

## **“YOU GOTTA BE A MAN OR A GIRL”: CONSTRUCTED DIALOGUE AND REFLEXIVITY IN THE DISCOURSE OF VIOLENCE<sup>1</sup>**

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### **1. Introduction**

At the micro-level, constructed remarks such as “you gotta be a man or a girl” and “you gotta do what you gotta do” position the speaker, his/her interlocutor(s) and now the readers in an interesting Zone of Proximal Development (Vygotsky [1934] 1986) in relation to the speaker’s agency. Within the discourse of prisoners such remarks are framed within, and in relation to the central power struggle in prison life: Staying alive. Encapsulated in the catch phrase—“being a man”—is the central rubric around which circles much prison violence. It also presents a focus for reflexive discourse by prisoners. Such a “tough” attitude is interestingly mirrored by the American society as a whole in current responses to crime and criminals. This discourse analytical paper suggests that constructed speech in the autobiographical narrative in public settings reveals clues into personal agency in relation to past acts, and, in these cases in particular, acts of violence. It also reveals a participation framework (Schiffrin 1987, 1994) that cues agentive and reflexive positioning of the self in the autobiography and, potentially, a positioning of the self and the community in the inmate’s return to society. This paper contributes not only to a discussion of prison life and death, but also to current research on remembering, personal agency, and on conflict talk. Such discourse analysis and such discursive opportunities “guide the interpretation of utterances” (Lucy 1993: 11) and, as such, are method and situations underutilized in the rehabilitation of criminals. Such a use of research represents a challenge to the silencing of therapeutic conversation and communication which often results from isolation during incarceration. (See also O’Connor, forthcoming.) This paper examines reflexive discourse by analyzing the positionings and indexicality in passages of constructed dialogue (Tannen 1989) and reflexive framebreaks (O’Connor 1995b) in narratives. In particular I analyze the features within a discourse of violence in which the participants have used as a rationale the concept of “being a man”. Lucy (1993: 11) notes that speech “is permeated by reflexive activity as speakers remark on language, report utterances, index and describe aspects of the speech event, invoke conventional names, and guide listeners in the proper interpretation of utterances”.

In a discussion broader than that of narratives of violence, readers will find reflexive

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elements presented here also indicate highly salient involvement strategies which are at work in everyday discourse about personal experiences. As such, speakers, not just those incarcerated, manage their discourse to shape not only a hearer's perceptions but to imprint or reinforce the speaker's own self-perceptions. This work shows that in recalling moments of significance in personal narratives we as speakers participate not only in the construction of a social fabric but in the social construction of our own lives—made observable by telling our stories to interested others who can learn with us from our own budding understandings of what we have done, what has been done to us, or what we have done to others. Narratives about violence tend to heighten the visibility of the reflexive elements, due to their contrast.

This work on reflexive speech takes up Briggs' (1993: 33) challenge that discourse studies investigate "speech situated in its social, cultural, and historical surroundings" by putting feet, as it were, to the macro-analysis of prisons and power done by Foucault (1979). The work is contextualized within several, ever-narrowing situational frames from generalized discourse of humans recounting their experiences, to the physical frames of walls and bars for the 1.5 millions incarcerated in American prisons and jails, to the specific local frame of the violent, urban maximum security prison in which the researcher has worked and studied 14 years, to the 12 person, prison classroom, to the smallest level of the situated life-story interviews which were elicited one-on-one within a cellblock.

Opportunity to conduct this research resulted from a long-term association through teaching higher education<sup>2</sup> in the prison in a program that brought not only faculty to teach, but also student volunteers to interact with and tutor in the courses, a marked change in the social routine of prison life. Examples used in this paper are taken from a corpus of over 100 narratives on crimes collected on audiotape or videotape inside this urban, United States maximum security prison during 1990-1994. The audio-taped material come from 19 life story interviews which provided the core of my dissertation research "Narratives of prisoners: A contribution to the grammar of agency" (O'Connor 1994b). The video-taped data was collected in a drama workshop which featured experience stories told by inmates. All names of prisoners and names used by prisoners in their accounts have been changed.

## 2. American imprisonment

A report on *Correctional populations in the US, 1994* notes that over 5.1 million are currently involved in the United States' criminal justice system either on parole or probation, or in jail or prison (1996: 1). According to the United States Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS), the United States incarcerates 1,585,400 persons (Gillard and Beck 1996: 1). One third of these prisoners are held in local jails; two thirds in state and federal institutions. State systems in 1995 operated between 114% and 125% of their capacity and Federal prisons at 126% (Gillard and Beck 1996: 1). Juvenile arrests are also a large part of the massive strain on the criminal justice system and their numbers are not reflected in the statistics above. Juvenile incarcerations in public facilities in the United States totaled 57,541 in 1991 (Maguire and Pastore 1995: 531). Not only does this steady increase in

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<sup>2</sup> Funding for the educational program for inmates was provided by the Georgetown University School for Summer and Continuing Education and the Georgetown University Volunteer and Public Service Center.

prisoners show communities' responses to crime over the last decade, the overcrowding shows a contributing factor in a climate of violence and violation within prisons.

### 3. Violence and violation in prison life

Surveys on rule breaking in prisons in 1979 and 1986 reveal that over half of state prisoners report being charged with violations during their current incarceration (Stephan 1989: 1). Violation covers a wide range of behaviors from verbal confrontations to attacks. The most serious of violations, causing physical harm to a guard or another inmate, are catalogued in the BJS annual reports. In the tabulation figures for 1993 during which time my research was being gathered, American state prisons and federal incarceration facilities officially reported numerous incidents of violence: 46 inmates killed by inmates; 4,829 assaults by inmates on staff; 8,220 assaults by inmates upon inmates; and 100 inmate suicides (Maguire and Pastore 1995: 586). With the exception of deaths and serious woundings needing hospitalizations, many assaults of prisoners on other prisoners go unreported. An inmate code of silence prevails which contributes to the private settlements of "justice" (referred to by many inmates as "just us" who settle scores). The data in my interviews as well as the experiences told during courses I've taught inside the prison provide many examples of such violence.

We may note that the shift from monarchical times, when corporal punishment was championed, to present-day criminal justice's use of imprisonment for isolation from community has not truly ended corporal punishment. Rather, the violence has merely been removed from what Foucault (1979) called the public spectacle (like the scaffold) and has instead been placed in the private sphere where, unobserved by those outside the prisoner and staff hierarchies, bodies continue to be the locus of corporal punishment. Many do not find this appalling; rather, the attitude of "they are getting what they deserve" prevails, even if "what they deserve" is re-interpreted by staff or by other inmates with private agendas. (See also Abbot 1991, Rideau and Wikberg 1992 for prisoners' views on these issues.) Conflicts of this nature have been recorded in the press, in sociological studies, in writings by inmates, and by a few linguists. (See especially Cardozo-Freeman and Delorme 1984.)

In *A World of Violence: Corrections in America*, sociologist Matthew Silberman (1995: 38) notes that the "contemporary prison is a violent world in which survival depends on the ability of the new prisoner to learn to adapt to the violent lifestyle of the hard-core convict". As Goffman (1961) noted in *Asylums*, the "total institution" requires that its inhabitants and its workers adapt to an enclosed society. Inmate authors like Jack Abbott, Assata Shakur, Nathan McCall, Dannie Martin, and Sanyika Shakur detail the everyday adapting experiences and emphasize ways to cope, to deflect danger, and, sometimes, ways to kill. A most compelling discussion of prisoner survival appears in Louisiana penitentiary inmate Wilbert Rideau's articles in the inmate written *Angolite* magazine and reprinted in Rideau and Wikberg's *Life Sentences: Rage and survival behind bars*. In the article "Sexual Jungle" he tells of James Dunn, sentenced at 19 for burglary. Dunn was brutally raped and "claimed" as "wife" by his rapist. To avoid the fate Dunn witnessed of another young man raped by 14 men in one night (violence resulting in a trip to the hospital "to sew him back up" and then his incarceration in a mental institution), Dunn submitted to the role as "wife" of one man (Rideau 1992: 77). Several years and another incarceration later he was

reclaimed by the same man—"once a whore, always a whore"—being the operating principle in the Angola Louisiana penitentiary at the time. To break this cycle, Dunn waited till his rapist was paroled, then determined that he would not allow himself to be "claimed" by anyone again. After two months of fights, he killed a man who tried to rape him, thus changing his status amongst the prisoners, but also having a life sentence added to his prison time (Rideau 1992: 79-80). This connection between violence and gendered positionings in prison life is precisely the background for conflict in the narratives I analyze in this paper.

#### 4. Conflict talk

In Grimshaw's (1990) introduction to his edited volume *Conflict Talk* he notes how few researchers had investigated arguments in conversations. His contributors helped fill that research gap by exploring how children learn to argue and how adults conduct verbal conflict. Elsewhere, critical discourse analyst Teun van Dijk (1995: 307) says "discourse may enact, cause, promote, defend, instigate, and legitimate violence". The importance of contextual understanding in the interpretation of conflict is also made apparent in work by Schifffrin (1984) on Jewish argument as sociability, by Tannen (1990) on women and men in conversation, by Gates (1987) and Kochman (1981, 1990) on black and white speaking styles and Labov's (1972) "Rules for ritual insults". Labov's (1981) discussion of "Actions and reactions" shows the contribution not only of words, but also of silences in reports on violence. Gal (1991) investigates the interaction of gender, silence, gaining voice, and power as cultural constructs. Wood and Rennie (1994) determine that in the discourse of survivors of rape it is important as well to investigate the discourse of villains. As does Labov's (1981) article, my research looks directly at words people recall which they claim do lead to actual violence, part of the world of conflict which Grimshaw (1990: 6) noted can be a "literally deadly phenomenon". (See also O'Connor 1995a.)

#### 5. Agency

Also important to the research presented here is the issue of agency in the act of telling about a violent event. The data discussed below is not recorded during an altercation or argument. Rather, inmates were invited to discuss their lives, and in those tellings they agentively gave accounts of their actions, including acts of violence and violation. (See also DeWaele and Harre 1979 on autobiographical elicitations from murderers.) My use of agency retains the idea of control as it applies to the person's view of self and includes a continuum of possibilities that at one extreme encompasses the deflection we have come to associate with 19th and 20th century bureaucracies (agencies and institutions like prisons, asylums, barracks, hospitals, etc. which act for us) and, at the other extreme, an "I-marked" stance clearly indexed to the speaker. Such a speaker represents the speaking self as well as the figure self (Goffman 1981) in the story of the narrated act.

In the discourse analysis of such a memory act I consider the agentive positioning of the speaker in relation to the acts of violence, noting, as Edwards and Potter (1995: 35), that the act of remembering is studyable not only "as a constructed occasional version", but

as a look at “discourse which can be examined for how speakers Conflict orient themselves to notions of mind, using them as resources in conversation”. It is particularly the “notion of mind”, how a person sees him/herself as a thinking, not just re-acting being, that is most needed in discourse studies of prisoners’ narratives. (On agency and positioning see Rom Harre 1995, 1984; Harre and van Langenhove 1991; and O’Connor 1994, 1995b.)

## **6. Research situation and data collection**

This research took place inside an urban, maximum security prison in two of the seven cellblocks where 630 prisoners were housed in single cells. The 19 inmates in the audiotaped interview study and the one man in the videotaped class were all African American males between the ages of 22 and 46. Many participants who volunteered for the interviews had taken classes in the college outreach program conducted by this author. Others were contacted by inmates in a version of Milroy’s (1987) social network method—inmates recommending to other inmates that they might like to participate. Inside a prison, little effective work can be done without such inmate referral or vouching. Interviews varied from 20 minutes to two hours in length as the men responded to open-ended questions such as “what was your neighborhood like” and “how did you end up in this prison”? (See O’Connor 1994b: 313.) Much data useful to the research at hand was elicited by a prompt modeled from Labov’s 1972 work: “Can you recall a time when you felt you were in danger of death”? In addition to the interview audiotapes, one classroom made videotape contributes to this paper. That tape includes a session of monologues by inmates who were describing significant events in prison life which could be enacted for a drama workshop.<sup>3</sup>

The following examples show in detail the discursive practices of constructed dialogue and reflexive framebreaks by prisoners as they present the storyline of “being a man” as evidence 1) of their ability to survive and, 2) of their will to kill in order to maintain their status as men within the sexual and power hierarchies inside prison.

## **7. On being a man: Constructed dialogue in the discourse of violence**

In the telling of an event, one of the ways speakers show evaluation and saliency is by performing or enacting their conversations with the others who participated in the past event. Such reflexive language is best termed constructed dialogue (following Tannen 1989), for it is often more crafted and strategic than it is a mere repetition of dialogue, as is seen in the story below where the idea of “being a man” is socially constructed by the speaker, his uncle, and his prison milieu.

Excerpt (1), from the audio-taped life story<sup>4</sup> of a maximum security inmate given

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<sup>3</sup> Thank you to Martin Mitchell, III, instructor in that workshop who elicited the videotaped narrative and assisted in the transcription.

<sup>4</sup> A detailed discussion of this story is included in O’Connor 1994a “‘You could feel it through the skin’: Agency and Positioning in Prisoners’ Stabbing Stories”.

the name Roland, illustrates how connected violence is to perceptions of gender and sexuality inside the walls. In Roland's narrative the terms of sexual prowess or subjugation were simply put: "You gotta be man or a girl". In the passage below, Roland is telling about a man in the prison who came to him for sex when Roland was first incarcerated at age 17. He tells of the approach made and of the signals he interprets. (Transcription conventions appear in Appendix A.)

(1)

250     so, he came to me give me some cookies,  
251     put some cookies on my bed,  
252     some cigarettes, some comic books.  
253     because in the cell,  
254     I had gotten an old comic book,  
255     and was reading, so, he came by,  
256     said, "how you doing, youngster?"  
257     I was just lying there.  
258     I didn't say nothing to him..

Offering gifts in prison can imply more than friendship as can the seemingly innocuous greeting in line 256 where the words of the inmate who visits Roland's cell are enacted as dialogue by Roland in "how you doing, youngster?"<sup>5</sup> Calling a new inmate "youngster" can be construed as a term of intimacy, not simply a friendly hello. For those outside the prison world, both these acts may seem harmless and even generous. The alert inmate learns to read such acts as potentially multi-layered and possibly dangerous<sup>6</sup>. Thus, by gifts and by words, the older man is considered to be signaling his interest and expectations. By taking the cookies or comics, Roland determines that he would be signaling his agreement for sex. Roland reports himself as saying nothing in reply. Such constructed speech (and in this case silence) about the self is agentively interesting for it is a performance not only of the other but also of the self as seen by others, yet filtered through the speaker. Such a passage shows a high degree of evaluation of the event (Tannen, Labov) and can have the effect of drawing the listener into the story by the performative voice, but also by the resonance in the trace of meaning of a second person, as it were, of the "you". You, the readers, now feel addressed, too, drawing you into the experience of being questioned, given comics, and if you are savvy enough, into the realization that you are being propositioned: How you doin', youngster?

In the next passage, example (2) from Roland, he again shows high evaluation of the event, using many more constructed utterances. Roland tells that he has sought advice

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<sup>5</sup> See Rideau and Wikberg's *Life Sentences*, particularly, the aforementioned award winning section "Sexual jungle" which describes such routinized overtures.

<sup>6</sup> While the inmate in this narrative makes it obvious that he "reads" these acts as sexual overtures, realize that many actual friendships do occur in prison. In my years working inside the maximum security unit I have seen deep friendships which included using terms of friendly expression, sharing of food, books, and other resources. However, prisoner advice in these matters cautions the new inmate to be what literary critics would call a "close reader" in matters of gifts.

by consulting his uncle<sup>7</sup> who also was housed in that prison.

(2)

259      so, uh, I happened to see my uncle who was there, right,  
260      and uh, I was talking to him.  
261      and he tell me like uh,  
262      “you gotta be a man, or a girl”.  
263      he say, “what you gonna do”?  
264      I say, “Man, I can’t beat that big old dude”.  
265      so he, he gave me a knife,  
266      say, “you gotta do what you gotta to do”.

In line 263 Roland’s uncle is apparently speaking directly to Roland when he says: “what you gonna do?”; it seems to be a case of the uncle asking his nephew for information (i.e. what is his plan to deal with the sexual overture?). The “you” indexes Roland, yet is of course applicable to others who would be in a similar situation, positioned to choose to accept favors and accept sexual consequences. The other alternatives, unspoken, but implied, would be to reject the overtures, reject the sexual implications and actions and still be raped or “claimed”; or, reject and fight an older, stronger opponent—“that big old dude” (264).

Instances of “you” can broaden the audience to include a sort of everyperson. This is particularly so when Roland’s uncle uses an aphorism: “you gotta be a man or a girl” in 262. Of course, Roland is a man (though only 17 years old). This is a metaphor more by including an antonym and by extrapolating the world of expectations engendered by these two uneven polarities. The uncle suggests Roland has to choose to position himself as strong, to be perceived as a “man”. The Uncle’s other option “girl” positions Roland as weak, lesser, child-like<sup>8</sup>. In the prison vernacular “girl” also means victim, a meaning that cues how power and gender interact in forming status, even in an all-male institution.

Such status signaling can be of paramount importance as is noted in Silberman’s *World of Violence* (1995: 26) in which he describes an inmate “who had been pressured” for sex by another inmate. He seizes an opportunity when out of handcuffs to slash the throat of his would-be assailant. Roland’s account provides more details about the decision-making process such a pressured inmate faces. Roland presents how he seeks and takes advice before acting.

## 8. You as a signal of searching

Listeners smoothly make the switch that indicates that the speaker is having someone address himself, but as the figure in the narrated past event. In the remarks “you gotta be

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<sup>7</sup> Part of my growing literacy about this prison has included the realization that several generations of families inhabit the seven facilities that house its 11,000 prisoners.

<sup>8</sup> Readers will note that the terms of choice, “man or girl”, do not offer a symmetrical choice (man or woman), further diminishing the status of the non-male choice.

a man or a girl” and “you gotta do what you gotta do”, we find “you’s” in constructed dialogue but simultaneously in aphorisms which make a doubled framework for the experience as one which happens to many, but in particular to men in prison who must indicate how they will spend their time within the sexual hierarchies that operate in many prisons. Such a “you” no longer solely indexes the story figure. Lines 262 and 266 where the uncle says “you gotta be a man or a girl” and “you gotta do what you gotta do” show generalized expressions about behavior which connote a normalizing instruction. Thus, at one level the discourse is a generic normative and at the same time a specific indexer of the one to whom the uncle wants the normalizing phrase to apply—to Roland. Thus, Roland will enact the uncle’s words. (See O’Connor 1995b on “involving you”; Kitagawa and Lehrer 1990 on “generic you”). It is the uncle, after all, who gives Roland the necessary means, the knife, to assist him to “be a man” and to “do what you gotta do.” This kind of “you” is positioning the nephew into a general and necessary experience of assaulting another prisoner to establish his own status in prison. The uncle then is the educator who gives the student the necessary teaching and tools for learning. Or, in terms of Vladimir Propp’s (1968) functions in folk tales, Uncle has given Roland the magic element—a knife—with which he will overcome the adversity en route to being the hero. It is up to the student/hero, Roland, to apply the normalizing lesson as we see in the excerpt in example (3) below. (The boldface type marks the evaluative framebreak , an interlude of metadiscourse.)

## (3)

281     so, later on that day round about eight=  
 282     =about nine o’clock in the morning,  
 283     they have Rec, go outside,  
 284     so he came down into my cell,  
 285     into my cell telling about uh,  
 286     “you wanna have sex with me, right”?  
 287     I say, “yeh”,  
 288     so I laid in the bed, right.  
 289     so I was nervous,  
 290     so I signaled,  
 291     “c’mom”,  
 292     I say “c’mom”.  
 293     so when he came,  
 294     when he got close enough to me,  
 295     I stabbed him..  
 296     with, when I stabbed him  
 297     **it was at the point,**  
 298     **I really didn’t know how to use the knife.**  
 299     **therefore I wasn’t able to really KILL him**  
 300     **you know I assaulted him.**  
 301     **I wouldn’t have killed him, you know.**  
 302     like say right now  
 303     if I was to do it,  
 304     **I would put him away.**  
 305     **because I know.. how to do it, you know.**  
 306     **and, that happened.**  
 307     so, he ran out  
 308     I never, I, there wasn’t nothing that I got



309 I strive off of.  
 310 the reputation came behind that, right, you know.

## 9. Getting the advantage/being a man

We first note that Roland signals his complicity to have sex when he answers “right” to the man’s direct question “You wanna have sex with me, right” in line 286. Roland, thus, deceives the man and in his retelling also quite agentively states, “I stabbed him” in 295. In the passage I marked in bold that follows that most personally agentive utterance, Roland breaks the action frame to reflexively evaluate his act as he contemplates a small universe of understanding particularly apt in prisons: How to use a knife effectively. He reveals to his listener and to himself in his reflection two important items in this passage. At age 17 he lacked the deadly facility to kill that he claims he has since gained: “therefore I wasn’t able to really KILL him” (line 299). However, he asserts he could kill someone easily “like say right now” because he knows “how to do it” (line 302-3), a chilling remark for the interviewer to process. He also shows how the necessary reputation for violence became his protection, something he “strive[s] off of” (line 309). Both the acts of deception and aggression are agentively presented and assist the inmate in showing his “manliness” via his cunning at the time of the narrated event, his bravado at the time of the interview, and his ability to survive in general in the slow time of prison life where reputation as well as physical dexterity determine power.

## 10. Taking charge of his status

These passages show the speaker at work discerning the meaning of his actions in this autobiographical reflection. He recounts his sense of a self as a “man” in contrast to a “negative” metaphor of being a “girl” and he establishes his sense of self as a deceiver and even a killer by necessity. He drives home the point of his story for the interviewer and for himself as he proves he’s “gotta be a man” to survive.

In that final segment Roland describes the stabbing, creating a scene in the retelling that recreates at least the intent, if not the finesse, of the seemingly generic instructions of prison survival uttered by his uncle, instructions that are all too frequently a part of prison lore. (See inmate Jack Abbott’s ([1981] 1991 :76) words on how to stab in his epistolary accounts to Norman Mailer in *In the belly of the beast*.) “Being a man” is directly tied to agentive decisions to use aggression, not accommodation, for survival in prison, a rationale that reifies what James Gilligan’s (1996) *Violence: Our deadly epidemic and its causes* notes is the reaction to implications of shame. This also affirms what Adams et al. (1995) say is the rationale at work in the discourse of male spouse abusers who use their “king of the castle” metaphor to justify violence against wives and girlfriends who do not submit to their authority. In the all-male prison, manliness is most assuredly and stereotypically asserted by being violent, by protecting one’s space, and by reacting with bravery in the face of violence—as is shown in these words spoken by another one of the interviewees who had survived a nighttime stabbing in his supposedly locked cell: “I’m not scared of a knife. I would never run from a man with a knife.. get nowhere, you know”.

### 11. Being ready to die/being ready to kill: More reflexive frame breaks

Reflexive frame breaks, like the one in Roland's discussion of his ability with a knife above, are a discursive feature which I associate with heightened epistemological considerations in autobiographical narratives (see O'Connor 1995b). Part of the external evaluation (Labov) of spoken narrative, such overt comments on the events and on hypothetical other events, "like say right now/ if I was to do it/ I would put him away" (lines 302-304), cue the positioning of the storyteller in the world of the telling. Roland is not only recounting, he is posturing as a man in front of his female interviewer.

In the example below taken from a video transcript,<sup>9</sup> inmate Malcolm-Bey also gives a rationale for violence and positions himself as manly in the world of the story and of the storytelling. First, I briefly summarize the events of the story, then present large parts of the transcript so that we can consider how "being a man" also undergirds the acts of violence. The audience for this story is a drama workshop conducted usually by a male instructor and me (both white European Americans) with the assistance that year of an all male group of tutor volunteers, white and black. All inmates are male and African-American or, as is preferred by the speaker and some others of the group—Moorish Americans. By my absence, the group becomes all male, allowing for a significant change into sexually specific descriptions once permission "to use the language" is given.

Malcolm-Bey tells his audience about surviving an 8-man hit squad which comes to kill him in retaliation for a misunderstanding that occurred in the food service line earlier one day. The misunderstanding started with an insult which occurred because Malcolm-Bey (who works as a food server) has refused to make a special tray of food for another inmate. A bystander inmate has taken Malcolm-Bey's side by casting aspersions on the requestor as someone not worthy of asking favors because he is not a "man"; rather, the unnamed<sup>10</sup> requestor is a sexual object of other men, according to speech animated for the bystander by our storyteller. This bystander's verbal confrontation forces an apology by the requestor. That forced act of apology impugns that man's character sufficiently that the requestor arranges to have a powerful inmate put out a 'hit' to kill Malcolm-Bey to whom he has been made to apologize for requesting the special meal. Malcolm-Bey describes how he attempts to quell the coming violence by talking directly to the one who orders the hit, to no avail. The narrator Malcolm-Bey is attacked, defends himself, nearly dies, but survives, because, as he puts it "you can't keep a MAN down".

In this tapescript we see Malcolm-Bey's story positioning himself as a strong man, positioning another man as impolite, as a whore and a liar. In the middle section he

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<sup>9</sup> Special thanks to fellow prison educator Martin Mitchell, III for his work in the drama workshop which elicited this tape.

<sup>10</sup> The speaker whom I have given the pseudonym Malcolm-Bey does not use actual names for the other inmates involved. Thus I have termed them the Requestor (who wants a special tray for himself like the one he carries to his Benefactor) and the Bystander (who makes sexually explicit remarks about the Requestor). His lack of naming may have been more complex than I realized at the time of the taping. Other inmates present may have known the identities and thus needed no names. Or, equally possible, they did not know and Malcolm-Bey chose to omit the specific names. Since that time another failed attempt has taken place on Malcolm-Bey's life.

positions another as a deceiver—all which validate Malcolm-Bey's own acts and provide his rationale for violence and strength of will as necessary in prison. Such positionings not only within the storyline but within prisoner hierarchies co-construct the violence and validate conflict while positioning the speaker as victim, as contender, and as survivor. In the time of the storytelling, in the drama workshop, we can discern another positioning overlay as well, one which establishes the teller as powerful and manly in front of his peers (inmates) and in front of the outsiders (college teacher and student volunteers). We can note that the positionings of the speaker as a man in his story and in its insertion into the drama workshop are jointly constructed via size, heterosexuality, dangerousness, and reasonableness. Malcolm-Bey constructs the scenario in example (4). (The reflexive framebreak which interrupts the chronicling of actions to provide more orientation (Labov) and self display and reflection is marked in bold.)

(4)

- 38      So now this other brother that he sent over..  
 39      he'd been coming over for, about picking up, picking up this tray.  
 40      So now this individual comes over this particular day and says..  
 41      um.."where's mine?"  
 42      I said, "I beg your pardon?"  
 43      He said "WHERE'S MINES?"  
 44      You fix him one. You fix me one".  
 45      **Now, I weigh three hundred and fifteen pounds.**  
 46      **I bench press 580.**  
 47      **The bars would be bendin' like this.**  
 48      **Because there was so much weight on it. Ok?**  
 49      **At the same time there is also this bar in cell block yard.**  
 50      **I can jump up and hit a six foot six three man..**  
 51      **on top of his head and do some serious damage.**  
 52      **So you see I'm not what you call slow, or limited,**  
 53      **even though I am large.**  
 54      **And this individual here, he don't know nothing about me.**  
 55      **I don't know anything about him.**  
 56      **But I do know one thing.**  
 57      **The way that he approached me was completely wrong.**  
 58      **Because if he'd asked me properly, I may have made him, one of those trays.**  
 59      **But he came and demanded one of those trays.**  
 60      So now another friend of mine comes up and says "hold up..  
 61--> Can I use the language? (Martin: Yeah) "Hold up, HO."  
 62      "What the hell are you talking to this MAN like that for?"  
 63      He said "You a ho. You was my ho on the hill"<sup>11</sup>  
 64      I done had my penis in your mouth..in your rectum..  
 65      and in the palm of both your hands..  
 66      now you're back here pretending to be something that you're definitely not.  
 67      Which is a man."

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<sup>11</sup> The "hill" refers to another of the prison facilities, a medium security unit.

## 12. Politeness: Face wants in a deadly situation

The requestor, according to Malcolm-Bey, violates rules of politeness in his arrogant manner in using a direct question and a direct command to get a special tray:

(5)

- 41       um.. "where's mine?"  
 42       I said, "I beg your pardon?"  
 43       He said "WHERE'S MINES?"  
 44       You fix him one. You fix me one".

Brown and Levinson (1983) may not have imagined the deadly consequence of violating one's face wants in a setting such as this. Malcolm-Bey says that had the man asked politely he might have done as requested. His overtly formal "I beg your pardon" is his only reported response. Instead, to the listeners he breaks the action frame to re-orient them on the obvious—his size and his physical prowess—both observable on the videotape and to the live audience of classroom members (composed of all males— inmates, college volunteers, and instructor.) He tells the listeners about his weightlifting and jump-attack abilities. Such details serve as part of the rationale for Malcolm-Bey to be treated with wary respect. He implies that the requestor was foolish to have ordered him around. In lines 45-53 Malcolm-Bey describes his own weight, height and physical dexterity. He not only notes these details, but interprets them for the audience explaining that his large size does not make him too "slow" or "limited"—words which could apply to either physical or mental ability. In lines 54 and 56 he further orients the listeners with more commentary on knowledge states—the requestor's and his own in a well paralleled couplet: He don't know nothing about me; I don't know anything about him. The repetition of the "don't know" builds the intensity of the passage. The subtle elimination of the double negative on his own knowledge state could even serve to indicate Malcolm-Bey's awareness of his two live audiences' speaking styles. The two utterances set up the juxtaposition of what he does know, which is only "one thing" that the man made an improper approach by ordering Malcolm-Bey to fix another special tray. Tannen (1989) notes how often so-called "literary" devices are at work in casual conversations, not just in tightly crafted prose. Briggs (1993) contributes artful tactics in public speaking by African Americans to the successful implementation of sermonic styles and to double voicing wherein an "I" remark can indicate various identities and social positionings in a speaker's use of autobiographical material. Malcolm-Bey's juxtapositioning of the "don't know's" against the "do know one thing" shows the saliency that this episode holds in the unfolding of the act he describes.

For those outside the volatile world of prison life, "Where's mine"? (line 41) and the louder "WHERE'S MINES"? (line 43) along with the more forceful command "you fix him one. You fix me one" (line 44) hardly seem worthy of taking great offense. However, not just Malcolm-Bey considers this behavior inappropriate, for he reports that a bystander takes up the cause in the account. We should pause here to note also what is not being said. In thirty utterances Malcolm-Bey reports himself as saying only one response: (line 42) "I beg your pardon"? which is said after the requestor makes his first comment "where's mine"? Putting most of the commentary into the mouths of others could merely be a replication of the actual speech event. As a rhetorical strategy, however, it has the effect of

putting Malcolm-Bey in a positive light, one which is enhanced though his framebreak musings on politeness. His own figure's silence enhances his positioning as a reasonable man looking back on serious events. Thus his constructed silence has a subtle power. (See especially Gal 1991 on gender, power, silence.) The most incendiary remarks are given to the bystander beginning with "you a ho" [whore] in line 63. The bystander is reported as saying that Malcolm-Bey is a "man" and not a "ho" (whore) like the requestor who has participated in sex acts which serviced the bystander, as seen in lines 64-65 spoken slowly and deliberately:

64        "I done had my penis in your mouth...in your rectum...  
65        and in the palm of both your hands...

The effect of these lines on the all male audience is not recorded on the videotape. The speaker, however, has pointedly asked the male instructor for permission to speak graphically, "to use the language" in front of the non-inmates. Thus, we may assume that the point of the details is for the effect they will have on this new audience. Malcolm-Bey is well aware of sexual activity among men in prison, he provides graphic details. With his own reported silence he also constructs himself as distanced from such activity to the outsiders and simultaneously re-asserts his status to prisoners. Inside the narrative, the man who requests the special tray is thus reminded of the status he has in the prison. Simultaneously, inside the cellblock classroom, the non-inmate audience is apprized of just what kind of status that is.

This opening scene sets up the event that occurs when the requestor gets his powerful friend to redress the situation. The requestor is a servant in the hierarchy, but not powerless, for he comes under the protection of his benefactor. The requestor has told his benefactor that Malcolm-Bey has slandered the members of their Moorish American group. The friend puts out a "hit" on Malcolm-Bey. Unlike the inmate who was pressured for sex in Silberman's book, Malcolm-Bey does not hastily take any action when he later hears that a killing has been planned. Like Roland, he reports that he seeks advice of another inmate and is told to go talk to the man who has put out the hit.

(6)

158        He said, "Mo<sup>12</sup>, go talk to that brother."  
159        He said, "Moes don't kill Moes."  
160        He said, "That's your brother."  
161        Talk to him man"

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<sup>12</sup> Mo and Moes refer to members of the Moorish Americans, a group of Islam following black prisoners, a different group from the Black Muslims, but like them, a powerful force in prisons. Members prize education and appropriate personal demeanor. A large group which has its own hierarchies can be a source of conflict and concern within the prison administration.

### 13. Learning to give up on words<sup>13</sup>: Being “reasonable” in the violent world of prison

Malcolm-Bey thus presents himself as a reasonable man, one who uses words to solve problems, even though he is quite capable of using force. In example (7) below, he also stops the action twice [note the bold print sections] for reflection on the scene in which he describes trying to talk with the man who ordered the hit.

(7)

- 170 I went up to the block..  
 171 The brother was on the phone.  
 172 → **If I had my piece that's where they would have picked his body up at.**  
 173 **Because I would have took him off.**  
 174 → I said, "Excuse me brother let me holler at you."  
 175 He act like he didn't hear.  
 176 Touched him on the shoulder..  
 177 → I said, "Excuse me brother let me holler at you a minute."  
 178 "What's up, Mo?"  
 179 I said, "Brother-Man..we got to talk."  
 180 He said "ho hold it's about that situation?"  
 181 → He said "Man look, I got the word, man, I understand now uh..  
 182 You wasn't like that."  
 183 → He said "I already took care of it."  
 184 → **So I'm looking him straight in his eyes.**  
 185 → **Because when you talk to a person you look them in the eyes.**  
 186 → **And the eyes will tell you what the mouth won't.**  
 187 **So now,...I didn't.**  
 188 → **I couldn't see the lie.**  
 189 → **I couldn't see the lie.**  
 190 **Maybe I was looking a little too hard for that lie.**  
 191 **He convinced me.**  
 192 I said, "Alright Mo we got that straightened out."  
 193 I go back in the yard..four block yard.  
 194 Go out and I tell my rappy and the other brothers..  
 195 say, "everything, I talked to him. Alright, everything's cool."  
 196 My rappy takes my piece and his piece.. back to the block and puts it away.  
 197 I go in to into the rec yard and I'm down there I got 380.  
 198 Up on the bars. I'm benching this.  
 199 I go up once..I go up twice..and in the process I bring my neck up.  
 200 Right. And I see...seven brothers coming through the gate.  
 201 I know these Moes.  
 202 I know what each each and every one of their functions is.  
 203 → This is the seven<sup>14</sup> man hit squad right here.

We see in this narrative the concept of being a man underpins the insult, the attack, and the survival. In the section above Malcolm-Bey concerns himself with reading the body language of the man at the phone (who has ordered the hit), with seeing the lie, and with

<sup>13</sup> Apologies to Keith Basso for applying this phrase in so deadly a context.

<sup>14</sup> It will become apparent that Malcolm-Bey is not miscounting when he finishes the story.

Malcolm-Bey's own faith in words for solutions and how that ironically helps construct the deception. In line 174 Malcolm-Bey politely tries to interrupt saying "excuse me, brother" to talk to the man on the phone. The man, however, does not end his phone<sup>15</sup> conversation, nor respond when first tapped on the shoulder. Malcolm-Bey notes in an aside in the teller's world that the man would have been "taken off" (assaulted/killed) right then by Malcolm-Bey if he had been armed, ostensibly for the impoliteness, the affront of not speaking to him immediately when such an important event as a man's life is at stake.

#### **14. Vagueness as dangerous**

The work of Adelsward & Linnell (1994) on threats describes how vagueness is used as a linguistic resource in delivering threatening phone calls made by Mafia members. They note that "vague, unspecific, and indirect expressions within a frame of threat" are useful in the "logic of negotiation and blackmail, the treatment of morally sensitive topics, and the concern for third parties", particularly in the case of a powerful threatener (Adelsward and Linnell 1994: 285-6). Though not responding to someone interrupting during a phone call may seem a minor element, it is not minor in the context of prison life. Made clear by the examples in this paper, inmates have deep structure understanding of what Austin presented as linguistic ways of acting via our "ways with words". The extremely polite approach of Malcolm-Bey shows the seriousness of the situation. Malcolm-Bey knows (via the prison grapevine) that a hit has been put out on him.

Malcolm-Bey uses several lexical items that connote he feels he and the man on the phone, two Moes, are on equal footing; or, at least, Malcolm-Bey seems to be positioning himself as an equal. This is shown by both "Mo" and "Brother-man",<sup>16</sup> the familiarizing form of address that connotes membership in the African-American male community. In lines 174 and 177 Malcolm-Bey uses his most polite forms: "Excuse me brother". Also, he twice uses a colloquial expression for having a chat or discussion: "Let me holler at you". (In the African American vernacular this expression has none of the negative connotations attached to the word "hollering" which might connote "yelling".) In the constructed dialogue by Malcolm-Bey he enacts the man on the phone asking casually "What's up, Mo?" in line 178. Thus, the man on the phone takes up the discourse of the familiar, of the brotherhood, with the use of the colloquial "what's up" and the in-group term "Mo" for Moorish Americans, a Muslim group of some standing amongst black prisoners. However, I suggest that by asking "what's up" he is presented as purposefully vague and by using "Mo" he is purposefully and deceptively friendly. It is, in fact, this association amongst the Moorish Americans that has provided the logical advice, "Moes don't kill Moes" (line 159), used as a rationale for Malcolm-Bey to talk instead of to use weapons upon first

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<sup>15</sup> Phone time is sharply regulated and doled out by the minute in most prisons. Thus, the man's not hanging up to talk with Malcolm-Bey might not really be considered an affront, as the man would lose his turn at the phone. This leads me to suggest that Malcolm-Bey considers his own status superior to that of the man on the phone and thus that he should have acknowledged Malcolm-Bey more directly.

<sup>16</sup> Brotherman is an interesting combination of the words "Man" and "Brother" used in African American speech to connote both solidarity (as in "bro") and familiarity (as in "man").

hearing of the hit. Prison culture, however, overrides religious culture and logic in this case. The fallacy in following such a code of peaceful inquiry is seen most clearly in retrospect by Malcolm-Bey as he tells the story.

### 15. Vagueness contributes to deception

The deception grows in lines 180-2. The man on the phone feigns not knowing exactly why Malcolm-Bey is there. He innocently inquires in 180, "it's about that situation?" Here we have a vagueness in "that situation" used for describing all the specifics that have gone before (the tray scene, the reported slander, the hit being put out), all reduced to the generic "that situation" which in retrospect might be better recognized as *dangerously vague* much as in Adelsward and Linnell's analysis. Malcolm-Bey hears in 181-82 that the phone man knows that Malcolm-Bey "is not like that", again a vague reference. "That" might connote that the man on the phone knows that Malcolm-Bey is not the sort to say slanderous things about another. His casualness might then be taken to be just that—casualness because the whole issue is so unimportant. What is also possible is that the man on the phone is frightened that Malcolm-Bey is armed. He does, after all, try to interrupt during phone time, a bold maneuver in a prison where phone time is highly valued, doled out as a privilege, and even a currency of trade.

### 16. Autobiographical discourse as a way into understanding the self

In the teller's world, Malcolm-Bey is agentively puzzling over his lack of action, looking back on the situations from the perspective of one who was deceived. He has already noted that now in retrospect he knows he should have been armed and taken deadly action. He breaks the action scene again in lines 185-191 to provide contemplation for understanding life and for understanding the violent acts that ensue. Such action-frame breaks not only help the speaker re-orient the listeners and emphasize high evaluation of the story, but also show the speaker's reflection on his own life. Important in a construction of survival and a construction of manliness in prison is the epistemic self presented in this passage (marked in bold). Malcolm-Bey breaks the event frame to analyze, to be reflective about how he drew the conclusion that all was "straightened out" (192) because as Malcolm-Bey put it:

(8)

185     **Because when you talk to a person you look them in the eyes.**  
 186     **And the eyes will tell you what the mouth won't.**

The "you" here universalizes the experience of searching for truth. It also invites the listeners into the experience by the switch from first person discourse to a "you inclusive" (O'Connor 1994a) that signals the reflexive nature of these framebreaks which cause not only the speaker, but also the audience, to step away from the structuring of the actions in the event. The speaker suggests that "you", people ostensibly like himself, are capable of the same puzzlement over the past event *and* over the human condition in general. He



implies that in an ideal world we should be able to look someone in the eyes and see if the truth is there. Malcolm-Bey gets a sharp reminder that his location is no ideal world. He returns to the first person as he notes and repeats “I couldn’t see the lie” (lines 188 & 189), utterances which foreshadow the violence that follows the deception.

### 17. “If you are afraid to die this is the wrong place to be”

In the example below we see that Malcolm-Bey is then set up for an attack, cannot reach his weapons in spite of the small “rappy” (his rap brother, his pal) trying to get them to him through the bars in lines 275-9. He suffers (in 286) a paralyzing wound. The reflexive framebreak, where we find Malcolm-Bey moving toward his most globally contemplative stance, is marked in bold and with arrows.

(9)

- 268 But this particular brother..I heard him.  
 269 He said “Back Motherfucker back I got him.”  
 270 I turned and I looked over my shoulder still making tracks.  
 271 And he was swinging his piece.  
 272 At the group that had merged together...  
 273 to run down on me..and stab me to death.  
 274 And he broke out behind me right.  
 275 **I’m about from here..from that wall to maybe about right here..**  
 276 **from my piece..the piece is sticking out..the door..like this. {Another inmate is trying to get a knife (“piece”) to Malcolm-Bey}**  
 277 **It’s about this long. He’s sticking it out the door this here**  
 278 **You know all I got to do is just get there and grab it.**  
 279 **Once I get that..I don’t care how many times they stab me because see..**  
 280 **I’m not going by myself.**  
 281 → **So you see that’s the mentality..that the brothers got to have.**  
 282 → **When they’re doing time...because if you don’t have that particular mentality..**  
 283 → **You’re not you’re not accepted<sup>17</sup> to make it here.**  
 284 → **Because if you are afraid to die this is the wrong place to be.**  
 285 Just as I thought I was going to make it.. to that piece.  
 286 BAM it felt like a heavy weight..hit me in the back but I didn’t feel no pain.

Malcolm-Bey reflexively considers his position again in 278-84 as he details his thoughts as he realizes that he cannot reach his weapon to defend himself against so many men. We can follow the shift in pronouns that occurs in these lines from “I” to “they” (the brothers)

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<sup>17</sup> Careful listening to the tape by two transcribers leads me to use the word accepted here rather than expected, based upon the pronunciation. Both words actually work in the context, though expected may be intended and the speaker may simply make no phonetic distinction. (In a similar way in my own dialect of southern mountain English, words such as pen, pin are homophones for me.) *You are not accepted to make it here* would say that you are considered an outsider if you are not ready to die. *You are not expected to make it here* would say that it is not likely that you will live through the experience unless you are ready to die. That both words work is part of the richness of African American style which invites listener engagement and interpretation and which here sets up the interesting conundrum of dying in order to live. (The connection to Christian beliefs is probably also recoverable in this small text as well.)

to “you”. I find it significant that this shift from I-dominated telling occurs at a moment of great evaluative intensity when he realizes he cannot access weapons to fight off his attackers. I find such a passage a moment of deeper thinking in which the speaker is becoming now more contemplative of his actions, doing much more than providing further orientation as in the description of his rappy holding his knife out to him in 275-278. Such a moment of reflection occurs in discourse when speakers (regardless of situation) use the rhetorical resources of reflexive language to comment on the saliency of the event, to draw out the importance of a situation. The shift into such introspection begins, when Malcolm-Bey’s expression in 280: “I’m not going by myself” indicates his thinking at the time: He will kill some of his attackers no matter how severely he is outnumbered. He moves to a reference to the kind of “mentality” (i.e. thinking) that “the brothers” (other African-American prisoners like himself) “got to have” in 281. The passage serves to ratify his actions in defense of his own safety. He has already personally ratified his willingness to kill in line 280: “I’m not going by myself”. Shifting to “you” socially ratifies his survival strategy. Such a contemplative break in the action sequence makes a reflexive frame break. Erving Goffman’s (1974) use of frame break when someone in an audience at a play stands up and shouts at the actors, as if entering into their dialogue, is an example of what he calls “flooding” into the action on stage. My use of reflexive framebreak is that of a speaker more or less “flooding” out of the action sequence in order to make an evaluative analysis that is based on his/her understanding of a larger significance of the events. In this kind of framebreak, agentive talk in relation not only to the action described but towards the larger issue of a life story often occurs.

Thus the whole story serves to make the point that people die in prison, but even against the odds, a real man can survive. He can survive the trickery, the hit squad, the betrayals, because he 1) observes the status hierarchies; 2) is in excellent physical shape, is strong and deadly himself; and 3) is more honorable, more of a man, because he tries to negotiate with words to stop violence. He is constructed both as a dangerous man and as a man of his word.

### **18. “You can’t keep a MAN down”**

When Malcolm-Bey returns to the “play by play” in lines 285-286 he reveals that he was stabbed: “BAM, it felt like a heavy weight.” He, similar to Roland earlier in this article, was ready to kill. However, he, unlike Roland, does not reach the Magic key--the knife. Instead, Malcolm-Bey is taken down by the 8th man in the hit squad who has ironically claimed to be helping him. When he is stabbed, as we see below in Example 10, Malcolm-Bey is taken to the doctors, and later assumed to be crippled for life. He asserts, however, that it is because “you can’t keep a MAN down” (line 351) that he recovers. Malcolm’s physical prowess, his willingness to kill (shown in the reflexive frame break) and now his mental as well as physical determination all come together to show the storyline of a man who is neither afraid of a knife, nor afraid to use one, nor is he vanquished by one. The resolution of the story brings all these threads together:

(10)

341     So now the pain is setting in.  
 342     You hear what I'm saying?  
 343     So when she told me I wouldn't walk anymore...  
 344     I made up my mind to prove her a lie.  
 345     And I'm walking now.  
 346     I've been walking ever since.  
 347     It took me nine months...but I was up walking.  
 348     I was going slowly..but I was walking.  
 349     The doctor said "I just don't understand it."  
 350     I said "I do."  
 351 →   You can't keep a MAN down."

This final passage in his story contains many elements used in African-American sermon style, the direct addressing of the audience "you hear what I'm saying" (342) which invites response; the use of a version of a rather incendiary phrase of accusation about the doctor in line 344 "proved her a lie" ("you a lie" as a way of calling out a liar is often heard in African-American vernacular argument), and most noticeably the repetition of sonorous phrasing around the word *walking*. He says he is *walking* four times, slightly varying the aspect and the juxtapositions of the feat. The first pair—"I'm walking now"; "I've been walking ever since" are bringing the audience up to the present time, as is common in the coda of a narrative. "It took me nine months...but I was up walking" is paired with a second utterance conjoined by a matching pause structure: "I was going slowly...but I was up walking" reminiscent of the cadence in Langston Hughes' "I's still climbin'" in the poem "Mother to son" where the speaker notes how her life "ain't been no crystal stair". Malcolm-Bey walks with a cane, an instrument he uses several times in the course of this videotaped story to point out distances, lengths of knives, and how he bench presses. His emphasis in this story on his physical prowess and, in this final section, on his walking as recovery from a paralyzing injury serve as a way of doubly marking his performed text and re-vising perceptions of his life. He is much more than a man walking with the help of a cane.

The increased stress and final line positioning of the word "MAN" in the last line help establish the evaluative intensity this remark signifies. He is clearly asserting he is a man. He may also be offering that self assessment by *signifying* to the audience in contrast to an unstated but recoverable implication that some members of his audience are not men, at least not in his implied definition of strong and heterosexual maleness. (On signifying in African American speech see Abrahams [1974] 1989, Mitchell-Kernan 1974; Gates 1987; Kochman 1981; M.H. Goodwin 1990; Briggs 1993.) These words, though at the very end of his monologue, open up the narrative for audience interpretation. We can note that the "you" in line 351 is opening and polysemic: "You can't keep a MAN down". All those in the audience at the time of the workshop, all those in the actual time of the event—the medical professionals, the other prisoners—all these live and former interlocutors can learn not to thwart Malcolm-Bey. He also just as readily is addressing himself, such that he not ever give in to pain or despair which might keep himself down

## 19. Zones of proximal development

Important to my analysis is that greater meaning which could be being shaped as any speaker articulates such a self-assessing passage for himself to hear as well. In a Vygotskian Zone of Proximal development, an autobiographical storyteller speaks aloud his understanding of how to achieve a life. At the same time he or she is teaching the listeners exactly what is needed to understand his life experience as he or she now sees it. In the particular instances of these data we begin to see (if not to understand) the “necessary violence” required in prison survival. By discussing the transcript and its uses for talks and papers such as this, Malcolm-Bey also has further presented his words into an even more distant public sphere.<sup>18</sup> The utterance, “you can’t keep a man down”, like the whole story of the eight-man hit squad coming for Malcolm-Bey, agentively shows how words in prison not only challenge hierarchies enough to kill or be killed, but also how autobiographical tellings can challenge the practice of silence that follows imprisonment by revealing the dangerous implications of isolation from community. This isolation contributes to the destruction of bodies while doing little to focus on the souls/minds (See Foucault 1979) of prisoners.

## 20. Conclusions

Thus, while I illustrate, via the discourse of prisoners, that narrative can be the site of a powerful macro-reflexive act, I also assert that narrative positionings showcasing personal agency and self reflexivity are key to understanding anyone’s autobiographical discourse. Such lexical items as pronoun choices and discourse features as constructed dialogue, frame breaks, double positionings, and use of aphorisms can cue the internal reflexivity of the speaker who is at the same time also (re)creating a self in the macro-reflexive act of “autobiography”. A central self concept illustrated in this analysis is that of “being a man,” a construct that ironically can be seen as both protecting one from being raped or killed and which can be used as a rationale for assault. That both are considered “necessary” in the prison context is particularly vexing.

Could additional discursive practices be used in prison work as a means into rehabilitative thinking? I suggest that making opportunities for autobiographical speech and writing by prisoners can open up sites for constructing a self who is more self reflective. Doing this in the company of non-prisoners changes the “public” in the prisoner’s Zone of Proximal Development. What is taken up then by new audiences becomes a new negotiation in meaning. I suggest that socially productive sites occur in the telling of events and especially within the frame breaks that allow for epistemic considerations which lead to a more personally agentive self in the context of a cultural and social milieu of change. This requires, ironically, that more people get into prisons—not just as the result of the incarceration boom advocated by current legislators and governors in response to perceived

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<sup>18</sup> Malcolm-Bey has read over the transcript and discussed its use in talks I have made on various continents.

increases<sup>19</sup> in violent crime and drug offenses—but as a necessary part of re-habilitating whole communities. Inside the “same old-same old” routine of prison life, especially in the locked down world of maximum security prisons, little opportunity comes for new zones of proximal development which might promote new ways of thinking. While religious groups have been frequent volunteers and visitors in the prisons, many educational involvements have been decreasing. The United States 1994 Crime Bill has contributed to a diminishing number of educational contacts nationwide since it now prevents the use of Pell Grant tuition funding for anyone who is incarcerated. That removes a significant source of discursive opportunities between prisoners and those not involved in crime.

The 1992 National Adult Literacy Survey noted that the incarcerated who joined groups scored significantly higher than non-joiners on all literacy scales (Haigler et al. 1994: 56). The most frequently joined groups were in the categories of addiction and religion, groupings which not only bring in those from outside the prison but which also offer forums for discursive displays through public expression of one’s story, beliefs, and self knowledge. Engaging convicts in more discursive settings with non-criminal interactants allows opportunity for the kind of talk that can lead to introspection of past and current acts. It potentially allows for very productive puzzling that promotes agentive claims and clears the way for honest appraisals of a self or of a community--the kind of discourse seldom used in criminal justice proceedings and rarely found inside the prison walls. Such self-disclosing speech might better evolve in communicative and community based experience, the very experience that prison precludes, but which the long-term involvement via education in the company of concerned citizens could provide.

## **21. Beyond the Walls**

Beyond the world of prison walls we can notice the richness and saliency of epistemic puzzling to help give insight into the workings of communicative autobiographical talk in general. Inviting the public display of discourse on events of deep engagement and high intensity (peak moments in a life) makes possible fruitful pathways to self introspection. Such interview and performance settings provide ways *in* to the thinking of others via the observable frame breaks which act as openings *out* to the larger social world. As speakers of stories about important life (and death) events we make connections to our past selves, to our current listeners, and to our sense of current and future selves in the ways we reach out to *you* with words. In a sense, whenever we tell a story (or publish an article on narratives) we are emphasizing a version of Malcolm-Bey’s commentary which reaches out to seek understanding and affirmation: “You hear what I’m saying?”

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<sup>19</sup> Note, however, that the actual number of reported crimes in the U.S. has gone down.

## Appendix A

### Key to transcriptions

.	Indicates sentence-final falling intonation
,	indicates clause-final falling intonation
..	two dots indicates a pause of a half second or less
...	three dots and more indicate progressively longer pauses
=	indicates words following are latched quickly together
hh	indicates laughter
CAPS	indicates raised voice
[?]	square bracket with question mark indicates inaudible words
[word?]	indicates unsure transcription
{comment}	curly brackets indicate author's explanatory notes to readers
→	arrows indicate passages to be specially noted in the analysis
<b>bold</b>	<b>darkened print indicates framebreaks</b>

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