

Prisons, Literacy, and Creative Maladjustment: How College-in-Prison Educators Subvert and Circumnavigate State Power

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Even as education is always a high-stakes endeavor, the stakes of prison education contexts are even higher. This is, of course, due to the nature of the carceral state and the means through which it sustains jails, prisons, and detention centers as “death-making institutions” of state control (Kaba). Given the power of prisons to harass, confine, and further segregate incarcerated people without explanation—populations that are disproportionately Black, Brown, and/or Indigenous (Sawyer and Wagner)—it comes as no surprise that students in prison education programs are neither immune nor protected from these violences.

I’ve worked as an educator with the Midwest Prison Education Project (MPEP), a “comprehensive college-in-prison program” (Midwest Prison Education Project 5), for the past five years.¹ Through this work, I’ve come to understand firsthand how the prison, as enacted through arbitrary bureaucratic policies and the whims of individual staff, interrupts education on the inside and further oppresses incarcerated people. At the same time, I’ve witnessed how prison educators navigate and push back against these regulations to support the teaching and learning of incarcerated students.

It is at this nexus of carceral bureaucracy and prison education that I stake my intervention in this article. I argue that prison educators mobilize complex and highly situated literacy practices to bend the rules in prison contexts. Deploying these subversive acts of “creative maladjustment” (King Jr.; Kohl), as I’ll describe later, enables these instructors to circumnavigate state power as they sustain educational commitments to incarcerated students in the face of state violence. Considering that literacy is often a tool used by the state (Chávez; Epps-Robertson; Vieira, *American*; Wan) to regulate and control (incarcerated) people, it’s critical to spotlight how individuals work against the grain of such directives to aid others in meeting their material needs. Attending to these practices can assist educators and researchers in better making sense of how literacy can simultaneously

“liberate and oppress” (Vieira, “Writing” 283) as well as how it enables and constrains possibilities for resistance to the power of the state—in carceral institutions or otherwise.

In the pages that follow, I first explicate the theoretical framework I draw from in statecraft, an abolitionist conceptualization of state power. I go on to articulate how statecraft informs my understanding of literacy in this article, both as a multiply layered, sociomaterial phenomenon and as an object of inquiry in prison-based scholarship. I then describe two key concepts for making sense of how prison educators negotiate carceral policies on the inside in the Carceral Communications Framework (Cavallaro et al. 2)¹ and creative maladjustment, after which I detail the contradictions present in the prison regulations that govern MPEP programming. In the remainder of this piece, I draw upon research from a qualitative, IRB-approved study that examines prison educators’ literacy and teaching practices in the context of the carceral state and abolition. In particular, I describe and analyze the accounts of Jim and Michelle,² two MPEP instructors who leverage their institutional knowledge of the prison to work around its rules in working with incarcerated students. I find that both educators use literacy to decode complex institutional contexts, identifying and working within the ambiguity of the prison’s regulations to get educational materials to students through underground channels. In the final paragraphs of the article, I reflect on what these accounts can tell us about researching and resisting the violence of the state. More specifically, I conclude with implications for (prison) literacy educators that speak to the importance of bending institutional rules, divesting from carceral logics, and enacting subversive literacy practices in those textual bureaucracies created and maintained by the state.

ABOLITION AND STATECRAFT: A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

We cannot understand how educators subvert the institutional policies of the prison without first theorizing state power. I do so by drawing upon the work of abolitionist organizers and scholars who seek to address and combat “the root causes of state violence” (Spade, Kaba, and Dixon) in leading anti-policing and anti-prison struggles for liberation. As a theoretical framework, abolition helps elucidate how the state itself fundamentally commits violence against racialized, queer, trans, disabled, and/or poor people. Abolitionist praxis guides communities toward collectively building anew more just and humane worlds.

To these ends, I comprehend the state’s relation to the prison through Savannah Shange’s notion of statecraft, a “Black-centered political framework that theorizes the state as a set of

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practices that exceed any single apparatus or even a collection of them” (5-6). In conceptualizing the state less as a singular, monolithic institution and more as relationships of power that are continually made and remade over time, Shange emphasizes the everyday “state practices that render blackness itself *as* abjection” (6, emphasis in original). As Shange points out through her analysis of the

Movement 4 Black Lives' vision statement, these extractive practices include the corporate and governmental degradation of Black neighborhoods; the criminalization of Black youth in schools; lending practices that target poor Black folks; and the incarceration and murder of Black people, particularly queer and trans individuals (5–6, M4BL). Taking stock of these structural harms helps us identify state power as expansive and foundationally violent. So too does this vantage point necessarily entwine the varied practices of the state with institutional “racism, ableism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, and xenophobia” (Spade 5–6), the likes of which enable the mechanisms that sustain mass incarceration itself.³ In this sense, *statecraft* both highlights the expansive foundations of state power and provides a heuristic for examining the situated, day-to-day interactions that uphold structural violence—an exchange with a prison guard or the arbitrary denial of important bureaucratic paperwork in the prison.

Even as *statecraft* helps us draw important connections between prisons and universities, both institutions of the state, it's important to note that state power functions differently across these sites. Prisons and universities have both historically excluded minoritized people, and each enacts carceral logics, meaning that they exert pervasive control through “policing [and] punishment” (Kaba and Hayes 24). That said, there are many more rules, written and unwritten, in prisons; so too are the consequences for transgressions much more severe. University practitioners bend rules all the time, often with little by way of disciplinary response. Similar infractions by incarcerated people in prisons, jails, and detention centers, however, can result in extended physical isolation, extreme bodily harm, and/or the further restriction of movement and socialization—all without reason or recourse. Such disparities in punishment can also, of course, be traced to the anti-Black foundations of the prison itself. I mention these differences because it's necessary to understand prison education—and the work of prison educators—in the context of the carceral state. Just as state power functions differently in prisons than in mainstream university settings, so too are the capacities of literacy to inflict harm different in these institutions.

THE (CARCERAL) VIOLENCE OF LITERACY

In this section, I trace connections between *statecraft*, carcerality, and discipline-specific notions of literacy. Before doing so, though, it's necessary to explicate how I'm understanding literacy as an unbounded meaning-making process. In the text that follows, I point to how MPEP educators enact broad and expansive literacy practices in contrast to the control of the carceral environments they work in. Beyond solely engaging with alphabetic text, literacy constitutes a range of sociomaterial meaning-making activity that encompasses a wide range of “literacy performances” in addition to written and verbal communication, namely “sense-making, discernment, and methods of encoding and decoding various signs and symbols” (Pritchard 19). Highlighting these everyday means of “complicated, rhetorical, and embodied ways people make meaning” (Davis 56) is especially crucial to the literacies I'll be discussing in this piece, as it's of the utmost importance for prison educators and incarcerated students to consistently and carefully “read” the nuances of their surroundings.

It's also important, though, to gesture toward the nature in which literacy constructs—and

is reciprocally constructed by—the material realities of the prison. Speaking of the papers that immigrants use to cross borders, Vieira notes how “documents . . . make subjects ‘legible’ to the state” as well as how such papers are used for identifying and regulatory purposes (8). This reality is also true in US carceral institutions. Papers issued by prison staff determine incarcerated people’s schedules for movement outside of their cells, access to commissary, and other vital day-to-day functions. Other documents such as Department of Corrections directives, policies, and rules govern what prison educators can and can’t do to support incarcerated students in teaching contexts—obviously with much less material consequence. In both cases, these textual bureaucracies make incarcerated and nonincarcerated subjects alike legible to the state while occluding the actors, processes, and power used to do so.

None of this is to say, however, that literacy is inherently harmful when mobilized in state contexts. I reject totalizing, one-to-one connections between literacy and violence, as noted by J. Elspeth Stuckey:

Literacy . . . is a matter of access, a matter of opportunity, a matter of economic security—a total matter. The violence of literacy is the violence of the milieu it comes from, promises, recapitulates. It is attached inextricably to the world of food, shelter, and human equality.

When literacy harbors violence, the society harbors violence. (94)

A chameleonic tool, literacy can take on multiple meanings and values enacted by actors in carceral institutions, all for a variety of purposes. As such, documents are sometimes used to carry out oppressive sanctions. A prison guard, for instance, could very well choose not to distribute papers to an imprisoned person, effectively restricting their access to commissary or preventing them from making a phone call home. These acts, though, always involve individuals; documents themselves do not oppress individuals on their own. Yet because literacy is a double-edged sword, and as I’ve witnessed through my work in MPEP, there is also room for it to be used in service of creative resistance to state power in institutions where violence is normalized.

Stuckey’s work is useful, nonetheless, for connecting the interpersonal and infrastructural valences of literacy in prison environments. As Alexandra Cavallaro has rightfully pointed out, Pritchard’s notion of literacy normativity is useful to understanding the relationships between literacy and the carceral state (5). In *Fashioning Lives*, Eric Darnell Pritchard theorizes literacy normativity as a means of identifying “incidents where literacy operates with the power of regulation, imposition, surveillance, and other forces that do damage or inflict harm on individuals” (12). Though they develop this concept in relation to Black queer folks’ literacy practices, I see in their description of literacy normativity the functions of policing and prisons, both of which are unambiguously anti-queer, anti-trans, and anti-Black institutions.

As it relates to this exploration, then, prisons are built to dehumanize the populations within them. Accordingly, the documents that uphold such structures—and specifically, the prison staff who enforce literacy normativity through these rules—dehumanize incarcerated people by means of literacy as well. Although these frames are perhaps most useful to those studying or working in prison environments, literacy studies can also benefit from more deeply examining such mechanisms of state violence, the implications of which I’ll tease out more extensively in this article’s conclusion.

POWER, FRICTION, AND INSTITUTIONAL CONFLICT: A PRISON LITERACIES LITERATURE REVIEW

While the specter of repressive state power looms large in the background of prison literacies research,⁴ the frictions between prison educators and departments of corrections are largely relegated to the periphery in this scholarship. Such moments of tension arise in different ways across this body of work: through references to the harsh materiality of prisons and jails, broad references to the power of carceral institutions, and in a few instances, moments of conflict between outside educators⁵ and prison staff. These insights from the literature, of course, would not be possible without the scholarship of incarcerated scholars, particularly MPEP students and educators whose work is referenced throughout this article (see Castro Brawn, Graves, Mayorga, Page, and Slater; Castro and Brawn; Cavallaro; Cavallaro et al., Lee Harrell, Villareal, and White; Rogers Hinshaw, Holding, and Jacobi; Sosnowski). Not only is it of the utmost importance to center the accounts and perspectives of marginalized people in research. Those who've survived the carceral state also have especially valuable perspectives on prison policies and regulations, some of which pertain specifically to Eastern Correctional Facility (ECF), the prison out of which the Midwest Prison Education Project operates.

The materiality of carceral space, as described in prison literacies work, often signifies state power. As Libby Catchings observes, the physical surfaces of the prison—and how outside instructors experience them sensorially—function as metonyms for how the carceral state dehumanizes all who come into contact with it (40). Common to such descriptions of prisons and jails are invocations of razor wire (Catchings 45; Jacobi, “Slipping Pages” 67; Malec 71); the clanging of automated prison doors; harsh, chemical smells (Curry and Jacobi 5); and the loud jangling of keys, fans, and “metal scraping metal” (Plemons, *Beyond Progress* 5). These jarring details, which are often narrated upon outside individuals' entrance to jails, prisons, and detention centers (Curry and Jacobi 5; Malec 68; Plemons, *Beyond Progress* 5), serve to mark the movement of nonincarcerated people into institutions of total control and to highlight cultures of authority and surveillance. Just as importantly, the absence of certain technologies in prison environments also indexes the power of the state. Whether through lack of access to computers (Berry 50) or Internet on the inside (Rogers Hinshaw, Holding, and Jacobi 79), these details gesture toward broader regimes of social control imposed by departments of corrections.

Other prison literacies scholars remind readers of these institutions' power by referencing the regulations and policies of carceral institutions. As Mo, Stephanie Bower, Raymond P., Emily Artiano, William M., and Ben Peck reflect on navigating parole board hearings on the inside, they speak to how incarcerated people “must confirm the power of the state, even when doing so is otherwise untrue and illogical” (103). Others, such as Rachel Lewis, reference more wide-ranging mechanisms of control such as mail surveillance, censorship, and book banning (194). And writing as a group of nonincarcerated and incarcerated scholars, Amos Lee, Michael Harrell, Miguel Villareal, and Douglas White detail how drafts of their work were screened by prison officials throughout their writing process. As one might suspect, these institutional regulations make it difficult to sustain educational

programming on the inside (Jacobi and Becker 32–33), not to mention how these “moving walls of carceral policy” (Jacobi, “Against Infrastructure” 68) capriciously shift over time, stymying the efforts of prison educators to address such changes.

Across these handful of accounts, state power is rendered nameless, faceless, and free from accountability. Locating the oppression of carceral institutions in objects, policies, and rules, though, obscures the people who carry out such injustices. As challenging as it can be to contend with carceral bureaucracies, facility administrators, guards, and others uphold these repressive policies across such spaces of education. So while it’s crucial to develop analyses that understand state violence as structural, erasing individual actors from these accounts presents the power of the prison as invisibilised and monolithic, unable to be navigated at all.

The prison literacies scholarship that mentions conflict between prison educators and DOC staff are few and far between. Michelle Curry and Tobi Jacobi remind readers of the authority of jail staff, as well as the arbitrariness with which they wield it, when they note that guards have “the power to deny [incarcerated students’] attendance for behavioral concerns or simply because they would rather not pull people from their cells” (9). Other narratives highlight accounts of disruption in prison classrooms, with instructors being told that they need to change rooms in the middle of class (Plemons, *Beyond Progress* 93). Instances such as these, which are rarely if ever explained, are usually justified as “security measures,” which Laura Rogers, Wendy Hinshaw, Cory Holding, and Tobi Jacobi pinpoint as the always-present institutional justification for any disruptive or oppressive action in the prison (80).

These accounts of conflict between instructors and jail or prison staff most often seem to be deployed as scene-setting mechanisms in the literature, signaling to readers how oppressive these facilities are as well as how difficult it can be to teach and learn on the inside. They can also situate moments of resistance. As Megan G. McDowell and Alison Reed write,

To counter the guards’ presence, we gathered around the tables placed furthest from their station. This choice felt like our unspoken and modest effort to reappropriate the space for our own purposes, to use the relative distance, noise, and heat emanating from the cellblocks to buffer our conversations. In a space of hypervisibility, our group desired to keep something for ourselves. (149)

Such moments in this scholarship are important because they illustrate how instructors can tactically resist the overriding power of the carceral state. As Anna Plemons argues, literacy can be mobilized in the name of “acts of creative resistance” on the inside (“Literacy” 39).⁶ These acts, though, are not without substantial risk and threat of violence, as “the rules of the [prison industrial complex] may, over time, be negotiated, but they cannot be ignored (“Literacy” 45). This matter is especially urgent on account of the fact that incarcerated people, and not prison educators, are those punished for indiscretions on the inside.

In the following pages, I build upon this literature by zooming in on these tensions and exploring how prison educators negotiate state power on the inside. Focusing on programmatic scales in prison education contexts can help us understand the development and circulation of prison literacies and student-composed texts on the inside. But here, I’m more interested in the qualitative dimensions

of how outside educators make sense of and grapple with state power. In what ways do individual educators deploy literacy practices to navigate the oppressive regulations of carceral institutions when teaching in these contexts? To what ends?

CONTROL AND CREATIVITY: PRISON POLICIES AND MALADJUSTING TO CARCERAL REGULATIONS

In this section, I introduce two concepts that help identify how prison educators subvert state power through literacy in MPEP spaces: the Carceral Communications Framework and creative maladjustment. These terms, which emerge from prison literacies and education contexts respectively, unite the structural and interpersonal dimensions of the prison. In addition, they aid me in locating individuals—and their resistance to carceral regimes—in the matrix of textual bureaucracies.

Paramount to the above discussions of prison education and state power is Alexandra Cavallaro et al.'s notion of the Carceral Communication Framework (CCF), a network of tangled and commingled rhetorical practices that collectively “isolate, silence, and contain” communication within prison environments. While scholars often point to how the material structures of prisons and jails confine individuals, the CCF highlights how carceral institutions control incarcerated people by dictating what forms of speaking, writing, and sociality are permissible in carceral settings. Communication that might appear typical in educational settings—the passing of notes from one person to the next and extended discussions with students, for instance—are subject to surveillance and punishment in the CCF. Even as this structure is staunchly authoritative and hierarchical, it nevertheless channels state power through unspoken and ever-changing rules, regulations, and policies, the likes of which impact incarcerated people and outside educators alike (Cavallaro et al.).

Not only is the CCF an invaluable tool for understanding negotiations of state power in prison contexts, but this framework was developed by a group of MPEP students alongside their nonincarcerated instructors. As conceptualizing life on the inside ought to come from incarcerated people themselves—I've personally worked with some of the MPEP students who co-theorized the CCF—this concept provides a telling depiction of the day-to-day uncertainty regarding regulations at ECF. It offers a useful lens for examining how the slipperiness of carceral regulations creates opportunities for negotiation and resistance as well as how MPEP educators deploy nuanced literacy practices in the face of the CCF's variability.

As is hopefully clear at this point, the policies governing incarcerated people are oppressive and unjust. Not only is the CCF designed to further isolate and marginalize incarcerated people, but since its mandates remain unknowable, variable, and subject to individual interpretation, they place individuals in a constant state of guesswork, always speculating about whether their actions will be subject to extreme scrutiny or punishment.

Given these systemic injustices that impact incarcerated people in educational contexts and beyond, what is the ethical obligation of nonincarcerated people to resist or subvert such policies, especially considering the punishment that befalls incarcerated people in prisons and jails? These

questions, which are centrally concerned with power, are of primary concern to abolitionists working on the inside or in solidarity with incarcerated people. One possible response rests with ideas of (creative) maladjustment, as coined by Martin Luther King Jr. and revised by progressive educator Herbert Kohl.

In his 1958 speech delivered to audiences at the University of California, Berkley, King advocated for the necessity of maladjustment to segregation, discrimination, mob rule, and militarism. In contrast to psychological understandings of “maladjustment,” which emerged from ableist psychiatric diagnoses, King calls upon individuals to “maladjust” to these damaging social ills (King Jr.). Decades later, Kohl extended King’s ideas of maladjustment by reflecting on his experiences with educational hierarchies in K-12 contexts. He recounts how he learned to navigate school policies when he was instructed to implement racist, sexist directives from administrators. In these teaching situations, Kohl realized he either needed to “[conform] to the demands of the system or [meet] the needs of [his] students” (128). And so over time, Kohl practiced and refined what he came to call “creative maladjustment”—unmarked, tactical, everyday actions that refuse to comply with unethical rules

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Acts of creative maladjustment can be deployed in prisons, jails, and detention centers to resist the CCF,

though certainly not in the same ways as in mainstream educational institutions. What was ultimately at stake for Kohl in his refusal to comply with unjust school policies was his job, and his status as a cis, straight, white man further insulated him from negative repercussions at work. Maladjusting to the carceral state, however, can spell much more severe consequences. When prison educators from the outside bend or break rules, punishment can be visited upon incarcerated folks through harassment and abuse, transfer to other prisons, and solitary confinement. The worst-case scenario for MPEP instructors, on the other hand, is to be permanently banned from entering state prisons. Nonetheless, prison educators must navigate these differentials in risk and punishment in such institutions that erratically wield state power.

THE MIDWEST PRISON EDUCATION PROJECT: LOCAL AND METHODOLOGICAL CONTEXT

Before turning to a comprehensive, research-based discussion of how Midwest Prison Education Project educators navigate these systems, it’s important to provide institutional context for the program itself. MPEP is a higher education in prison program that functions as a unit of the

Midwestern University's (MU) College of Education (Midwest Prison Education Project 5). Its prison-based programming is based in Eastern Correctional Facility, 45 minutes east of the university. At ECF, MPEP offers a wealth of educational options ranging from upper-division, for-credit courses in ethnic studies, physics, and other disciplines to extracurricular programs such as writing workshops, a language learning program, and a Community Anti-Violence Education (CAVE) group. MPEP additionally facilitates work on the outside through its Reentry Guide Initiative, which supports people released from prison, and it maintains connections with the Midwestern Coalition for Higher Education in Prison and the Learning and Liberation Campaign, both of which are state-wide, prison advocacy organizations (5). Though I don't discuss these complementary endeavors at length in this article, I mention these components of MPEP because they exemplify the program's expansive understanding of the carceral state.

To interrogate how prison educators understand connections among literacy, teaching, and higher education in prison as they related to their own literate lives, I conducted an IRB-approved qualitative study with MPEP instructors beginning in Summer 2020. To explore these topics, I designed and carried out a three-tiered, iterative approach to qualitative research, in which I conducted and transcribed 33 interviews with 15 MPEP instructors from June through December 2020. Although my study design only recruited MPEP instructors who had taught, facilitated, or worked on site at ECF, our conversations weren't confined to prison curricula or pedagogies. Through these conversations, I invited participants to share experiences related to schooling, education, and their diverse literacy practices; their teaching experiences on the inside and outside; and finally, topics pertaining to higher education in prison and prison abolition more broadly. In this third round of data collection, I posed questions to MPEP educators as to how they understood the goals of prison education and abolition—as distinct projects and in relation to each other. Collecting data on these topics demonstrated to me how carceral logics shape teaching and learning in prison education environments.

In this article, I draw on data from these interviews to explore how MPEP educators navigate and negotiate state power in prison education settings. It was through these contexts that I identified connections between teaching, Midwest Department of Corrections (MDOC) policies, and how instructors bend such rules in their educational work at the prison. In particular, I focus on qualitative accounts provided by Jim and Michelle, two veteran MPEP instructors. Jim is a PhD graduate from Midwestern University; he currently teaches at a local high school in the same town as the university. Michelle is a former doctoral student who also did her PhD work at MU. Both have worked with a handful of MPEP programs throughout their tenure with the organization. The insights from these two educators, as contrasted with the directives issued by the carceral state, comprise the bulk of analysis in the work that follows.

Here, I'll note one more significant aspect of institutional context. As a program, MPEP has faced numerous interruptions, MDOC investigations, and suspensions over the years. In November 2014, the then-warden of ECF suspended all MPEP programming; courses and extracurricular activities were reinstated in June 2015 (Midwest Prison Education Project 13). A few years later, MPEP's computer lab—an important site where students write, research, and study together—was

shut down by prison staff from May through September 2017 due to an ongoing investigation. And most prominently and publicly, on-site MPEP activities were delayed for weeks after Eastern Correctional Facility staff raided MPEP's library in January 2019, removing over 200 books from its shelves, the majority of them about race (Gaines). These interruptions, in addition to a year-and-a-half suspension of on-site MPEP programming due to COVID-19, has meant that MPEP has experienced lots of starts and stops over the years. In these regards, not only has MPEP been programmatically forced to contend with the unpredictability and volatility of state power. So too have individuals in the program had their lives upended by these interruptions.

COMPREHENDING THE TEXTUAL BUREAUCRACIES OF THE PRISON (OR NOT)

One of the most relevant sets of MDOC documents for MPEP educators concerns what materials—learning and otherwise—can or cannot enter ECF. These policies, featured in MDOC's administrative directive on publication review, went into effect in November 2019 after ECF's aforementioned book banning incident earlier in the year.⁷ As this act of censorship gained notoriety in national news, MDOC released this revised administrative directive (Jones, "MDOC Clearance Policies") to "establish review procedures for the admissibility of publications into [facilities]" (MDOC, "Internal Administrative Directive" 1) and to outline more explicitly constituent screening and distribution processes.

There are a few points from this directive that are useful for considering how MPEP educators navigate state power as it relates to what published materials enter the prison. Section G.2 highlights criteria that might result in publication disapproval, some of which aren't surprising: documents that contain explicit sexual content, actively encourage violence, or provide instructions for creating weapons (MDOC, "Internal Administrative Directive" 4). Other criteria, however, are incredibly nebulous. If, for example, a publication is "detrimental to the security or good order of the facility," it might not be admitted into the prison (4). What constitutes a threat to the security at the prison is, of course, subject to vast and arbitrary interpretation. As noted by Rogers, Hinshaw, Holding, and Jacobi above, this language provides institutional cover for prison administrators and staff to deny materials for whatever reasons they like.

In addition, this directive explains that publications intended for use in approved programs at Midwestern prisons are "reviewed by the Assistant Chief Administrative Officer of Programs" (MDOC, "Internal Administrative Directive" 1). Elsewhere, in a press release pertaining to the same revised publication review policy, MDOC notes that "Reading materials for educational programming are now assessed by the Educational Facility Administrator of each institution" (MDOC, "Press Release"). To me, though, it's never been totally clear who ECF's Assistant Chief Administrative Officer of Programs actually is. In addition, a former MPEP administrator observed that, to their knowledge, the Educational Facility Administrator was never responsible for reviewing educational materials—at least pre-COVID (Jones, "More MDOC Questions"). From my experience, inconsistencies such as these are fairly common in communication with MDOC.

On the whole, however, this MDOC administrative directive and press release appear to speak more to instances like book banning than to everyday prison education contexts. As the same former MPEP administrator noted, the directive was never explicitly intended to address the logistics of approving educational materials for entrance into ECF; it was instead a hastily drawn-up response to national press about ECF's library raid (Jones, "MDOC Clearance Policies"). Nowhere in any of these documents is it explicitly described how material clearance processes actually work in relation to education contexts—MPEP in addition to GED, community college, vocational, and religious education programs—in which books, articles, and other materials routinely move in and out of the prison. And based on my own MPEP experiences, policies from these directives were rarely, if ever, invoked by ECF staff when there were delays in material clearance processes. Instead, issues with the clearance of educational texts usually needed to be resolved behind the scenes by an assistant warden.

These contradictory documents and accounts provide only a glimpse into the byzantine and near-impenetrable textual bureaucracies of the prison. As such inconsistencies might suggest, it was often incredibly difficult to sustain educational programming at ECF amidst these conditions. The opaqueness surrounding the approval of MPEP curricular materials made it next to impossible to

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register or resolve these issues with prison staff. And even as revisions to publication review took root, they didn't make any tangible differences in the day-to-day workings of MPEP educators, who continued to contend with lengthy clearance times for

educational materials and lack of clarity around such directives. In this regard, I'd contend that the bureaucratic textscapes of the prison exert state power, one that continually obfuscates, regulates, and upholds the literacy normativity of the institution as evidenced by these substantive interruptions to teaching, learning, and access to education at ECF.

WORKING WITHIN AND AGAINST THE CARCERAL COMMUNICATIONS FRAMEWORK

The MPEP educators I interviewed are familiar with ECF's policies on clearance, both pre- and post-library raid, even though the revised publication review directive changed little for MPEP educators. As these individuals bring in curricular materials on a regular basis, they must submit such materials beforehand for review and approval by ECF staff. This process was often unpredictable and could take up to months on end (Sosnowski 160).⁸ From my time in MPEP, material clearance was not a particularly smooth affair. Instructional documents were frequently lost, misplaced, or delayed to the point where they weren't approved in time for extracurricular programs. According to Jim Sosnowski, educators were reluctant to bring new materials into MPEP spaces in the first place, citing the length and confusion of these processes (160). Just as detrimental, items that were cleared to bring

into ECF were occasionally denied at the front gate, the guard on duty offering little reason as to why. Of course, the shifting and variable nature of the CCF means that even these policies and processes of clearance are subject to change. Writing as a collective of incarcerated and nonincarcerated MPEP scholars, Erin L. Castro, Michael Brawn, Daniel E. Graves, Orlando Mayorga, Johnny Page, and Andra Slater underscore this reality when Michael Brawn, one of the student authors of the piece, speaks to how “[i]nformation in prison is provided to us as it is deemed necessary by authorities in charge of the facility” (21), a point also represented in additional scholarship from Castro and Brawn (117). From an outside MPEP educator point of view, these perspectives were also shared by Jim, who pointed out, “What you could bring in changed this week [or] maybe two or three times in the last couple months. And so who knows the current policy? And who’s going to enforce it even?”

I mention this context to sketch the administrative mechanisms MPEP educators contend with as they teach in the prison. These instructors also, however, grappled with MPEP’s interpretations of these processes. Michelle, for instance, reported that she never received explicit instruction from MPEP as to what kinds of non-curricular student writing she could bring into the prison or leave with after instructional sessions—documents such as memoir chapters and program proposals that might not have been composed explicitly for MPEP purposes. She went on to speak to the ambiguity around this question, acknowledging MPEP’s “Don’t ask, don’t tell” approach to situations such as these. In this regard, prison educators working with the Midwest Prison Education Project not only navigate the unknowable policies of the state as they teach and learn with incarcerated students, but they’re forced to constantly feel out and interpret MPEP’s stance toward these directives as well. As Michelle observed, if you asked every MPEP educator what the policy is for bringing materials in and out of the prison, “You would get 50 different [accounts].”

Reflecting on these ambiguities of state and organizational policy and the inconsistencies with which such regulations were enforced, some MPEP educators acknowledged that they regularly bent these rules. Most of these practices related to fulfilling MPEP students’ ad-hoc requests for bringing in additional learning resources without going through the proper material clearance channels. Michelle described the processes of bringing informational materials to individual MPEP students as “underground,” explaining that although it would depend on how well you knew the student in question, “everybody [was] doing it.” Michelle’s observation aligns with my own experiences in the program as well.⁹

Moreover, I’d argue that these practices of bringing unapproved materials into the prison—whether by educators for students or in other contexts—constitute the underlife of the prison. As Erving Goffman theorizes, the underlife of an institution points to those behaviors of individuals that diverge from their organizationally prescribed roles (qtd. in Brooke 142). Just as critically, underlife activity is mundane, quotidian, and unexceptional. As Goffman observes, all members of institutions participate in such behaviors because they maintain complex, multifaceted identities (qtd. in Brooke 142–3). I don’t believe that conceptualizing Jim and Michelle’s acts of creative maladjustment as a part of the prison’s underlife makes their literacy practices any less noteworthy. Rather, I do so to suggest that actions that “work around the institution” (Brooke 143) are not only normal, but they’re necessary for such systems to operate in the first place. The prison is no exception.

If we consider circumventing state policy to bring in educational materials as a normalized, complex, and situated literacy practice, then what does this look like in practice? What sorts of spatial, temporal, and interpersonal knowledges do prison educators leverage to enact these literate acts of creative maladjustment?

The majority of my participants did not address rule bending or subversive literacy practices in our qualitative interviews. My felt sense is that many educators were nervous to speak on the record about how they maladjusted to the prison's regulations—out of fear of both retaliation from ECF administration and potential reprimand from MPEP leadership. In addition, a handful of my interviewees were graduate student instructors at the time of this research. As such, I suspect they harbored anxieties about their own institutional precarity in relation to discussing such sensitive topics.

Those MPEP educators who talked about bending the rules in their work with students on the inside did so through a variety of means. As Michelle alluded to, some acknowledged that, even though they weren't supposed to bring texts in for individual students, they printed out such resources from the Internet and did so anyway. Others looked to ways they could work around the prison's rules against "fraternization," which prohibit outside volunteers from spending "too much time" or "becoming too close" with incarcerated individuals. As my participants recognized that good teaching is built from developing strong relationships with students, they developed strategies for circumnavigating these regulations. Some found pedagogical workarounds involving student group work that allowed them to continue tutoring the same student(s) on challenging math problem sets longer than ECF staff might have permitted. Others just opted to boldly bend the rules on this front when the "coast was clear." For instance, in describing how addressing MPEP students by their first names or nicknames was forbidden by ECF administration, some instructors nevertheless used these forms of address when guards weren't present. These acts, I believe, are fairly subtle and unremarkable. Yet taken together, they not only speak to patterns of creative maladjustment across this study, but they also demonstrate how prison educators strive to support their students in spite of the prison's dehumanizing effects.

"THOSE POLICIES CHANGE DEPENDING ON WHO'S PASSING BY THE GATE AT THE TIME"

Insights from Jim prove especially helpful in providing a more situated view of these phenomena. Given the variable options for programming at ECF—morning, afternoon, and evening hours—Jim has had plenty of experience working with students at different time blocks throughout the day across programs. Over the years, he's developed a flexible approach to navigating MDOC rules surrounding clearance. While he observes that there are scenarios in which educators technically shouldn't bring texts into the prison, he also acknowledges the "gray areas" of these regulations. To this point, Jim spoke to the importance of trying to determine and comprehend the impacts of any possible rule-bending on students, though he also identified the practical realities of knowing where "he can push those edges and where [he] can't." In speaking specifically to navigating clearance materials at the

front gate of the prison, he offered this account, which is worth reproducing in full:

[There was a] difference between the daytime shift and the nighttime shift and what could get in and what couldn't. And even those policies change depending on who's passing by the gate at the time. So you know, one guard, for months, never looked at our papers. And all of a sudden, the same correctional officer is asking us, as we're going by, to open all our notebooks and everything. And it's like "What's going on? This is weird." And you look over your shoulder and the warden's coming out, and it's like, "Oh, I get it now. You have to do your job now or make sure it looks like you're doing your job."

Was that person looking at our papers at all? Probably not. But it was just a matter of "Oh, here comes the warden; I'm supposed to be checking these things. I don't really care, but I'm going to look like I care."

The ways Jim is reading the prison's spatial, temporal, and institutional contexts, as well as the embodied and interpersonal dimensions of the actors within it, are striking. Only someone with ample experience entering and exiting the prison would be able to discern differences in how ECF staff check incoming materials (or not) across shifts. Jim also recognizes the tendencies and patterns of individual ECF guards. From months of continuous interaction, he's observed that this particular staff member doesn't ask MPEP educators to open their notebooks, scan their materials for anything that might raise red flags, or check to see if instructional materials have been formally approved. It's also notable that Jim can tell who the warden on duty is—certainly not a given because MPEP educators rarely, if ever, interact with ECF administration. More important, though, is his understanding of staff hierarchies at the prison. Stories of ECF guards being reprimanded or transferred to other posts within the facility for making mistakes on the job are not uncommon. And so, per the observation above, the guard on duty needs to present himself as if they're following prison regulations by asking Jim to open his notebooks—likely to check for contraband tucked between the pages—in front of the warden.

Even though he spoke about pushing at the edges of MDOC policies, I want to make clear that there's nothing about what Jim's doing here that would explicitly constitute a violation of MDOC policy. Nor would attempting to bring in something that was unapproved or deemed questionable likely spell punishment for MPEP students. As Jim later explained, he believed that the worst-case scenario in a situation like this one at ECF is that a guard would stop him from bringing such materials into the prison and that he'd have to go put them back in his car. These acts, as he elaborated, were not so much a challenge to the carceral state as they were enacted with the spirit of "irreverence," attempts to prevent the prison from exerting oppressive power over himself and MPEP students.

Regardless, Jim's multiple acts of decoding the prison environment to discern what's permissible on account

"Institutional knowledge can be leveraged to determine when and how one can maladjust to [prison] regulations, and, by extension, defy state power."

of who is stationed at the front gate, at what time, and in who else's company constitutes a highly complex and situated literacy practice. There's nothing inherently subversive about this kind of know-

how. Yet Jim's account demonstrates that this institutional knowledge can be leveraged to determine when and how one can maladjust to MDOC regulations, and, by extension, defy state power.

“AS LONG AS YOU DO NOT TALK ABOUT IT VERY MUCH, THEN A LOT IS POSSIBLE”

Michelle is another MPEP member who mentioned that she's done “[her] fair share” of circumventing MDOC policies regarding the entrance of unapproved materials into the prison. Like Jim, she thought deeply about risks to students and the program in working within the interstitial spaces of ambiguous prison regulations. For Michelle, these acts of creative maladjustment typically took the shape of bringing in additional instructional materials for students who personally requested them or fulfilling MPEP students' asks for additional written feedback on their work. So too did she research non-curricular topics for MPEP students on the outside and communicate such information at the prison—for example, helping a student understand the logistics of GoFundMe so he could tell his mother how to set up a fundraising page. These acts, Michelle realized, might constitute acts of fraternization according to prison regulations. Yet as she explained, “I never did anything that was really unambiguously against the rules, I think,” explaining that she took special care to ensure that any materials she carried into the prison “[wouldn't] look shady” to the guards at the front gate. To this end, she'd bring in resources for students that might only be a few pages in length, documents that would be easy to overlook if a guard were to quickly flip through her materials upon entering the prison. Michelle would additionally leave MPEP students' names off resources she brought into the prison and, on the other end, instruct students not to write their own names on writing that she took out of the prison. This tactic preserved individuals' anonymity in the chance that these documents would be flagged by ECF staff and possibly used to punish students on account of fraternization.

To illustrate these tactics, Michelle described a time she left the prison with a proposal for MPEP programming written by Hugo, an MPEP student, because she didn't have enough time to review his work with him during scheduled MPEP programming hours. Soon after, Michelle sent me a scan of Hugo's proposal at his request. I had previously worked with Hugo on workshopping his proposal, and as such, he wanted me to take another look at his draft to see how his writing was shaping up. The next time I went to ECF, I brought a printout of Hugo's proposal, newly annotated, with me into the prison; we were able to discuss his ideas in the education building hallway in between MPEP programming sessions. Michelle, Hugo, and I repeated this cycle once more in the following weeks, after which Hugo felt his proposal was ready to share with MPEP's director.

I can't speak for Michelle's experience, but from my vantage point, MPEP educators often worked with students in these capacities: bringing papers in and out of ECF and sharing materials with other instructors to give to students. As MPEP students don't have access to email, and seeing that ECF is 45 minutes from Midwestern University, around where most MPEP educators live, it's logistically challenging to ensure that students' learning needs and requests are met. All of these difficulties are compounded by the ambiguity surrounding what's permissible when it comes to institutional material clearance in educational contexts. But as Michelle reiterated to me, “As long as you do not

talk about it very much, then a lot is possible.”

As Michelle narrated her experiences in fulfilling MPEP students’ personal requests for information outside of MDOC regulations, I asked her why she engaged in this kind of work. What motivated her to bend the rules in this way? When I posed this question, I was thinking of other MPEP educators I interviewed who took a firm stand against working around such policies.

After reiterating that she never violated the prison’s clearance regulations in big or flashy ways, Michelle explained that students’ asks were often small, quick, and easy to fulfill. Her willingness to do this kind of tactical work was also rooted in the empathetic relationships that she cultivated with students. She noted, “I can imagine the frustration of whenever [MPEP students] get a document, it’s always really full of links to websites they can’t ever visit until they get out. I can imagine that when you have an idea you’re trying to develop, you’re just missing a lot of resources to write even the smallest piece about it.” Fulfilling these underground requests might not have contributed to MPEP’s big-picture educational goals, but these acts of creative maladjustment were still meaningful to Michelle because they “[helped] someone do something that they’re working on.”

COMPLICATING THE WHO, WHAT, AND WHY OF CREATIVE MALADJUSTMENT

Even as Jim and Michelle both narrated how they worked around MDOC’s labyrinthine policies, it’s worth explicating the similarities and differences in their approaches to this work. Here, the prison context helps us better theorize why people maladjust to state power, what circumstances create the condition for these subversive acts, and how and why people participate differently in these literacy practices. In drawing these connections, I seek to productively complicate the notion of creative maladjustment by attending to some of the complexities present in these everyday practices.

What I find most striking about both Jim and Michelle’s explanations as to why they work around MDOC policies is that their responses aren’t necessarily rooted in upending carceral logics. Though both educators demonstrate an understanding of the prison’s authority, neither explicitly describes the regulations of the prison as unethical, nor do they unequivocally cite an unwillingness to comply with unjust rules. I don’t mention these points to critique Michelle or Jim’s politics. Rather, I do so to illustrate how acts of creative maladjustment don’t render or reveal themselves as overtly political displays of resistance. What I see most present in Michelle and Jim’s interview responses is not so much evidence of political intent or visioning, which I think is less relevant here than the practical impacts of their actions. I instead see a commitment to ensuring that MPEP students have the resources and information they need to carry out the tasks that they find important, and with them, the cultivation of trust over time. Such actions might seem small or unmarked, especially considering the scale at which prisons oppress people. But given how the carceral state fails—and kills—people on the inside every day, the fact that educators can work with incarcerated people to meet their needs, even in small ways, is worthwhile.

These descriptions of creative maladjustment are partially why I was surprised to learn that Jim previously considered himself “a rule follower” in MPEP contexts. Thinking back to his early

days of working with MPEP, he described how he was consistently worried about surveillance from ECF staff. But over time, Jim became more and more emboldened in pushing at the boundaries of MDOC regulations. The reason? MPEP's suspension of programming in 2014. As Jim explained, once programming had been halted in November of that year, MPEP educators were barred from the prison for the next seven months. Jim quickly realized that ECF could shut MPEP down and revoke the clearance of its instructors without notice or rationale. Through our conversations, he went on to conceptualize educational programming, MPEP included, as just another avenue for carceral control. Jim articulated how he saw MPEP as a program that made the entire Midwest Department of Corrections look good. In the eyes of MDOC officials, MPEP's national prestige brought positive attention to MDOC, promoted education-as-rehabilitation discourse, and suggested that incarcerated people were "better adjusted" thanks to state-sanctioned programming. At the same time, he noted that MDOC could put an end to MPEP at any moment and without explanation. And so given the absolute power of ECF administration to suspend programs, transfer MPEP students, and bar individual educators from the prison, Jim came to comprehend that prison staff didn't need a reason to permanently ban him from the prison—or to commit any form of violence in the first place. This realization, in turn, compelled him to "[be] less afraid of pushing buttons" when it came to enacting subversive literacy practices in MPEP. Ironically, then, the restrictive actions of the prison are what engendered Jim's increased determination to maladjust to ECF's rules in the first place. Put differently, state power paradoxically creates resistance to state power.

Michelle, on the other hand, was not particularly cavalier in describing or enacting acts of creative maladjustment in prison education contexts. In spite of the means through which she brought unapproved materials in and out of ECF, she described herself as "[not] very confrontational." In speaking about other male-identifying MPEP educators who were more inclined to be "buddies" with guards to get what they wanted—maybe opening up an additional classroom in the education building or ensuring that students could attend MPEP activities even if they forgot the proper paperwork—Michelle stressed that she was "afraid to play" with this dynamic too much. She instead mentioned that she was inclined just to "do [her] own thing," more than happy to steer clear of pushing institutional boundaries on site beyond what she described to me. I don't get the sense that Jim cozied up to ECF guards as a means of bending the rules. Yet it is worth noting that, as a white man, Jim shares a number of demographic similarities with ECF staff (something he stated himself in one of our interviews) that Michelle does not. As such, it's difficult not to understand Jim's actions as at least somewhat informed by the fact that he inhabits some of the same identities as the prison's guards. Michelle's orientation toward state power, in turn, helps us remember that gender always informs how individuals maladjust to oppressive systems—especially in carceral environments where hyper-surveillance and obfuscation are normalized.

I don't want to draw too stark or flattening a dichotomy in parsing Jim and Michelle's orientations toward their approaches to creative maladjustment on the inside. But I do believe that these differences are worth drawing attention to because they push back against stock images of what resistance—and by extension, what challenging state power—look like. None of the stories of creative maladjustment that either educator shared conjure commonplace images of outspoken

action or militant protest against the carceral state, though this opposition is also necessary. Instead, these tactical, underground actions gesture toward what Michelle referred to as the “smaller, less glamorous” work of MPEP. And I would argue that Jim and Michelle’s acts “create new forms of association,” which Herbert Kohl describes as important to the boundary-crossing capacities of creative maladjustment. At least from my own experiences in working with incarcerated folks, this kind of work can often up space for deepening connections between MPEP educators and students. In speaking to this type of relationality, Alayna Eagle Shield, Django Paris, Rae Paris, and Timothy San Pedro state, “[R]elationships and learning opportunities open deeply, quickly, and beautifully when the stakes are so high, so immediate” (11).

CONCLUSION: TOWARD ETHICAL NEGOTIATION AND A PRAXIS FOR SURVIVAL

In this article, I’ve illuminated how carceral institutions use textscapes not only to inflict the violence of literacy but to materialize state violence itself upon incarcerated populations. So too have I detailed how college-in-prison instructors creatively maladjust to the oppressive regulations of the prison by deploying highly situated and complex literacy practices of their own, ones that require depth of institutional knowledge and context. Rather than prepare a set of practical recommendations for how I think (prison) educators should bend (the state’s) rules, I instead conclude with a handful of implications for this study as they relate to negotiating and navigating power.

1.) Prison literacy educators should recognize that they bend the rules all the time—in prison contexts and beyond.

It’s critical for educators working in jails, prisons, and detention centers to take stock of and better comprehend underground circuits of literacy and learning. Incarcerated and nonincarcerated people alike will always bend the rules, especially regarding communication and meaning making; recognizing this fact is imperative for prison educators. It’s important for college-in-prison instructors to understand how submerged literacy networks operate in these programs so they can more ethically negotiate the stakes of participating in these practices with other outside colleagues. More fundamentally, it’s imperative to stage these conversations openly with incarcerated students, who stand to be more severely punished by the state for any transgressions related to teaching and learning.

2.) So too must prison literacy educators attend to how bureaucratic textscapes mediate their experiences.

One crucial way that prison educators can cultivate an awareness of how they interact with state power is by looking to textual regimes. These instructors can facilitate transparent and explicit discussions of how textual bureaucracies operate and how prison educators participate in these mechanisms of control. Similar conversations can also take place in mainstream university contexts, where institutional texts structure individuals’ teaching and research lives.

3.) *All literacy educators ought to divest from carceral logics in their curricula and pedagogies.*

Whether working on the inside or the outside, educators should reflect on how they internalize and/or enact punishment mindsets in their teaching. Here, I'm reminded of Paula X. Rojas's call to readers to "identify the cops in our heads and hearts" (213), urging us not to internalize carceral logics and police ourselves because these functions are those of the carceral state. As Jim and Michelle show us, instructors can and should be more "answerable to learning, knowledge, and living beings' needs" (Patel 5) than to the opaque and punishing directives of the carceral state.

4.) *We should all be aware of how we engage with state power on a daily basis.*

Prison literacy educators, of course, need to be acutely aware of how they wield, exert, and/or negotiate state power. Yet even those instructors and researchers not working on the inside would still do well to pay close attention to how students, other faculty, staff, and workers negotiate state power—for varying purposes, aims, and ends—in everyday settings.

5.) *It's not only crucial for literacy researchers and educators to study how people maladjust to oppressive rules but to practice these subversive literacy practices themselves.*

Looking to situations in which individuals bend or break rules—without judgment or punishment—can shed light on how and why certain regulations prevent people from having their essential needs met. Investigating these scenarios, I believe, can help scholars better understand both how documents in the form of administrative and legal texts shape individuals' actions and how such regulations systemically oppress minoritized populations. This research might ideally create space for collaborative interventions or creative solutions to address and overturn such injustices in local contexts.

Just as importantly, enacting subversive (literacy) practices is perhaps more important than ever given the ongoing crises of COVID-19; neoliberal austerity measures; and anti-Black, white supremacist violence. We know that everyday people are struggling to scrape by, not in spite of the state but because of its pervasive neglect and institutional harm. Whether through occupying foreclosed homes, creating pop-up community food pantries, or finding inventive ways to get reading materials to incarcerated people, individuals on the inside and outside alike are resisting carceral logics in innovative ways to survive the state (Shange 10). We'd do well to follow their lead if we're all to survive too.

NOTES

¹*Editorial footnote:* We wish to acknowledge the full list of authors who contributed to this text: Cavallaro, Alexandra J., Melissa K. Forbes, Larry Barrett, Robert Garite, Christopher Harrison, Reginald Jones, Igor Kazakovs, Otilio Rosas, Luis Saucedo, Tobias Thurman, Agustin Torres, and Antonio Walker. It is *LiCS'* editorial policy to name all authors of a text instead of using “et al.” We do this because “et al.” can obscure the full contributions of all authors, instead centering the efforts of a single author. We also recognize that when many authors have contributed to a text, the list of names in a citation can make it hard for readers to follow the paragraph they are reading. In such cases, we include a note like this one to name and make visible the efforts of all contributors.

¹ The Midwest Prison Education Program (MPEP) is a pseudonym, as are the department of corrections (MDOC) and educational institution (Midwestern University) centered in this article. When citing MPEP and MDOC internal documents as sources, I have changed the names of these texts to preserve the anonymity of these institutions.

² Some participants have chosen to use pseudonyms out of concern that they'll face repercussions from MPEP and the Midwest Department of Corrections; others have chosen to use their names.

³ For these reasons, I often refer to the state as the “carceral state” throughout this piece. As opposed to comparable terms like “prison industrial complex,” carceral state indexes the heterogeneity of state practices and highlights how institutions of “police, incarceration, and surveillance are . . . fundamental to the structure of the United States” (Carceral Studies Consortium).

⁴ Building on the work of Cavallaro (18), I use the terms “prison education” and “prison literacies” interchangeably throughout this piece. These terms are fairly compatible here given the breadth with which I'm understanding literacy in this article and how literacy necessarily informs learning.

⁵ I apply the term “outside people” as a synonym for nonincarcerated people and the phrases “inside people” or “people on the inside” to describe incarcerated people. I draw this language from prison education and reentry contexts where such terms are commonly used. It's also worth noting that I avoid and reject dehumanizing language such as “prisoner,” “criminal,” or “inmate” because these terms reduce imprisoned people to their status in the criminal legal system and make presumptuous judgments as to the guilt of people who are locked up (Mason, Czifra, Ricks, Cerda-Jara, and Zohrabi).

⁶ While Plemons's discussion of literacy as creative resistance (“Literacy” 45) also makes a case for the necessity of tactical action on the inside (“Literacy” 43), I believe my argument is more interested in (1) drawing attention to how prisons reproduce state power through texts and (2) adding to these conversations by qualitatively demonstrating how prison educators use literacy to maladjust to these systems.

⁷ According to this directive, publications constitute “any book, booklet, magazine, newspaper, periodical or similar materials” (MDOC, “Administrative Directive” 1).

⁸ It's worth noting that, although these setbacks were common at ECF, every state prison and

department of corrections approaches matters of material clearance somewhat differently. Some staff are quite restrictive, and others may be more lenient.

⁹Though MPEP's handbook stresses the importance of obeying ECF and MDOC policies (51), there is little description of what these policies are, what they entail, or where they can be found on the Midwest Department of Corrections website.

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