self is not recognized as an object, but rather “the immediate, iterative, and symbolic experience of *relationship with* oneself and implicitly, *separation from* the other” (Bruder, 1998, p. 89).

Therefore, the self is permeated by otherness and emerges in scenarios of dialogical action. These conversations necessitate the agency to shift between *separating from* and *taking the roles of* others. This understanding of self as a locus of dialogue is bolstered by Bakhtin’s (1984) notion of an internal discourse between a number of voices maintaining different degrees of authority, reflecting the dialogue that makes up the larger culture. He explains that the self is formed by first internalizing this dialogue and then joining it. This model fits neatly with the notion of reflexive appropriation and Bakhtin’s “double-voiced discourse” parallels Mead’s (1967) generalized other.

Moreover, Bakhtin notes a polyphony in this double-voiced discourse, so the self is recognized as a multiplicity of voices that operate similarly to characters in a narrative structure.

Self-Control

Given its reflexivity, the self is dependent upon social interaction and vulnerable to mortification. The essential mechanisms at work within total institutions draw their power from these characteristics and seek to disrupt “the usual relationship between the individual and his acts” (Goffman, 1961, p. 35). Bruder (1998) explicates this mechanism in a discussion of the socialization process within a Christian monastery by documenting what Goffman (1961) referred to as a situation where recruits “sustain a willful desire to be stripped of their own will” (p. 47). Bruder (1998) explains that “newcomers to the monastery are enrolled in a program of training which is designed to replace existing ways of *seeing* oneself and the rest of reality, of *speaking* to or of oneself, as well as others, and of *behaving* which are in many respects diametrically opposed to their former lives” (p. 88).

In the socialization process, the institutional voice seeks an authoritarian status within self-dialogues. Through the deprivatization of self, recruits are internalizing the institutional monologue to transform themselves into a desired ideal. They actively reconstruct their selves in public spaces where institutional norms stand as the only legitimate point of reference. Dissenting voices within the self-dialogue are silenced and a form of self-imposed monologism is established in the pursuit of desired ideals.

Dialogic Space

McCorkel (1998) offers a contrast to Bruder’s (1998) monastic example in her study of an intensive drug treatment program for incarcerated women designed to dramatically alter the selves of its participants through a highly proscribed interaction order. The women are defined as addicts whose undesirable and immoral selves must be corrected. There are no free places within the program’s physical or conceptual space and the women are effectively compelled to report every trivial violation committed by their fellow program members. Modes of talking, movement, and posture are highly circumscribed to enforce mandatory ways to *see*, *speak*, and *behave*.

Women in this program negotiate the interaction order in an effort to secure early release. Some cynically play along with the formal rules while surreptitiously carving out spaces for dialogue among themselves as well as

with coconspirators. They colonize a space (calling it “the crack house”) where resistance to indoctrination is possible. For these incarcerated women, the crack house is a scene where they can, at least temporarily, *speak* and *behave* in ways that challenge the institutional monologue, maintaining aspects of their authentic selves (Scott, 1990).

Alternatively, Inside-Out courses provide a contradictory experience wherein education, as a fully legitimated goal of the institution, is facilitated by creating a mesostructure (Hall, 1995) that promotes normalized interactions and the suspension of institutional identities within the prison itself. The need to distance the self from organizational identity claims is channeled into a locus of positive social change. Here the self is reconciled to the social, and stigma is negated within the dialogic space offered through the program. Encounters with stigmatized people in a highly restrictive residential setting effectively transform the selves of nonincarcerated people.

The Moral Career of the Teacher-Activist

This research utilizes the concept of a moral career in conjunction with the notion of dialogic space to explicate the process of becoming wise. Goffman (1961) defines moral career as “the regular sequence of changes that career entails in the person’s self and his framework of imagery for judging himself and others” (p. 128). The consecutive alterations of self within the moral career are turning points in worldview marked by particular happenings (e.g., institutionalization or in this case Inside-Out training) that illustrate the link between the person and society through which a public event, such as a shift in social category (e.g., civilian to mental patient or teacher to activist) has a very powerful effect on the self. This shift parallels the experience of a “moral shock” (Jasper, 1997), in which basic expectations and moral identity are unexpectedly challenged by a situation or event, motivating an activist role.

As part of their training, potential Inside-Out instructors move through a sequential shift in their framework for judging themselves and others that constitutes progression through a moral career. While trainees generally rank in status from graduate student to department chair, each comes to the program as a teacher. During their week of training they are driven from the “prospect” phase of their moral career into the “trainee” phase through a series of intentional moral shocks. After completing the training and returning to their schools, those who go on to establish their own courses move into the “teacher-activist” phase and perhaps recruit new trainees through their dedication to the model and its effects.

This article explicates a particular series of moral shocks experienced during the training. Through planned exposure to a series of meaningful interactions, the trainees are gradually transformed from well-meaning but naive college teachers to increasingly “wise” allies of the incarcerated. What is more, the initially “discredited” and dangerous status of incarcerated men is seen to shift toward discreditable (i.e., normal) and then toward admirable (or heroic) in this training context. At the same time, the trainees begin to recognize their own discredibility and commonalities in relation to the increasingly normalized “inmates,” who are recognized as “incarcerated persons” carrying significant authority and moral weight within the dialogic space.

For Goffman, deviance does not have to threaten physical harm—as in the case of crime—to be feared. Since order is established and maintained through interaction, manners are the building blocks of social structure. Indiscretion, discourtesy, and bad taste challenge the touchstones that assure us our social world will not plunge out of control. Accordingly, Goffman’s notion of stigma is contingent upon the expectations regarding the categories of people we will confront within social encounters. When discrediting information arises, and people realize that those with whom they are sharing copresence are not what they appear to be (i.e., their virtual social identities do not align with their actual social identities) the interaction order is challenged. Thus, Goffman describes stigma as an interactive social process in which individuals violate normative expectations when a disjuncture between their virtual and actual social identities is discovered.

As part of Inside-Out training, normative expectations are challenged to elevate the stigmatized. This is particularly true when trainees interact with a group of incarcerated men mostly serving life sentences who are anticipated to be “thoroughly bad” (Goffman, 1963, p. 2). However, the setting and interaction reveal the merit and authority of their actual social identities. Thus, uncomfortable scenes are normalized through the direct inversion of Goffman’s stigmatizing process (Scheff, n.d.). As the process continues, trainees begin to *see* those incarcerated as being more like themselves, and themselves as more like the incarcerated. In this shift, they take a crucial step toward wisdom.

Goffman introduces his concept of the wise to describe a special class of relationships between deviants and normals who share special knowledge of those deviants (i.e., family, service professionals, and others). While Goffman 1963, mentions that a “heart-changing experience” (i.e., moral shock) may be required, he does not address the processes through which individuals become wise (p. 28). This paper uses the example of Inside-Out training to elaborate

the concept of wisdom. By examining the moral career of Inside-Out trainees, we elucidate the transition to the status of the wise and work to understand the meaning of wisdom itself.

Method

Inside-Out is a national program devoted to teaching college courses in correctional settings. These courses include traditional students as well as an equivalent number of students selected from prison populations. Instructors attend a 7-day training in Philadelphia, where they confront the potential dilemmas that accompany the unusual course structure. Trainees design courses and are equipped with an array of techniques for managing courses in prisons. They present their original courses, in the form of syllabi and sample exercises, to the Inside-Out Think Tank based out of the State Correctional Institution at Graterford (hereafter the Think Tank). The Think Tank is a group of Inside-Out alumni comprised of men serving life sentences and outside alumni who meet weekly to plan and discuss ways to advance the program.

One of the goals of Inside-Out is to shift the consciousness of each student. The destigmatization of incarcerated people is the key to the experiential process. Courses begin with a discussion of labels and a recommendation that negative terms (e.g., “inmate”) be exchanged for “inside student”—while the rest of the class is referred to as “outside students”. Starting with this relabeling, participants begin to realize that neither can be reduced to the one-dimensional image that they had previously assumed. As students interact over the course of a semester, incarcerated men and women no longer appear as just the misfits and monsters presented in popular culture, but as people with lives and families beyond prison walls, while college students become something more than children of privilege incapable of understanding why people succumb to the culture of street crime. In time, initial changes in how the two groups see each other translate further to change how group members see themselves, their futures, and their potential impact on society. This alteration of self and perspective constitutes a phase shift in the moral career.

From this perspective Inside-Out classes are encounters that begin as scenes or incidents (Goffman, 1963), but are quickly normalized and the potential for disruption is minimized. Goffman argued that, since no attribute is intrinsically discrediting and can only become so because of the relationship between those engaged in a social encounter, “a language of relationships, not attributes is what is really needed” to understand stigma (p. 3). Normalization during Inside-Out courses is rooted in a new *language of*

relationships that is first expressed in the labels of “inside” and “outside students” described above.

Before this relational understanding can be transmitted to students, it must exist within the program’s instructors. Instructor training uses a condensed version of the course that evokes the same transformative experience as the full course, using destigmatization of incarcerated men and women as the central mechanism in the socialization process. In this shift, trainees come to recognize people serving life sentences as something more than the sum of their crimes. Once the stigma is challenged, deeper understandings of the criminal justice system are sharpened and trainees are more likely to seize upon Inside-Out as an opportunity for activism. Our research examines the function of the training structure in leading participants to *see, speak, and behave* (Bruder, 1998) in ways that are diametrically opposed to the conventional understandings of crime, those who commit crime, and corrections. Most specifically, the analysis focuses on the training’s intentional reversal of the stigmatization process, and how it facilitates “wisdom” regarding people ensnared in the criminal justice system.

This study seeks to explicate the moral career of Inside-Out trainees as it progresses within the dialogic space of the program. Our attention is devoted to moral career *as experienced* by trainees as well as its structuring within the formal and informal elements of training. In the summer of 2007, the first author attended Inside-Out instructor training and took detailed field notes on the experience. Those data have been analyzed from a grounded theory perspective and coded for emerging processes and themes (Charmaz, 1983; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Analytic memos were essential in understanding how the training functioned. When the significance of destigmatization began to emerge, the field notes were recoded to determine what types of techniques were used in this process and to what ends. Eventually, it became clear that conditioning trainees to recognize the basic humanity of incarcerated people was an essential mechanism in recruiting members into this grassroots social movement. Particular training events began to stand out as high points in the socialization process. Field notes were once again recorded to understand the meaning of these events and how they worked within the socialization process. As supplemental data and a check on the other methods, he conducted extensive interviews with the program’s founder and 10 key figures within the organization. Interviews were generally unstructured and lasted from 1 to 3 hr.

As a check on the first author’s potential bias, the third author attended an instructor training session in the summer of 2009. She used the same methodological approach described above. Along with her participant

observation, she also conducted interviews with all of her colleagues in the training. The second author, by contrast, was at first completely separate from the Inside-Out organization, but during work on this article, was recruited as an instructor and attended the training in 2011. Our division of labor was designed to offer a combination of objectivity and experience.

Becoming Wise

Instructor training for Inside-Out has a distinctive thematic arc that is fundamental to the socialization process. The curve of this arc has been marked by an initial recruitment to the program, immersion within the training environment, a tour of the Philadelphia Prison System, and two sessions working with the Think Tank. This section provides a basic description of these meaningful training events and considers their impact upon potential instructors.

Recruitment

Inside-Out utilizes a snowball recruiting mechanism; as soon as trainees adopt the teacher-activist role, they recruit colleagues whose teaching interests might fit into the program structure. Generally, recruitment for Inside-Out begins at the moment when the prospect first learns of the program. While the organizers do their best to advertise through emails and sessions at conferences, much of the recruitment occurs through collegial social networks. One instructor described his initial recruitment as follows:

A couple years ago a really good friend at another university told me about Inside-Out.

He asked me to go to the training with him, but I was like, “No I can’t make it. I have too much going on with work and stuff.” So, he gets back from the training and immediately starts up his own Inside-Out class. At that point I still didn’t even know what it was really all about, but every week he’d call me while he was driving home from the prison and tell me how great the class was. I didn’t really understand what he was doing in these classes, but when he was describing it he’d always say “It’s *good*. It’s really *good*.” I remember there was just something about how he was pronouncing the word “good” that caught my attention. It had a certain weight and I was thinking that there really must be something to it. So, when the opportunity presented itself again I took it so I could find out what it was all about.

Stories of individuals joining the program and then recruiting friends are very common. This one captures the running theme of a potential reward connected to Inside-Out that is not available through ordinary teaching. As is common among those recruited to social movements (Dani, 2008), a number of active instructors report feeling burned out or disillusioned with teaching prior to involvement in the program. Teacher-activists describe a “second wind” that accompanied their involvement with Inside-Out. Many claim that the experience “breathed new life” into their regular teaching, encouraging them to include pedagogical techniques and key themes like civic engagement in their other courses.

Arrival (and Departure)

The typical Inside-Out socialization begins with a trip to Philadelphia. (This is the “classic” description. More recently, new sites and new trainers have been developed, and other milestones will be experienced.) Many participants travel by plane, so the process starts at an airport. However, by the end of their training even the terminal may have new meaning to them. As one teacher-activist explained:

I’ll never forget going to the airport after the training. I really missed my family and couldn’t wait to get home. But it was either the same day or the day after the terrorist attack on Heathrow airport in England, so security was intense. At first I was really worried because I only got there about an hour before my flight and the line at security stretched out the door. Then, I’m standing waiting to go through the metal detectors and scanners and the TSA agents are marching around shouting out reminders about three ounce bottles, lighters, belts and taking our shoes off. In that moment, I felt exactly the way I did when we were going into [the prison]. All of the ID checks, and paperwork, scanners, and surveillance felt so similar. Except this time it was different. This time I wasn’t waiting for a tour or waiting to go work with the Think Tank. This time I was waiting to go home. So, on the one hand I was thinking about how we make the world a lot like a prison, but on the other I was thinking about how much I wanted to see my family and I was feeling anxious about missing the plane. So, while I’m trying to figure out how I’m going to have to get a later flight if I miss mine, I realize that this is like being on the other side of the prison. There was all this security between me and my home and it just felt awful.

The term “transformative” is often used to describe both the Inside-Out courses and the instructor training; stories like this one exemplify the evolution of self that trainees experience. The narrative clearly illustrates an alteration in consciousness where the individual has internalized the voices of people who are incarcerated, and is able to *see* the world from their perspective while returning to everyday life. Such events serve as moral shocks (Jasper, 1997), where an individual’s basic expectations are challenged and then motivate them to take on an activist role.

As the socialization moves from early to later stages, the intensity grows. The training takes place at a retreat center in a rural setting outside of Philadelphia; most trainees arrive from disparate locations without knowing anyone else in their cohort and unsure of exactly what to expect. As one trainee put it:

I think the biggest thing for me when arriving at the retreat center was just taking in the surroundings and figuring out how I was going to handle spending the week there with a bunch of people I didn’t know.

Many trainees note this initial anxiety and it turns out to be a driving fuel for the socialization, since the training itself includes a concentrated version of the undergraduate course. Under these circumstances the initial apprehension regarding a week in semi-isolation with a group of strangers parallels the experience of inside and outside students as they begin a course. Of course, the social distance between academics is minimal compared to the two groups in an Inside-Out class. Yet, it offers an initial uncertainty that is essential for the learning experience.

To diffuse (or utilize?) this tension, the process begins with trainees seated in a circle discussing the importance of shared space and boundaries. This practice is essential to the training; Inside-Out courses emphasize this inter-actional structure, putting inside and outside students into circles to directly engage one another. As one graduate student explained:

Up until Inside-Out, I saw circles as an annoying classroom setup. I was never very comfortable with them because everything is out in the open and everyone can see everyone else. However, that fact became a reason why throughout the training I began to value the circle. It became a place where everyone in the room was seen as an equal, even though we all came from different backgrounds and held different positions.

This trainee has experienced how the creation of a dialogic space, through something as simple as a seating arrangement, can change the dynamics and allow for equal voice among people of vastly different statuses.

While seated in the circle, trainees are asked to introduce themselves, explain why they are interested in the program, and discuss any concerns they have regarding Inside-Out or the training. During this exchange, participants often spontaneously disclose very personal things about themselves that help to explain why they are pursuing the training. In one session, several trainees opened up about their histories with addiction, mental illness, crime, and incarceration. Other trainees discussed either their parents' or children's histories with these problems as well as the molestations, rapes, and murders of close friends and family. One trainee even talked about a close friend from graduate school who was serving a life sentence for murder.

Such disclosures are the basis of a powerful, and for many unexpected, exchange in which a group of academics, who may otherwise have been interacting in the standard collegial manner, spontaneously begin sharing intimate details about their personal lives. Since participants tend to move in this direction without any push from the trainers and can obviously choose to withhold information, it is not a "planned" element of the training. However, it is a highly significant moment and lays the groundwork for transformations in the ways trainees *see*, *speak*, and *behave* that come later. Being socialized into the process with people like themselves can be seen as anticipatory exposure, facing "the other" in themselves and those still unmet.

During their introductions the group begins to look at themselves and each other as both victims and victimizers. Rather than *seeing* stigmatic information as evidence that the discredited individual is unlike the presumably normal participants in an encounter, the process pushes trainees to recognize their own potential for discredit as well as that of similar others. As trainees negotiate this shift in perspective, the discrediting information and the power of stigma begin to lose their potential for social disruption, reflecting a shift in the moral career.

Once the group finishes this discussion, the topic shifts to the history of the program. The program director (hereafter Lori) explains how the idea for Inside-Out arose (see Pompa, 2002).¹ This story is important for presenting a key moment in the history of the program and allowing the trainees to understand how they might fit into something larger than themselves. But it has an even more important activist subtext, centered on the notion that an adjunct faculty member, facilitating a dialogue between undergraduates and incarcerated men, acquired from a man serving a life sentence the germ of an idea that

she would eventually turn into a national program. This is important organizational mythology, highlighting the potential that individuals, both on the inside and outside, have for achieving positive social change. Trainees report being inspired by this story, embracing Lori as not only the leader of the program, but also a major role model combining activism and destigmatizing practice. In *seeing* Lori as an exemplar of the teacher-activist, trainees internalize the possible outcome of their own moral careers.

Going Inside

In a brutal contrast to the preceding training experience, the next stage in the process is a tour introducing trainees to the Philadelphia Prison System. This event plays a crucial role in the development of the moral careers of the trainees. The descriptions and narratives that follow highlight this process. Specifically, trainees begin to *see* incarcerated men and women as more than their crimes. Once trainees arrive at the Detention Center, the contrast is immediately apparent. Trainees experience a strong moral shock upon entering a cellblock within the facility. As a group of primarily female trainees enter the cellblock, most of the population explodes into an unintelligible mass of cat calls. While some men hoot and holler, others point to the outdated television mounted high in one corner and yell out, "Hey, mommy! Check out my flat screen plasma!" Still others try to cut through the chaos and gain the attention of specific female trainees, asking their names and where they are from. This degree of madness is paralyzing for those unaccustomed to correctional environments, and even trainees with experience in leading students on prison tours are taken aback. As the eruption continues, the trainees filter into a large cell, until they are standing among the 40 men held captive within it. This shift in location further heightens the sense of disbelief among the trainees. One trainee explained it as follows:

So, the place is totally crazy and now we're going into one of the cells?
My mind was already blown and then we're standing right next to all those guys.

However, the tension is quickly diffused as Lori carves out a dialogic space, treating the men with respect and asking them questions that elicit more direct knowledge about incarceration than most of the trainees have ever been exposed to in their careers.

The normalization of this scene is a moment of role modeling in which trainees observe, generally with a sense of awe, one woman walks into a cage

holding a group of men in profoundly dehumanizing conditions, inviting them to thoughtfully express themselves in conversation. The environment is temporarily transformed from a world of savage brutality to a place where people can openly communicate as equals. In this exchange, trainees begin to *see* what Inside-Out really is: the facilitation of dialogue within a monologic environment. This encounter reinforces the origin story presented above, as trainees *see* one person change the relational dynamics, at least momentarily, in an utterly inhumane environment. Here, the unintelligible cacophony is shattered and individual voices emerge:

When the group finishes their tour of the Detention Center they travel to a nearby women's facility. Here, the modern construction of the building gives it a more orderly and controlled appearance. However, this difference does not feel like an improvement. While the physical structure provides a less chaotic, almost dorm-like environment, and it is painted in various pastels, the women's uniforms were obviously designed for men. Trainees are struck by these half-hearted attempts to feminize what can only be recognized as a hyper-masculine environment.

Trainees describe the more subtle uneasiness within the women's facility, in stark contrast to the terror of the Detention Center. Most trainees report that they did not feel as threatened within the women's facility, so upon entering they were immediately able to *see* the women with a greater sense of empathy.

The essential moment in this event occurs when the cohort enters one of the housing units and Lori quickly convenes a group of women to talk to the trainees. The trainees and the women are taken to a room where chairs are arranged in a circle and each trainee is seated between two incarcerated women. Within this dialogic space, the women talk about their lives before entering the culture of street crime, their time in prison, the consequences of both, and their plans for their lives after they are released. Many discuss their lives and careers in the "straight" world while others talk about trying to recover from the ravages of drug addiction. This exchange is very important for the trainees, opening their eyes to certain realities of crime and incarceration that would not be visible without it. One trainee noted that she was most struck by the condition of the women's teeth. She explained:

It was their teeth. I couldn't stop looking at them. They were so bad. It was just terrible. I couldn't stop thinking about it and then I started to wonder about the rest of their health. They were talking about all of the

drugs and how they had hurt them and I was like, "If they weren't getting any dental care and they were doing all kinds of drugs and working as prostitutes, what about the state of the rest of their health?" It must just be horrible.

This sentiment was echoed within the group. Such observations demonstrate that trainees have experiences that allow them to *see* incarcerated men and women as more than offenders; they are also able to *see* them as victims, and most importantly as people with whom they can empathize. In both settings, incarcerated men and women are humanized for the trainees. Through this normalization, they are able to grasp the dialectic between victim and offender that is absent from the ordinary sense of the stigma attached to those who are incarcerated. The tours of correctional facilities are seen as more moral shocks that once again challenge the trainees' basic expectations and ways of thinking.² They provide a foundation for the trainees' experiences later in the training when they are interacting more deeply with a group of incarcerated men.

The Heart of the Program

The day after the tour of the Philadelphia Prison System, trainees are transported to SCI Graterford, a maximum-security prison where much of the national program is organized, to work with the Think Tank. After an extensive tour of the facility, trainees move to a room where they once again arrange about 30 chairs into a circle and sit in every other one. After they are seated, the Think Tank members filter into the room. By this point, most of the trainees are no longer as conscious of the fact that the men are all Black or Latino as they were during the earlier tours. However, this unconsciousness is quickly shattered as the one White member enters the room. His presence makes for a dynamic contrast and is essential in helping trainees to recognize their own deep-seated racism. As one trainee put it:

I hate to admit it but (that guy) freaked me out more than anyone else. He came in wearing nice glasses with his hair neatly combed looking like just some ordinary guy. And then his demeanor was so sweet. I know it's reverse racism, but all I could think whenever I looked at him was "the scary jail man." I figured that he must be a serial killer or something.

Dan's presence is an opportunity for trainees to address racial expectations. It is common to see minorities in prison, but the presence of well-educated

and professional Whites can be threatening for them. The thought of someone like Dan facing a life sentence makes the nightmare of incarceration seem possible for trainees despite their privileged social status. Seeing poor minorities (i.e., others) in this circumstance provides enough distance for trainees to remain comfortable, while Dan challenges the assumptions of many of the highly educated, middle class, mostly White trainees. As reflected in the narratives, this experience has a powerful effect on the trainees by challenging their own ideas about race and incarceration. In this context, trainees begin to recognize their own discreditability and commonalities in relation to an incarcerated population

Once everyone is in the room, Lori passes around materials so that everyone can make nametags. Under normal circumstances this would be an insignificant event. However, within the institutional setting, it serves as an important initial step in facilitating basic interaction between the two groups. In this activity, normals and deviants are forced into a simple exchange that helps set the stage for later interactions. When this task is complete, the groups move into an “ice breaker” activity. For this event the group arranges their chairs in two circles with one circle inside of the other and each chair from one circle directly facing a chair from the other (i.e., a “wagon wheel”). The trainees sit in the inner circle, face-to-face with the members of the Think Tank. Trainees are asked to finish sentences such as “The funniest thing that ever happened to me was . . .” with each Think Tank member. Once both of the individuals in each of the dyads finish the sentence, all the trainees stand up and rotate one seat to the right. With this shift they confront a different Think Tank member as well as a different unfinished sentence. The cycle continues until each trainee has encountered every member of the Think Tank. The activity is very effective for relieving the significant tension within trainee groups. Through this process, trainees are not only changing their ways of *seeing* oneself and others, but begin to change ways of *speaking* and *behaving* as well. One trainee described this as an “amazing transformation” and went on to add that:

In all of the tours we were shifting between various awful settings. Everyone was so scared and uncomfortable. Then we’re interacting with the guys from the Think Tank and at some point I just forgot we were in a maximum security prison talking to a bunch of guys who are doing life. It was just like we were back at the retreat center doing our usual thing.

This sentiment is echoed by numerous trainees and while it certainly reflects the experience of the first author, there was a complication that added to the

richness of the encounter. The complication came in his initial interaction with a Think Tank member named Jamal. The following narrative illustrates a shift in the first author's ways of *seeing*, *speaking*, and *behaving*. He explains:

Jamal was an African American man in his early thirties who wore prison-issued glasses and a long beard. When I rotated to the chair in front of him he was seated at the edge of his chair with his elbows on his knees and his head down and to the side. After I sat down, Jamal looked at me out of the corner of his eyes and in an extremely minstrel-like voice asked me to stand up. When I met his request, he also stood and began comparing himself to me saying, "Oh, you sizeable. Yeah, you sizeable." I found this to be slightly disconcerting and it cued me back into the strangeness of the prison environment. As we sat back down Jamal resumed his posture and asked, "Where you from?" When I answered he responded, "Oh, ... Yeah I heard a-dat. Where you teach at?" After I told him he explained, "Oh yeah, I think I, I think I heard a-dat." In the moment I was completely befuddled. The culture shock of the tour coupled with Jamal's affect left me with little idea of how to react, until Jamal followed his claim to "have heard a-dat" with the very clear articulation, "Nah, I'm just fuck'n with you. It's only the second largest school in Pittsburgh."

Jamal's shift in character from the racial stereotype he was initially portraying, to the extremely intelligent and engaged person that he really is, offered a blow to my understanding of the overall encounter and my place within it. I assumed that the game Jamal was playing with me was based on his assumption that as a white intellectual, I would expect him to be more like some type of Jim Crow character than a man who was earning a degree in liberal studies while incarcerated. After witnessing the undeniable consequences of racism in our society during the tours, I was both hurt and angered by these assumptions. Based upon this combination of emotions I began seeing Jamal's "fuck'n with" me as unfairly manipulative. My feelings were that Jamal's presentation of himself as a racial caricature to someone completely foreign to the environment was mean-spirited. Later, despite this judgment, or perhaps because of it, I felt the need to repeatedly engage Jamal and show him how unracist I really am.

After being fairly shaken in my experience with Jamal, I rotated on to a Puerto Rican man, Johnny, who offered a much more friendly initial greeting. From the minute Johnny had entered the room, he conveyed an upbeat and positive attitude that was evident in everything from his smile and the bounce in his step to an elaborately designed nametag that read “el Fantastico.” As soon as I sat down with Johnny and told him where I was from, Johnny started talking about a time when he was “staying there” and how much he liked WYEP [a radio station]. When I commented that I also liked that station, Johnny started discussing his taste for alternative music and ran down a list of all of his favorite bands from the nineties.

The conversation with Johnny was a sharp contrast to my encounter with Jamal because, rather than feeling like I was being played with as a result of assumptions about my racial attitudes, I felt as if we were exploring a mutual interest. It seemed as if Johnny might have been able to use my age and race as variables enabling him to predict that I might be interested in and familiar with the musical genre. This was an inversion of my sense that Jamal had seen me as a privileged white boy and decided to play on, what he had presumed to be, the accompanying racial attitudes. Moreover, Johnny was playing on a racial stereotype that I held without even knowing it. My surprise at his appreciation of a musical genre enjoyed by “people like me” was based on the assumption that Johnny wasn’t “like me” and would probably prefer some more urban Latino type of music.

Of course, these are merely the first author’s interpretation of the men’s goals in these exchanges and he may be mistaken. However, each is worth reporting for two reasons. First, as a trainee who eventually went on to establish his own Inside-Out course and become very active in the program, it was *his perception* of training events—just like those of the other participants interviewed—and, *the impact of these perceptions*—that is really the subject of our analysis. Second, his interpretation is highly plausible and he has found no better ways for explaining the situations described.

Much like the incident involving Dan, our first author’s interactions with Johnny and Jamal illustrate a shift in his framework of imagery for judging himself and others from what would be expected during encounters with the stigmatized. Above, he explains that Jamal’s assumptions regarding the connection between his virtual social identity (i.e., a privileged white man) and his racial assumptions were actually painful for him. Moreover, he explains his

efforts to prove to Jamal that he was not a racist. In this shift, it is the “normal” who is attempting to manage a perceived stigma (and master status) among a group of “deviants” and to influence how he will be seen (Hughes, 1945).

Significantly, these encounters illustrate that Johnny and Jamal’s voices had enough credibility within the author’s dialogic of self that their sense of him as a racist or otherwise was very important within the situation. Johnny enters the dynamic by pointing out a commonality and shared interest between them, essentially making him one of their “own.” The dialectic of degradation (i.e., being made to feel like a racist) and elevation (i.e., being made to feel like part of the group) demonstrates that our first author was developing a model for evaluating others and himself that represents an obvious stigmatization of incarcerated men. Clearly, their ability to elicit feelings of both warmth and shame is evidence that he did not *see* their stigma in the usual light.

Eventually the trainees form groups and design original courses on the subjects of their choosing. After deciding on a course topic, they pitch the idea to the Think Tank, and members join trainee groups based upon their interest in the proposed ideas. In this activity, conventional roles and statuses are inverted. Since the Think Tank is a group of alumni playing a central role in the program’s continued development and national expansion, they are in the position of expert while the academics are novices. This event provides the trainees with a crucial experience of the program’s transformative power. Specifically, a group of people who have invested countless hours and effort to acquire credentials, establish impressive curriculum vitas, and pursue status are now striving to impress a group of men who are at the absolute bottom of the social hierarchy. One trainee expressed this sentiment as follows:

I was so nervous when we were presenting our idea. I mean these guys are basically running the program and they’ve done this same project with everyone who’s ever been trained. I was afraid they’d think our course idea was stupid. Then, after we pitched it, Tyrone was interested and wanted to join our group. I mean *Tyrone*. He’s like one of the leaders in the Think Tank and he liked our idea. I just couldn’t believe it. It was so great.

This sentiment was echoed by numerous trainees, who noted how much they enjoyed being with “the guys” and how just talking to them and looking into their eyes was an intensely humanizing experience that eventually translated into respect and admiration. One of the younger professors expressed this idea as follows:

Look at the older guys in the group. They've been here so long and read so much that they obviously know a lot more about criminal justice than I do. Seriously, put one of them in the right sweater or sport coat, give them the office next to mine and then ask some student to find the criminologist.

This statement is evidence that the socialization process is effectively destigmatizing the incarcerated men. As the stigma begins to lift, trainees come to *see* the guys in the Think Tank as mentors and partners in the program. Moreover, as the voices of the men from the Think Tank gain authority, trainees begin to demonstrate a sense of pride based upon the guys' expressions of approval. Based on the narratives presented above, it is evident that this part of the training is a significant event in the moral careers of the trainees, and plays a major role in the process of becoming wise. Their perceptions of the Think Tank members shift towards admirable in this context and influence new ways of *seeing, speaking, and behaving*. Since these new partners are physically confined to the facility, trainees feel a sense of indebtedness to them and are driven to accomplish as much as possible on their behalf through efforts in the outside world. With this, it is clear that the men of the Think Tank become part of the polyphony that makes up the discourse of self among trainees.

Ashamed and Inspired

The second day with the Think Tank is spent running through the new class activities and critiquing courses. During these activities, trainees are extremely nervous about presenting their work in front of a group of course alumni (i.e., the Think Tank as well as former outside students who are still active in the program). In one of the course activities during the first author's training, participants were given slips of paper with different social categories on them and told to portray these statuses as if they were at a wedding reception sitting at a table with five people they did not know. He describes it as follows:

Everyone was required to guess what stereotype the other five members in the group were portraying and write it on a piece of paper taped to their back. In my group, an African American Think Tank member in his sixties named Clark introduced himself as follows:

I like fast cars and fast woman. I treat my women wrong and I don't care who knows it. I like money and gold chains and I ain't afraid to do what I got to do to get them.

Some read this presentation as that of “rapper” while others decoded it as “thug.” At the conclusion of the exercise Clark explained that within the exercise, as in life, he was a Black man. Moreover, he expressed disbelief at the labels that his fellow group members had attached to his presentation. He explained:

No, see they knew I was *black*. They just didn’t want to say it cause they felt bad about it. You know, they’re nice people and they don’t want to hurt my feelings or anything like that.

Again, much like in the earlier interaction with Jamal, I was dismayed that an African American would expect me to buy into such a stereotype. This issue was raised in a full group critique of the exercise and I attempted to explain that I did not, in fact, think Clark was portraying a Black man during the exercise. I argued that the characteristics he was portraying were much more in keeping with the lifestyle that is frequently touted in mainstream rap music than anything I had ever seen among African Americans in their everyday life.

As part of the ensuing discussion, a younger African American Think Tank member named Joe began questioning Clark regarding his assumptions about his group. Joe had an obvious intelligence and a thoughtfulness that allowed him to really see both sides of the issue and ask insightful questions. Since I was experiencing the same type of racial anxiety that I had earlier faced, I was relieved to have someone in a minority status effectively taking up my cause.

Much to my surprise, Joe approached me during lunch and explained that he had been pleased when he learned that I was participating in the training. I was fairly perplexed by this statement because I had no sense of how my presence could be of any particular significance to anyone. Joe went on to explain that he was hoping to be transferred closer to our shared hometown, and in that eventuality, he would be very interested in seeking an outlet for community activism. Considering the general apathy toward the problems plaguing urban environments, the thought that a man physically banished from his home was now seeking a positive activist role within that community made me feel both ashamed and inspired. The shame was based on a sense that, like many free people, I sometimes lack even the motivation to unplug my cell phone at night to conserve energy, while a man with every reason to give up, was desperate to make any type of positive social change that he could. More importantly, I was inspired because, having completed the program, I was in a position to immediately get to work on setting up my own Inside-Out class.

Yet again, as with Johnny and Jamal, our first author was dismayed by assumptions that could discredit him as a racist and then offered partnership within the program by one of its members. Joe's recrediting of him as a potential ally in local activism was the ultimate acceptance within the group and its significance was duly recognized. Many instructor trainees report this kind of profound interaction and consider it a spur to both their initial and continued activity within the program.

However, as with prior Think Tank interactions, there was a complication at this point that illustrates the changes in our first author's framework of imagery for judging himself in relation to these stigmatized others. He notes:

Earlier in the training, when we were sitting with the guys from the Think Tank, Dan made a comment about never making any promises to the inside students. He said, "These guys get lied to so often by so many people that it's ridiculous. Once you promise them something that you can't come through with you're going to lose all credibility." So, after my talk with Joe, his group gave a presentation on Inside-Out and social activism that was a real highlight of my training experience. I was so inspired that as we were all saying good bye, I went up to him and said, "Joe, I'm going to get right on setting up an Inside-Out program at my school as soon as I get back."

As it came out of my mouth, I was immediately mortified. They had just told us not to make promises to guys on the inside and what was the first thing I did? I felt so stupid. And to make matters worse, Joe just kind of looks at me out of the corner of his eye as he's walking away. He seemed suspicious and it felt like we both understood what I had done. It *killed* me that he might think that I was just another liar. Again, in that moment I was ashamed, but also inspired because I knew if I could get the program up and running once I got home, I'd be coming through with my promise.

Our first author's final interaction with Joe exemplifies the extent to which the prison scene is normalized for trainees. Above, he details a third incident where he was trying to manage potentially discrediting information or behavior in relation to guys from the Think Tank. The first two centered on the issue of race, and though he expressed a sense of emotional pain with regard to them, he could chalk them up to the men's misconceptions of him or his responses. In addition, his account was justified by other guys from the Think Tank who could *see* him for who he was.

However, in this final interaction, there was no denying that he had failed to live up to a group edict. Trainees were warned about making promises, and—in his growing activist fervor—that was exactly what he did. His shame and Joe's possible suspicion were entirely justified by group norms. These consequences demonstrate the power of socialization in creating a scenario wherein an African American man stigmatized as a "juvenile lifer" is elevated to a status of such moral authority that a White college professor can only look at him and *see* his own transgression. Clearly, he had experienced a significant shift in his moral career where his framework of imagery for judging himself and others had been changed. Moreover, the force of the normalization is further evident in the fact that the shame of the incident served as a driving factor in his initial activism within the program.

Conclusion

What does it mean to be wise? How do people engage in relationships of understanding with members of "deviant" groups and maintain a respectful and trusting, if different, kind of "knowing?" Each of the authors of this article has done ethnographic or narrative analytic work with groups that are positioned outside the ordinary: maquiladoras, occupational "deviants," police recruits, psychiatric survivor/advocates, and people with disabilities. We may serve as interpreters or representatives in relation to society, possibly in an activist or advocacy role, to promote and bring together unaccustomed groupings, gaining access for interaction with members of the group in question. Being allowed in at the edges, getting a sense of what matters, receiving validation and becoming a "courtesy member"—Goffman explains this to a point, and yet it can be taken further to consider shared goals, mutual recognition, and the pointed and prickly exchanges that remind us that we are still different, not the same. One can come close to sharing a standpoint, while wary of being labeled as an "expert"—as so often happens in academia. To be accepted and "seen," to be allowed to "know" the other but still at a respectful distance, is to approach the experience of wisdom and "being wise."

The inversion of common stereotypes through structured face-to-face interaction is not the final goal, but an important step in leading trainees toward activism within the program. As a recruitment mechanism, this process draws its power from that which it seeks to eliminate. Goffman (1963) explains:

When normals and stigmatized do in fact enter one another's immediate presence, especially when they there attempt to sustain a joint conversational encounter, there occurs one of the primal scenes of sociology; for, in many cases, these moments will be the ones when the causes and effects of stigma must be directly confronted by both sides (p. 13).

In *Inside-Out*, the stigmatized status takes on a formal function as part of the training, in which the Think Tank trainers exercise their power and their knowledge in a dialogic space: teaching the teachers, fellow resisters of the dominant ideologies that drive both the justice system and the academy. Think Tank members risk their status among "normal" incarcerated persons—perhaps both ridiculed and admired—to work with *Inside-Out* and gradually work for social change. In the process, they help us change our lives and our practice, while changing their own.

Authors' Note

Acting Dean Albert Labriola generously provided a course release to assist with the writing. Immeasurable thanks go to Lori Pompa for her help with this project, as well as those from *Inside-Out* who shared their stories. The authors are deeply indebted to John Marx and James D. Bigley for sharing their wisdom.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The author(s) disclosed receipt of the following financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article: This research was supported by grants from the Wimmer Family Foundation and the Center for the Study of Catholic Social Thought, Duquesne University.

Notes

1. "Sometime in the mid-nineties, I took a class to meet with a group of life-sentenced men at a state prison three hours away from Temple's main campus in Philadelphia. During the tour of this facility, the students began discussing with the 'lifers' issues of economics, politics, race and class, and—related to it all—crime and how we respond to it. One of the men remarked how beneficial it would be to have an

ongoing dialogue about these and other issues throughout the semester. Everyone agreed, while realizing that the distance was prohibitive. However, the seed was sown" (Pompa, 2002, p. 72).

2. The second author's cohort experience of "going inside" was quite different in 2011. The prison tours were not part of the training. One aspect that did provoke anxiety and a serious sense of "difference" and risk was an emphasis on conforming to prison rules and security in relation to the group's arrival in several cars, and their initial entry into SCI Graterford. They were warned that their vehicles were likely to be searched. They were to remove all maps, which might assist in an escape attempt; not to have any trace of drugs or paraphernalia because of the drug-sniffing dogs; to dress in as nondescript and covered-up way as possible, with no extra skin showing; not to bring anything that could be considered contraband; and to avoid any physical contact with the men inside. Beyond the parking lot, the first institutional setting was the waiting room for visitors outside security. It was largely populated by family members, mostly people of color, familiar with the procedures and the wait. The Inside-Out trainees stood out and there was grumbling, sidelong glances, and derisive comments about their presence. Rather than assigning stigma to the "real" visitors, the trainees felt out of place, unwelcome, and awkward.

After going through security, which was intimidating, and waiting for the heavy doors to slide open, the trainees walked down the long hallway. Walking past curious and provocative incarcerated men, trainees were loudly told by the guard to "stay on the right and keep moving." It was a long walk in an unfamiliar setting, which felt somewhat threatening. Eventually they entered a large auditorium with about 20 men in prison uniforms. This room was actually a sanctuary for the men, the Think Tank members, and it became a place of discovery and education for all. There were guards there who stayed in the background. Group members expressed that they felt "welcome" there. From that point on, the interactions and socialization process of the training were comparable to the other authors'.

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