Restorative Hope:
Exploring Pedagogy through the Lens of Incarceration

Abstract:
Restorative hope contends against society’s propensity to place strict boundaries on what it means to be human. This paper responds to the question: “What are educational practices that educators can employ to address the urgent needs of incarcerated women who have to navigate the difficult terrain of hopelessness within and after incarceration?” I propose restorative hope as an alternative way to do pedagogy in confining spaces. In order to construct a restorative hope pedagogy, I take seriously the insights of women on the incarceration continuum while also drawing on the rich body of pedagogical literature. First, I identify why “lockdown pedagogies” can disrupt hope and ultimately authenticity. To counter these confining spaces, I argue that restorative hope creates a space of authenticity that bolsters a sense of humanity.1 I highlight self-authorship as critical to the process of developing a more authentic self. Finally, I offer some generative practices that religious educators can employ to help create spaces where people feel comfortable becoming more fully human, and being more fully themselves.

Introduction
Restorative hope contends against society’s propensity to place strict boundaries on what it means to be human. When people fall outside of these social norms, they are often placed in exile. Not only do they have to earn their way back into society, they have to re-earn their way back into the status of “human.” Those who do not reside within the category of “human” unfortunately become a target for inferior treatment. This maltreatment is justified by one’s non-humaness. Criminality applied to one’s humanity creates a human confinement that prevents incarcerated and formerly incarcerated persons from moving beyond the criminal act(s) they committed. Human confinement places a person’s humanity under lock and key. In this frame of reference, a person’s being is static and unchanging. A person is the same today, yesterday, and forever. The partial glimpse into a person’s past becomes the truth by which human confinement identifies incarcerated and formerly incarcerated persons. It locks people in their mistakes by emphasizing a fragment of someone’s life, namely their criminal acts, and applying it as if this is the “truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.” They are not their name, but their department

1 *Please note: In order to emphasize the voice of women through direct quotes, I decided to limit my paper to cover the quest for authenticity within restorative hope pedagogy. However, this research reveals that restorative hope pedagogy equally creates space for connection and resiliency. Further, this research points to particular epistemological approaches that undergird women coming to know hope in order to face the existential challenges they encounter within prison. As a result, I hope to extend the conversation in my session to also integrate the quest for connection and resiliency that are central to restorative hope pedagogy. Stay tuned!
of corrections number. They are not their transformation, but their murder or drug use or kidnapping charges.

In order to construct a restorative hope pedagogy, I take seriously the insights of women on the incarceration continuum while also drawing on the rich body of pedagogical literature. Feminist, womanist, and critical approaches to pedagogy inform my proposal of restorative hope pedagogy. These pedagogies rely on the wisdom of multiple articulations of pedagogies that seek to transform the self, community, and world. Restorative hope pedagogy, as both holistic and broad-based, embraces teaching and learning as a constant re-visions and bolstering of ways of seeing, ways of knowing, ways of being, and ways of doing within the world; this dynamic inner and outer praxis is always acting upon the self, others, God, and the world to transform self and society. I assume that pedagogy helps re-orient someone’s being so they can see, know, do, and be differently in the world.

Ultimately, this paper responds to the question: “What are educational practices that educators can employ to address the urgent needs of incarcerated women who have to navigate the difficult terrain of hopelessness within and after incarceration?” I propose restorative hope as an alternative way to do pedagogy in confining spaces. First, I identify why “lockdown pedagogies” can disrupt hope and ultimately authenticity. To counter these confining spaces, I argue that restorative hope creates a space of authenticity that bolsters a sense of humanity. I highlight self-authorship as critical to the process of developing a more authentic self. Finally, I offer some generative practices that religious educators can employ to help create spaces where people feel comfortable becoming more fully human, and being more fully themselves.

A Note on Study Population and Methodology

This paper is aimed at educators and people of faith—chiefly those who see restoring hope as one of their primary vocational aims. Drawing on semi-structured interviews, a focus group, and my personal experiences teaching in the prison, this paper examines the narratives of formerly incarcerated women in order to better understand the ways of sustaining hope and contribute to the knowledge base on effective educational practices for marginalized populations. The qualitative research consists of discussions with a total of 10 formerly incarcerated women in the state of Georgia. Nine of the participants are African American while 1 is Caucasian. While this study can be expanded to invite participants across the nation, I delimit this research by selecting research participants within the state of Georgia.2 The difficulty of identifying formerly incarcerated women would create significant challenges otherwise.

This paper is grounded in my experience teaching within and co-directing a Certificate of Theological Studies Program (CTS Program) in a prison in Georgia. In this program, students are expected to complete two foundational courses in theological and biblical studies, three electives, and a leadership project. They must also maintain a record free of disciplinary reports. I draw on the CTS Program because, as a whole, it seemed to be one space within the prison that illuminates restorative hope pedagogy. While I’ve taught a couple courses in the program, for the purpose of this paper, I will draw mostly from the 12 week Exploring Spirituality and Identity through the Arts course I taught in 2012. This course invited women to explore Erikson’s stages of psychosocial identity formation through the use of art. For each of Erikson’s eight stages, the class used art to reflect on psychosocial concepts while also reflecting on their own identity formation. Every other week, guest artists came to lead the class in different artistic crafts that enabled them to experiment with different modes of art.

2 To create preserve anonymity, I use pseudonyms throughout this paper.
Restorative Hope Pedagogy as a Counter to Lockdown Pedagogy

Hope is the primary aim in restorative hope pedagogies. Restorative hope pedagogy’s quest to overcome internal and external chains that limit transformation feeds into a re-articulation of ways of seeing, knowing, being, and doing that restores hope even in the midst of confinement. Responding to the deep hopelessness that emerges from contexts of complex trauma and social death sets the agenda for how religious educators approach their ministry in communities, churches, prisons and the public square. The motivation for learning in restorative hope pedagogy is the desire to live a meaningful life that contributes to the healing and wholeness of society. For pedagogies of restorative hope, raising consciousness is not just about becoming more aware of one’s own ability to enact social change; it’s about seeing, knowing, and believing that there is a Divine presence that also interacts and partners with humanity to transform the self and the broken structures within society.3

My description of a pedagogy of restorative hope simultaneously juxtaposes and problematizes lockdown pedagogies.4 Whereas restorative hope grapples for a transformational paradigm, lockdown pedagogies prefer a tacit acceptance of the status quo. This tacit acceptance allows various forms of social death and complex trauma to thrive since there is no reassessment and re-envisioning of the ways in which things are done in learning (specifically) and in society (in general). I propose a pedagogy that contributes to humanizing and hope-building spaces. In doing so, I am also intent on identifying places that may shut down hope. Restorative hope pedagogy counters pedagogies that promote unhealthy competition, division, stratification, commoditization, othering, fragmentation, and low self-esteem; it names those pedagogies as pedagogies on lockdown. For women on the incarceration continuum, lockdown pedagogy functions in very specific ways. One such way is through the panopticon gaze, which makes women hyperaware of their self in ways that can easily disrupt any sense of authenticity.

The criminal justice system creates mechanisms that help control knowledge about the confined as well as maintain order and control over bodies of women on the incarceration continuum. In Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison, Foucault refers to these mechanisms of control as the panopticon, a building that was built in the 18th century for the sole purpose of watching incarcerated people. The panopticon gaze signifies a non-critical form of seeing that seeks to control, define, and disempower the watched. How and what one comes to know is directly connected to what one sees and/or perceives. The internal and external consequences of panopticism create a new politics of containment that centers on the ways in which people are seen and subsequently the ways in which people see. Distorted forms of visibility develop that create distance rather than connection. The panopticon gaze seeks to interrupt empowerment strategies that may be direct (such as physical and verbal acts of defiance) or indirect (an empowered sense

3 There is one primary distinction between restorative hope pedagogies and critical pedagogies. The God-consciousness in pedagogies of restorative hope set this form of conscientization apart from other forms of critical pedagogies. Critical pedagogies intend to raise the consciousness of those who have been marginalized so they can become active subjects of change within history. Restorative hope pedagogies build upon these principles while at the same time embracing a theological dimension that acknowledges the presence of a Divine being that is actively engaged in the world.

4 Pedagogies on lockdown are an uncritical approach to teaching and learning that focuses solely on one-dimensional learning (that is usually cognitive-based learning) in exchange for learning that impacts transformation. In favor of competitive, hierarchal, individualistic, and rational forms of learning, lockdown pedagogies devalue imagination, exclude the incarnational, limit the improvisational, and dismiss the intuitive. Those who do not conform to the given standards often sit on the margins seeking legitimacy.

3
of self). In other words, as a containment strategy, it intends to squash any form of resistance. With mechanisms that create noncritical ways of seeing, how we come to see individuals can easily be distorted. Similar to a microscope, instead of seeing individuals as whole, the panopticon reduces and fragments individuals. This fractured gaze makes those in power all-seeing but only with partial knowledge.

The panopticon is based on Bentham’s principle that “power should be visible and unverifiable.” 5 What will be visible to those without power is the tower that houses those who will look upon him or her. What will be unverifiable is the incarcerated person’s knowledge of when he or she is being watched. A stark dichotomy exists between the seeing that takes place and the person who is seen. 6 In the words of Foucault, “in the peripheric ring, one is totally seen, without ever seeing; in the central tower, one sees everything without ever being seen.” 7 The one who watches is ever-seeing but never seen. In other words, all the power is in the hands of the one who gazes rather than the one who is gazed upon. The overarching insidious sense of being watched and observed by the powerful creates fear, doubt, and insecurity. The feeling of being watched becomes a pervading sensation that influences how one engages the world. This controlled gaze feeds into a sense of inauthenticity, making it difficult to ever be comfortable in one’s own skin.

One may even say women in the prison context can be “cut dead but still alive” because of their experiences of hypervisibility, mis-visibility, or invisibility, which feed the public imagination 8 Further, it facilitates a process by which women are hyperaware of their actions and more susceptible to identity management in order to survive the prison context.

The practices used to sustain law and order usher one into a process of losing oneself so that one can even become unfamiliar to one’s self. Within prison, women are isolated from the things, people, and practices that made them who they were prior to incarceration. In this sense, hope has to be related to the existential reality of what people face and how that presses against their perception of self. One has to embrace a carceral identity—an identity that seeks to conform to prison culture in order to survive incarceration. In the prison, one is constantly asked to perform, to wear multiple identities in order to appeal to various participants within the prison. Most women even say wearing the mask is necessary to get one through the challenges of prison life. The role-playing becomes a tactic of survival. To be seen as weak or soft makes one an easy target for others. A carceral identity, however, forces people to become something other than themselves. In some circumstances that means playing tough while in other circumstances that means playing perfect. Wearing these roles becomes a way to gain privileges, maintain safety, or simply fit in.

As Toya named, “I had to transform into different people at times to fit in.” She talked about playing roles “like being on top of the world, being the one that had it altogether, and then
one that was bad and just being mean, hateful towards people that didn't even deserve it.”

While she was fully aware that this was not her real identity, she also understood the prison as a place that could not handle her true self. Safety required concealing her true self so that the prison environment could not steal it. Only parts of herself could be offered in the space, creating a situation where the human longing to be known is co-opted by the human longing to survive. I asked Toya what happens when people do not change in order to survive in prison. She shared:

If you don't, I feel that you'll be taken captive, seriously. I feel that if you don't have some form of changing to, well, adapting, if you don't change or perform in a certain type of way, you will feel lost...Feeling alone, not fitting in and stuff and you don't fit in, because you're not like everybody else. So you start having second thoughts about yourself and who you are as a person, and you seep into a depression.

This constant identity-shifting is a form of captivity, in which one can easily lose the self. The incongruence between the public persona that women wear and the personal identity that constitutes who women are can be easily blurred in the constant image negotiations in the prison. Those who are able to navigate a sense of inner continuity and authenticity in prison actually experience a greater sense of security. Thus, to carve out space where one can be their best self in the present in route to their best possible self in the future is critical. Put another way, finding space in the prison to actually be one’s self is necessary in order to get through prison life with a healthy sense of self.

**Restorative Hope as a Pedagogical Lens for Authenticity**

I was born dead. I was turned the wrong way, breached... I was just blue... and they were getting ready to prepare me a death certificate. But an old doctor happened to walk by and he looked. He heard the layman talking, and he said well, this child is not dead. He picked me up...hit me about four or five real hard times, you see? And they said I leapt up. That was hope. That's an unusual thing of hope, but that was hope. That was hope in one of its greatest forms.

This quote exemplifies my understanding of restorative hope. In the quote above, Eden connects her birthing process with hope and second chances. She underscores the fact that when one sees possibilities for what others can become, new possibilities are birthed and pathways opened. It is through this pedagogical lens of restorative hope that I emphasize the assumption that as humans we are always evolving and becoming. Human hope is the belief that a person is always more than what you can see with your natural eyes. This optimistic posture towards humanity undergirds the vision of restorative hope. The declaration that beings that some may have declared dead but are actually alive represents the importance of second chances. Whereas the facts may communicate death (i.e. the lack of oxygen), the truth may actually be another reality not yet realized. In this case, the truth was she perhaps should have been dead but wasn’t. She goes on further to say: And hope, to me, also looks like this. I know the people that I lived with and the ones that I left in prison, there are some good people that could be definitely attributes and they would be good in society, so even though it wasn't my plan to

---

9 Toya. Interview. 15 September 2014.
10 Ibid.
12 Yvonne Jewekes, "Men Behind Bars,” 53.
13 Eden, Interview, 17 April 2014.
do re-entry, it wasn't, it has become my passion. Hope that we as human beings can see the larger picture is asking a lot, because there's so many things that's going on out here, but if -- and all I want them to see, my hope comes in, see giving someone an honest second chance, so -- That's not easy. That's not easy at all.¹⁴

Even in the face of the most preposterous criminal actions, human hope leaves room for restoration in the very essence of a person’s humanity. It embraces a human-in-process perspective that counters human confinement. To counter a humanity that has been stripped, degraded, and fragmented, restorative hope recognizes humanity as resilient, authentic, and relational.¹⁵

Women on the incarceration continuum recognize the multilevel ways human confinement manifests. Even when women get released from prison, they face the collateral consequences of their incarceration. These consequences make it difficult to obtain employment and housing, some of the most basic social needs of humans. There is also an internal decarceration process that takes place, where returning citizens have to learn how to be physically free. The myriad of complications of this decarceration process manifests in the intangible bars that still exist. For example, one woman described her release by saying, “You are still incarcerated in certain types of ways. You need to learn how to separate yourself from the bars. It's very hard doing that. Because right now, I feel like I'm still behind bars. Mentally I'm still behind bars.” Some have identified this as “complicated freedom.” For example, while one may be technically free, one may still be on parole, which creates unique circumstances of confinement and possible reincarceration.

At the heart of a human-in-process perspective is the understanding that we are not today who we were yesterday nor will we be tomorrow who we are today. This perspective ultimately leaves room for a person’s identity, both personal and communal, to change in a world that is in constant flux. Rather than simplifying how one understands human nature, human hope embraces a more complex and nuanced perspective of human nature. It does not discount sin, crime, or the capacity for someone to do evil. Instead, it recognizes that all humanity, whether incarcerated or not, participates in individual and systemic acts that can be deemed sinful, criminal, or evil, thus requiring a greater need for redemption for all of humanity. All must see themselves as criminals in order to receive the beautiful act of redemption. Human hope tends away solely from discourses of personal responsibility and tends toward a discourse of second chances.¹⁶ Human hope embraces the perspective that people are valuable for who they are and are still in the process of becoming who they will be.

**Self-Authorship in the Process of Becoming Authentic**

Critical to human hope is providing spaces where women are invited to be their authentic selves, be in relationship to others in a life-giving way, and be challenged to grow. These sites actually create a context for resiliency and sustaining hope. Sites of appearing, becoming, and

---

¹⁴ Eden, Interview, 17 April 2014.

¹⁵ The categories of resilient, authentic, and relational emerged from coding the manuscripts from the interviews conducted with research participants. During the coding process, I compared the manuscripts to search for consistent patterns or reoccurring themes that surfaced among them. When I noticed phrases or narratives that relied heavily on depending on and connecting with others, I coded as relational. For phrases, repetitive words, and narratives that centered on being one’s self or being able to realize one’s full personhood, I coded for authenticity. Lastly, I coded narratives and themes that centered on traversing through great difficulty as resiliency. Because all three of these themes repeated throughout all of the interviews, I concluded that these themes were critical in building hope with women on the incarceration continuum.

connection become critical especially when women on the incarceration continuum find themselves in circumstances of intense existential questioning and meaning-making. These spaces invite introspection, dialogue, and resources to help one reframe their story. Even within the prison system, these spaces function as non-carceral spaces where women can simply be themselves. The concept of human hope serves as a robust pedagogical lens to elucidate how we be and how we become in restorative hope pedagogy. It is the process of moving from one state of being to another that produces integrity through the articulation of a more authentic self. The underlying question in restoring human hope in pedagogy is: In what ways can we invite the essence of persons into a learning environment that both affirms who they are but challenges them to become who they are to become? Within restorative hope pedagogy, I propose that human hope manifests through processes of self-authorship as students actively engage in creating themselves. The question of authorship becomes particularly important in carceral settings that reinforce human confinement. Carceral settings tend to operate on an “obey what I tell you to do, believe what I tell you to think, be who I say you are, and imagine only what I say is possible” basis. To be immersed in a setting where primacy is placed on external authorities to be the guiding voice in how one organizes experiences and shapes identity has severe consequences for one’s ontological formation. Learners immersed in carceral learning environments engage in a process of becoming when they begin to differentiate what they believe about themselves, others, and God from what others have told them to believe about themselves, others, and God. Self-authorship emerges from a human hope that refuses to remain content and constrained by the boxes of others.

To illustrate human hope in the midst of threats to confine one’s being, I draw on Marcia B. Baxter Magolda’s theory of self-authorship. Self-authorship, a term coined by Robert Kegan and expanded by Baxter Magolda is a constructive-developmental approach to meaning-making and the development of self. Baxter Magolda’s theoretical framing of self-authorship moves beyond the cognitive developmental approaches to self-authorship and takes seriously the relational and circumstantial impact of external influences in the making of self. Self-authorship is “characterized by internally generating and coordinating one’s beliefs, values, and internal loyalties, rather than depending on external values, beliefs, and interpersonal loyalties.” In other words, self-authoring people assume responsibility for their thoughts, emotions, and actions. Baxter Magolda’s theory, like my own, understands the interlocking influences that contribute to the development of an inner self. Epistemology (How do I know?), intrapersonal (Who am I?), and interpersonal (How do we construct relationships?) are key questions that learners respond to on their journey to self-authorship. Learners move from following external formulas given to them by others to a transitional space (known as the crossroads) where learners seek to integrate their sense of self influenced by the expectations of others with their sense of self influenced by their own values. During the crossroads, learners see a need to develop their own values but are not quite ready to do so. From this transitional space, learners move toward self-authorship. Self-authorship represents the phase where learners choose their own beliefs, values, and identity despite external influences.

18 Marcia B. Baxter Magolda, Elizabeth G. Creamer, and Peggy S. Meszaros, Development and Assessment of Self-Authorship Exploring the Concept across Cultures (Sterling, Va.: Stylus Pub., 2010), Kindle location 137.
19 Marcia B. Baxter Magolda, Kindle location 137.
21 Magolda, Making Their Own Way, 71-105.
Because self-authorship is grounded in the work of a being coming to voice, self-authorship is a manifestation of human hope. Self-authorship represents the process by which one becomes. To be an author of one’s life refers to a person’s ability to make decisions about one’s own life based on their internal voice rather than seeking to accommodate the demands of others. Educators have a unique challenge in working with learners who have been socialized to believe that only external authority figures have voices worth following. To assist learners to come to voice, to know one’s self, and to understand and value one’s internal self are key tasks that restorative hope pedagogy seeks to fulfill. In the context of the self-in-contemplation, the self-in communion with God, and the self-in-community with others, restorative hope pedagogy intends to offer sites of becoming, where learners engage in the process of meaning-making and self-authorship in order to create a more authentic self.

Meaning-making is the work of the interior self; thus, it is important for educators to acknowledge inner formation as critical to restorative hope pedagogy. Meaning-making possesses great ontological significance in the movement of selves. The act of meaning-making contributes to a person’s process of becoming. It is a stark protest against human confinement. It renounces the self that has been in a perpetual state of stagnation and non-formation and announces a self that is open to formation and more developed meaning-making capacities. In the words of constructive-developmental psychologist Robert Kegan, “The activity of being a person is the activity of meaning-making. There is thus no feeling, no experience, no thought, no perception, independent of a meaning-making context in which it becomes a feeling, an experience, a thought, a perception because we are the meaning-making context.”22 In other words, meaning-making cannot be separated from the self who is becoming; meaning-making drives how a person experiences and makes sense of the world. At the same time, meaning-making becomes more complex as one can identify his or her socialized self and enact agency even while the self is being co-constructed with the world and relationships around them.23

Restorative pedagogy resists the tendency of learners to simply submit in the context of authority; instead, restorative hope pedagogy encourages learners to develop a sense of personal integrity that enables them to exercise agency and authority over their own self, thoughts, and decisions. Educators invite learners into the process of meaning-making within the learning environment. Educators do not ask, “what did you learn from what others have said?” Educators ask, “how are you coming to understand and make meaning out of what you have heard? How does this new understanding fit into your world?” Educators approach learning with the understanding that learners are not only coming to know the content; learners are coming to know themselves in relation to the content. Educators then reinforce a self that is able to handle, reflect upon, and apply the knowledge rather than just consume it. A major task of restorative hope pedagogy is to help provide a context where students can share how they interpret their experience and actively seek out and consider new perspectives about their experience.

Sometimes the process of coming to know oneself can be messy. One comes to know the good, bad, and ugly that marks the condition of being human. For example, in a focus group conversation, we were talking about this process of authenticity and becoming when Linda began to share about her process of authenticity. She says,

“Once you’ve begun to realize things about yourself. You have to figure out how to maneuver with that information things that you’ve accepted about yourself...Like

23 Kegan, The Evolving Self, 32.
with my family...I’m a people pleaser and I wanted everyone to be good. That’s just my personality. And I was always falling short, not because of me but because of their expectations, not my expectations...So I had to release myself from their expectations, and I know the consequences of that is that when they call, I might not be able to run to their assistance. So I know they may feel X,Y, and Z. But I have to allow them to be who they are so I can be who the f—k I am.”

Critical to this act of becoming more authentic and developing a sense of voice is this process of differentiating herself and her own standards from those of others. To become authentic is not to become perfect but to be on a quest to become more whole, honest, and transparent with one’s self. Education that invites beings that are not perfect in the class reinforces the understanding that humans are always engaging in a process of becoming. In other words, the story of one’s life is not complete but continues to written.

**Restorative Hope Pedagogy in Praxis Within the Prison Classroom**

One of the benefits of prison is that it provides a setting where reflection can take place. This is especially so in classrooms that expect students to engage in introspection and reflection around course material. As Kaia Stern notes in her research with on prison education with men, introspection can be a faith act that reminds incarcerated persons of their dignity and provides a sense of freedom. Contemplation with self often represents a context where people can develop and clarify their sense of self and emergent voice. Authoring the self-in-contemplation represents the process of the self knowing the self more genuinely. Contemplation may be characterized as a “theology by heart,” wherein the self gives primacy to the interior life in its quest for a solid internal foundation. Amidst the competing voices that contend for one’s loyalty, contemplation attends to the often muted voice that yearns to become comprehensible to the self. The emphasis on self-authorship is really an invitation to become intimately acquainted with one’s self so that one can truly be authentic. While people continuously make meaning throughout the day, contemplation provides an opportunity for the internal voice to rise above the alternate voices that seek to make meaning for one. Contemplation provides space where one can listen to his or her inner self and discern the things that matter most in life. Self-authorship is not solely cognitive-based or focused on one’s consciousness; it focuses on building a solid internal foundation so that learners learn to listen to and trust their internal voice amidst external influences. Contemplation builds an interpersonal intelligence that enables one to understand the self so that the self can function effectively in the world.

Furthermore, the contemplative self-in-reflection model is not a disembodied experience. To have a strong internal foundation means embracing one’s whole self—body, soul, and spirit. To this end, one’s ethnic and cultural identity becomes a critical framing lens for restoring hope. Within self-authorship, learners begin to name their selves, their beliefs, and their contexts. They become more conscious of their ethnic identity and their bodies, in turn using both as resources to know the self more intimately. Subsequently, the practices of self-definition, self-determination, and self-awareness are aroused, providing the internal resources to differentiate between the

---

multiple selves that one has created to obtain approval. The contemplative self has the capacity to reposition one’s consciousness so that the body is seen as an embodiment of hope. The fact that Black bodies and Black consciousness still exist in a world that has attempted to exterminate all forms of Blackness is something to reflect on. The resiliency of Black existence transcends confinement. Contemplation creates opportunities for fragmented selves to gain a sense of coherency and integration. The end of self-awareness is not an elevated sense of self but a more grounded self.

For women who have constantly been placed under a non-critical yet highly judgmental gaze, the Certificate in Theology classroom seemed to represent one of the few places where they felt a sense of freedom to be themselves. One reason is because women are actually seen; they are not just physically visible but humanly visible. One concrete example of how critical visibility functioned within the classroom is by inviting students to participate in artistic activities that encouraged them to express their true identity. Women did not have to embrace a carceral identity in order to survive; these spaces provided opportunity for them to be themselves. Having spaces within the prison that gave them something to “look forward to” or put their hope in actually helped create a sense of resilience and optimism for women while incarcerated.

Within the Certificate Program, the courses provide an opportunity for women to explore their faith. In prison, faith can quickly become a weapon against the carceral system. Several of the women talk about how the classrooms within the Program help them explore their image of God and challenge some of the religious doctrines and traditions that confined them in the past. One compelling story came from Sherry who spoke directly about the impact of the Certificate Program on her faith. She says, “The theology program was wonderful and happened at the perfect time. It really put me back into studying and understanding the Word for myself. It put me back into self-reflection, and it was wonderful. It put me back on track in my prayer life and study of the word.” She goes on further to talk about how she feels like she incarcerated her family, and that part of her battle was for her family. What was particularly significant was the practice of drawing, which was re-awakened through her participation in the Certificate Program and continued to sustain her throughout her time of incarceration. For her, drawing was actually a weapon to fight. In particular, she talked about how the Exploring Identity through the Arts course enabled her to open up. She would draw scriptures in order to visualize them. She described one image where she drew a woman with armor on. She communicated that looking at the completed art helped her gain insights. She says, “You don’t actually see God, but the winner. It helped me remember my place and where God is in the picture.” She says further, “it doesn’t take a large person to win the battle.” Overall, she says, “The theology program helped a lot because I never really knew I was standing on faith.” The Certificate Program became a space where people could expand their imaginations and faith; they saw themselves as resilient warriors that were able to win this fight called “incarceration.” Connection to God ultimately helped provide a resiliency against the difficulties of incarceration and separation from her family.

Further, several activities were built into the Arts course that encouraged women to explore their inner self. One assignment, for example, invited students to walk down memory lane. They had to bring to the class something to illustrate their most formative memory. People shared about grandma’s biscuits and bedtime prayers. They also shared about divorce, death, love, and loved ones. These were the memories that shaped and made these women who they are. Another

---

30 Sherry, Interview, 3 January 2015.
31 Sherry, Interview, 3 January 2015.
assignment I asked them to complete is to write a eulogy. I asked them to write what they want others to remember about them. They shared these in front of the class. The objective of the assignment was for them to explore the things that matter most in their lives. Both of these activities created space for women to reflect on and share their authentic selves with the learning community.

Comments from the course evaluation reflected the course’s ability to create a site of authenticity. I asked students in the class, “What have you learned about your identity that you did not know before entering this class?” Some of these comments included: “I learned not to be shy, but to open up more and go after my goal to help teenagers;” “I learned about my parents (after reading Becoming Abigail) and the struggle with grief she experienced after her Mother’s death. I have struggled with my identity for the last 35 to 40 years;” “Before this class, I never really did any soul searching. Lately, I’ve been trying to figure out what events in my life have made me, me;” “I learned that there are parts of my identity that I was covering up. I knew about my gifts and talents, but tapping into the experiences and circumstances that make me...me.” Overall, the course invited women into introspection so they could develop and hear their inner voice amidst the competing voices in the prison.

Conclusion

Self-authorship is ultimately a process of coming to see, know, and be in a way that creates inner peace. Restorative hope pedagogy encourages self-authorship by creating spaces of theological reflection and contemplation. Critical to the development of self-authorship are periods of reflection so that students can integrate their experiences with what they are coming to know about themselves and the world. Concrete practices of contemplation include journal writing, spiritual autobiographies, and letter writing. These “turn-life-into-text” forms of writing become a “living human document” in which the self can reflect.\(^\text{32}\) A self that is more grounded can be critical of competing voices while also discerning of one’s internal voice. This moves ontological valuation from the hands of others to one’s own hands. One no longer measures one’s being from other people’s standards and values but against their own internal standards, which finds ultimate value in communion with God. Particularly, within a Christian restorative hope framework, one may attempt to locate themselves apart from God, but may find even more value and meaning when locating themselves with God as a primary reference for and with the self. Overall, restorative hope pedagogy counters lockdown pedagogy by creating space for authenticity. In this paper, I’ve argued that self-authorship is a process in which one becomes more authentic through engaging in contemplation and meaning-making processes that enrich one’s sense of being as well as the being they are becoming. Thus, religious educators can create sites of becoming by embracing human hope as a lens to see their students as beings on a journey. Engaging students in contemplative processes that encourage self-authorship and authenticity ultimately becomes a way to enact restorative hope within pedagogy, even those spaces that are confining.

Bibliography

Eden. Interview. 17 April 2014.
Sherry. Interview. 03 January 2015.
Toya. Interview. 15 September 2014.