

**Critical Song:
Exploring Songwriting's Value and Pedagogy in Prison**

by

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Introduction

Prison. Over two million individuals in the United States presently reside here.

Yet vast as this subculture is, very little is known about it. Perhaps that is due to the fact that as a society, we've been in no hurry to lay claim to the prisoners in our midst. And perhaps this reluctance to peer into the funhouse mirror explains our apparent inability to address the problems we are doing our best not to see. Whatever the case, it has been my observation that many of our best educated, best intentioned, and most influential citizens are fundamentally clueless when it comes to the matter of our prisons. (Gordon 2000)

Although the general population's ability to peer into the lives of those in prison has changed since the time of this quote, with the advent of television shows such as Investigation Discovery's *Prison Wives* or HBO's *Oz*, the reality of prison is still illusive to much of United States society. The following discourse is my small attempt to bridge the disconnect between mainstream American society and prison life, as described above. While I will not be focusing primarily on explaining statistics of incarceration, I will illuminate certain aspects of prison life that are important for understanding this part of our society. I aim to show that songwriting can be a tool for "outside" facilitators to connect to incarcerated individuals, and vice-versa, sharing between them the empowering effects of the songwriting process.

Incarceration affects the very fabric of society. It tears apart families, propagates violence, and yields gains to corporations involved in supplying prison materials. It is a product of inequalities, prejudice, and ignorance in American society ("Our Vision" n.d.). I came to "prison work," as it is often called, because of my involvement in a prison abolition group. I realized I had very little personal

experience with prison and incarcerated individuals, and although I was passionate in my opinions of the prison industry, I did not *know it* directly. I was aware, however, that individuals in prison often face harsh circumstances with very little opportunity for creative outlets. I attempted to bridge the gap between incarcerated individuals and myself by co-facilitating a songwriting workshop in York Correctional Institution, the only women's prison in Connecticut.

Why songwriting? In my life, I have often used musical performance and the act of listening to music to calm myself, to identify with anger and sadness, or to lift my spirits. I overcame many of the most difficult days in my life through the use of music. Within this plethora of musical experiences, one of the most empowering musical activities for me, and one of the most challenging, has been songwriting.

Songwriting, like all music, demands personal involvement. Like the act of written musical composition, it is a creative expression of personal preferences and aesthetic choices. However, it is more accessible to the average citizen than formal musical composition. A song can be made of anything one wishes. It can be documented, or merely memorized. For me as a vocalist, songwriting demands that I move beyond my physical voice to include expressions of creativity and personal experience in words. It pushes me to explore and articulate my opinions and understanding of the world. It allows me a space to explore alternate realities, liberating me from the confines of my lived reality.

Thus, my own experiences of songwriting have encompassed personal challenge and liberation. These feelings sparked the desire for me to share songwriting with those in prison, who could gain much by experiencing its confine-

lifting powers. I felt that if I felt uplifted by writing out lyrics and singing them aloud in a self-performance of my own music, then those in prison, surrounded by razor wire and strict rules, would also find in songwriting a positive outlet.

This thesis came out of a realization that there were few resources available to guide me in structuring a songwriting workshop in prison. I was cognizant of other organizations and individuals that had facilitated or were presently facilitating songwriting workshops in prison, but I could find very little information regarding the pedagogy they used for their workshops.

I knew about the benefits of music in general from music therapy books and studies, as well as from organizations such as the UK's *Music In Prison—the Irene Taylor Trust*, which runs weeklong music programs in London-area prisons. I discovered sufficient material about leading writing workshops in prison.

Organizations such as the PEN American Center have released instructional handbooks after years of facilitating writing workshops in various centers of incarceration in the United States. I was also knowledgeable of theatre programs that had successfully run performance-based programs in prison, such as Wesleyan University's Prison Outreach Through Theater course, and therefore understood that performance was a successful tool for those in prison.

The knowledge of these programs gave me assurance that songwriting had the potential to be a helpful tool for individuals in prison. However, they did not give me a picture of what a songwriting workshop could or should look like materially or pedagogically. Thus, I undertook my own songwriting workshop without the benefit of a direct guide of how to facilitate songwriting in prison. The workshop illuminated

many aspects of working in prison, the intricacies of being a facilitator, and the qualities of songwriting.

This thesis is an attempt to tie together the resources that I found as well as my own experience into a semi-comprehensive view of the complexities and best practices pedagogically for running a songwriting workshop in prison. This thesis references musicians who have worked in prison, individuals and groups who have led writing workshops in prison, music therapists, and songwriting guides. It does not include direct written material from the participants of my workshop because I was not prepared to view the workshop as research while facilitating it and therefore did not obtain permission from the women with whom I worked to use their written words. The end result is an explanation of what songwriting means, why songwriting is an important activity, and how songwriting workshops can be best integrated into the prison environment in a healthy, helpful way.

Chapter one explains the benefits of songwriting by exploring its components—music, writing, and performance. Chapter two uses my own experience co-facilitating a songwriting workshop in York Correctional Institution as a case study through which to view the difficulties and benefits of songwriting workshops in prison. Finally, chapter three delves into the particular characteristics of prisons, the difficulties one may encounter when running a songwriting workshop in prison, and pedagogical recommendations for the creation of a successful workshop. It is the hope of the author that the reader will come to understand how important and helpful songwriting can be for those who are incarcerated.

Chapter 1 The Why of Songwriting

Songwriting should be viewed as a process embodying stages of thought and action in relation to the creation of music. Broadly and stereotypically, songwriting can be divided into three stages—writing lyrics, developing music, and performing material. To some, songwriting is thought to describe solely the development of lyrics, possibly with the addition of forming musical accompaniment. However, I believe that the fullest benefits of songwriting come with a complete experience of the creation and performance of a song, and therefore I will be discussing a very broad conception of the process of songwriting.

In this chapter I will explore the benefits of each aspect of songwriting—music, writing, and performance. I will then show how songwriting combines these three aspects' benefits and therefore provides a unique avenue of expression that may be beyond the range of expression that can be observed individually in these three spheres. Although within the process of songwriting these three aspects will often overlap, it will be helpful to separate them to more clearly understand the full range of experiences that are encountered in songwriting.

Music

Music's definition is not an easy one to articulate. Grove Music Online includes an entry for "music," which admits that "providing a universally acceptable definition and characterization of both word and concept is beyond the capacity of a single statement by one author" (Nettl 2010). Therefore, for the purposes of this

discussion, the use of the term “music” will point towards any meaningful construction of sound that creates a recognizable profile for memory and/or possible future performance. This includes, but is not limited to, instrumental accompaniment, a sung melody, and rhythmical components. However, when discussing the impact and importance of music, I will not be restricting my discussion of “music” to that which contains all three of the above-mentioned characteristics. Music can include experiencing and experimenting with sound, feeling the emotions of music listened to, communicating emotions through the medium of sound, and the process of organizing specific patterns of sound.

Music therapist Felicity Baker discusses the way in which music is in large part an inextricable and unavoidable part of daily life for most people around the world (Baker 2005:9-11). In the United States, we are surrounded by radio and internet music at home and parties, music of all varieties being played in retail stores, even music played outside of storefronts and parking garages. Thus, music provides a very relevant medium through which to relate to aspects of ourselves and to others. Baker cites many benefits of experiencing and participating in musical experiences. These include individual benefits as well as benefits that assist in community making. Individual benefits include assisting in reflection on past experiences, thinking about one’s future, and projecting personal feelings into the medium of music. Baker’s group benefits include confronting differences in interpersonal relationships and having contact with thought processes of others (Baker 2005).

To understand *why* music can provide this myriad of effects in those who experience it, it is helpful to think of music in terms of its signs. Thomas Turino, in

Music as Social Life: The Politics of Participation, lays out a theoretical framework of semiotics in communication, drawing on the work of Charles Sanders Peirce. Using Peirce's concepts of *sign*, *object*, *effect*, *icon*, and *index*, Turino shows how the effects of music can be understood through semiotics.

A *sign* "can be anything that is perceived by an observer which stands for or calls to mind something else and by doing so creates an effect on the observer" (Turino 2008:5). The idea or physical object referenced by a sign is an *object*. Thus, if one hears a cymbal and thinks immediately of thunder, the cymbal would be functioning as a sign while the thunder would be its object. If thinking of thunder spurs a picture of thunder in the listener's mind, or a shudder, the picture or shudder would be the *effect* of the sign-object relationship. Within the title of sign are the categories *icon* and *index* (Turino 2008:5-6).

Iconic signs are those that resemble other ideas or objects. In the cymbal example above, the cymbal is acting as an icon for thunder. It may be helpful to think of the commonly used term "iconic" which often references a work so meaningful and new that it will always represent the time in which it was created or the object which it is describing. Like this term, iconic signs are recognized by most individuals as related to specific ideas or objects, although the signs are not the idea or object themselves. As another example, certain vocal timbres may tend to be icons of a particular type of music—a rough, twangy voice often signals that the song is a country or bluegrass song. Different social groups may associate themselves or be associated with particular types of music, and therefore, a piece of music with an iconic texture that is associated with a particular musical genre may also spur

thoughts of the genre-associated social group. Perhaps the best example of iconic association between musical sound and social group is in hip-hop, where many listeners upon hearing a hip-hop drum track will think of inner-city youth culture. Icons may represent different ideas to different people, largely based on past experience and social conditioning, as referred to by Turino as *internal context*. This internal context contributes to the formation of associations between icons and objects (Turino 2008:7-8).

Indexical signs connect a sign with an object by past association between sign and object—one's mind has an "index" of past associations that can be referenced through indexical signs. Indexical signs often bring into consciousness a part of one's lived reality that was not previously being thought about. As Turino describes,

We make the connection between indexical signs and their objects by experiencing them together in our actual lives. Consequently indices have a particularly direct impact; we typically do not reflect on the reality of the object that the sign calls forth, but we simply assume its reality as commonsense because it is part of our existence. (Turino 2008:9)

Thus, indexical signs, like iconic signs, are related to individuals' *internal contexts*. Indexical signs often reference one's lived reality more directly than iconic signs. Thus, indexical relationships explain why certain songs will remind a listener of a past time in their life. Rita may have heard Beethoven's Ninth Symphony often while dating someone named Joe, and since their breakup every time Rita hears any part of this composition she thinks of Joe. Rita has stored the association between Beethoven's Ninth and Joe in her mind's index. The sound of Beethoven's Ninth has become an indexical sign that instantly reaches into her mind and pulls out its connection to Joe, a connection that exists because of Rita's internal context.

These iconic and indexical signs provide music with a unique quality that is illuminated by Kenneth Aigen: [L]iving in music that is *expressive of things* such as sadness, anger, love, and intimacy brings a richness of emotional experience” without having to experience the emotion “in relation to a particular internal cause. (Aigen 2005:99) Thus, because music holds many signs for a participant, music is able to reference deep emotions and episodes of meaning and possible turmoil within the participant. However, in this context the participant does not need to personally experience or re-experience the situations that would elicit such feelings. The music can be viewed as a distanced embodiment of emotions that can be accessed with the press of a button that controls the playback of music. Even when emotions are felt after the end of a song, the music can still be understood as the carrier of those emotions, and thus listeners are more likely to be able to choose whether or not to accept the elicited emotion. Now that we know why music can be such a powerful reference tool, we explore other aspects of music and their benefits, turning to other works of Kenneth Aigen.

In Kenneth Aigen’s work, *Music-Centered Music Therapy*, the author discusses the benefits of music in five realms: aesthetic, communal, transpersonal, creative, and expressive. It is helpful to explore each realm to fully view the possible benefits music may bring its users.

Aesthetic realms of music include properties “relat[ing] to qualities as varied as its subtlety, expressiveness, conviction, simplicity, complexity, beauty, novelty, unity, rhythmic cohesion, and strength of representation...” (Aigen 2005:100).

Listening to or experiencing aesthetically pleasing music is a benefit in and of its self.

As Aigen explains,

...Aesthetic experience is an essential psychological human need. It is a highly motivating need in understanding much of human activity. We resonate to beauty in our life, and the need to create and experience beauty motivates us to activity that creates the circumstances for its emergence. (Aigen 2005:100)

Experiencing music that is aesthetically pleasing to the listener fills a human need to experience an ideal, enjoyable situation. By providing an avenue for experiencing aesthetically pleasing sounds, whether pre-recorded or created by the individual, music can also encourage further exploration into other pleasurable experiences. This may mean that the participant dedicates herself to a deeper exploration of music or other forms of art, or simply wakes herself to the presence of aesthetically pleasing objects and ideas around her.

Being able to experience one's own aesthetic preferences in music within a group can be an affirming communal experience. In a group setting where others also appreciate one's preferred aesthetics, an individual receives confirmation that others value her preferences, which can foster a sense of community. Since icons depend on one's internal context and culture to form the associations between icon and object, when group members perceive the same icon-object association while experiencing a piece of music it indicates that they interpret the world—or at least that small part of the world that may be held in a single sound—in a similar way.

Turino points out that music's signs are prevalently those of iconic or indexical nature. Indexical signs relate directly to the lived realities of each person—they reference a past feeling or idea of one's life—and therefore often cultivate a

strong sense of intimacy with the music that carries these indexical signs. Music's indexical signs combined with the interpersonal connection of iconic signs, then, form a basis of empathy between listeners.

While discussing the communal aspect of music, Aigen posits, "Inherent in [making and experiencing music] is an outward focus that reflects a profound respect for other people," (Aigen 2005:83) and "individuals drawn to music are simultaneously expressing the value they place on human connection" (Aigen 2005:90). In group music-making/experiencing, connections develop between an individual's music and the music being made by those around her. Participating in the creation of music along with others, then, is a way to become part of an instant community where everyone's input is valuable. All contributions are important because each one has an impact on the overall sound of the music. Additionally, in order to best interact musically, a participant's contribution to the piece must be in reaction or relation to other members' musical inputs. Thus, participants in group music making activities cultivate awareness of their how their musical actions affect and interact with others' musical actions, helping to create a sense of community within this group (Hull 1998). This interpersonal musical consciousness may then assist in general alertness about how one's actions in life affect and are affected by the actions of those around them.

Participating in the creation of music is a way to feel part of something larger than oneself. As Aigen proposes, "[The] sense of belonging is a primary human need and an important component of a well-rounded self-identity" (Aigen 2005:101). Participation in musical activities can facilitate connection with a larger community

based simply on the fact that millions of others have created music in the past, or are creating it in the same moment in which the participant is experiencing it. Individuals creating music are simultaneously interacting with the music they are experiencing in the present moment and musical motives and ideas that have been passed on through generations of music-makers. Even in solo music making, then, one is building connections to others.

Another important element in music's ability to foster positive experiences for those who interact with it is the element of creativity.

Creative processes represent an engagement with life that can counterbalance emotions such as depression and despair that can lead a person to withdraw...[and] [e]ngagement in creative activity, particularly music, is therapeutic because it provides both access to and field for the development of the individual's capacity for embracing creation, and, hence, life itself. (Aigen, 1991:94 in Aigen 2005:96-97)

Thus, creativity opens individuals to the act of creation and provides avenues for exiting emotional ruts. Because the process of life itself involves continuous creation—of new neuron connections, new memories, new motor skills—an individual who consciously engages in a creative process takes into her own hands an essential element of life itself.

Creativity can be seen as a means of empowerment. Creativity involves the freedom to make personal decisions that result in the creation of a new idea or object. Thus, creativity offers space in which to exercise decision making abilities, confirming that those who participate in creative acts retain agency in their lives (Baker 2005:96). This control and ability to make decisions can be especially empowering for those who are not normally allowed to make decisions, such as incarcerated individuals.

Julie P. Sutton elaborates on the benefits of creativity for those who have undergone traumatic experiences. She explains that trauma often results from a situation in which an individual has no control over a dramatic event in her life. After these situations occur, musical creativity can provide an outlet through which control can be reasserted over her own life and body (Sutton 2002:31). Sutton also stresses the importance of music's ability to connect one's body and physical actions to one's mental processes within a short, delineated time frame. Through experimenting with music, an individual can hear and feel the way that her body responds to the directives and thoughts of her mind almost instantaneously, unless she consciously desires to postpone the physical manifestation of her thoughts (Sutton 2002:35). Mental and emotional shutdown can often result from a traumatic experience. Sutton argues that creativity is one way that traumatized individuals can re-access emotions and mental processes. This is because creativity allows oneself to re-imagine and re-create situations and feelings, thereby allowing individuals to conceive of life above and beyond the trauma that occurred (Sutton 2002:108-115). Finally, moving to group benefits, Sutton identifies creative musical engagement with others as a way to form intimate connections. She explains that creative musical interaction requires fine interpersonal attunement, in which one is subconsciously or consciously aware of other's actions and how they influence one's own actions (Sutton 2002:128). Creativity, then, is a powerful aspect of musical experience.

To continue exploring Aigen's categories of musical qualities, we turn to the transpersonal aspect of music. The transpersonal qualities of music, as elaborated by Aigen, are in part outlined in the section above, exemplified in the connection with

fellow musicians, past and present, through musical experiences. The transpersonal nature of music also explains the phenomenon whereby otherwise-non-communicative individuals are enabled, through music, to connect with those around them. This can be seen most prevalently in autistic children but is also evidenced in individuals suffering from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and other traumatized individuals. Research shows that music accesses different parts of the brain than other forms of communication and therefore is not necessarily inhibited even when other avenues of communication are highly restricted by such disorders (Tomaino 2009).

Throughout the previous pages one can see the many ways music can be helpful to individuals and communities. Individually, its indexical signs can lead listeners to memories of past events and feelings. Music can act as a channel for feelings and thoughts not desired to be expressed through language. It can provide listeners with aesthetically pleasing experiences. Finally, the creative processes involved in music can help individuals assert their own choices, gain control of their actions, cultivate mind-body connections, and re-access stifled emotions. Communally, shared iconic sign-object relationships from music can connect various individuals with each other, creating an affirmative bond through music. Music can also foster a sense of community when interacted with collectively and can cultivate connections with others who are creatively engaging with music, past or present.

Writing

Writing and literature have an historic connection to power. Literature over the ages has been used to concretize histories, highlight the lives of individuals

deemed important, and characterize and describe societies. Literature has the power to legitimize the actions of some and silence those of others. Historically, many oppressed peoples have used writing as a means for empowerment, education, and liberation after realizing that the literature of dominant discourses could paint an arbitrary picture of life that did not relate to their own experiences. One need not look farther than the poetry of Langston Hughes, Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*, or the *Autobiography of Malcolm X* to see examples of times when a book has had the power to illuminate parts of society previously ignored.

In a society in which the written word is highly valued and depended on to verify knowledge as legitimate, then, the ability to express oneself through the written medium is an important one. Many incarcerated individuals find their words stifled by the restrictions of prison life. In prison, every meal is scheduled and daily life includes little choice as to what activities an incarcerated individual is able to participate in, if they are allowed any activity at all. Incarcerated individuals are stripped of their children, their clothing, and even their name, as they are referred to either by their inmate number or their last name. In the words of Caroline Dean and Jonathan Field, the prison environment "is [a] harsh...violent, hostile, oppressive, inhumane and isolating experience for those who are incarcerated. Feelings of shame and loss of self-esteem are typical" (Dean & Field 2003:1).

Stephen J. Hartnett describes the work of participants in the prison writing workshops he has been running for nine years: "...each poem clings...to hope, to the belief that inside these prison walls, in their dignified acts of resistance, men

dismantle parts of this brutal system, celebrating their own humanity in the process” (Hartnett 2003:ix). Perhaps the words of one student explains it best:

Like fruit, like stars, words
To save their lives
To snatch them from the streets
Defend their dreams...

To change our lives (Hartnett 2003:10)

Hartnett proclaims, “...writing workshops in prison take on cathartic, truly redemptive energies—hence the power and passion of so much prison writing” (Hartnett 2003:10).

Many incarcerated individuals use writing to verify their existence. By discovering their ability to write, incarcerated individuals can be imbued with a sense of agency. New writers often realize that they have a valuable story to share, just as other authors they have read. Through writing workshops these individuals are affirmed in their ability to communicate these stories. In the words of Ann Folwell Stanford, through writing, the participants of her workshops in prison

claim and proclaim that they are not simply statistics, predators, loose-women, nameless women, poor women, battered and raped women. Instead, they construct selves that are rooted in their deepest belief and desires about who they are—strong, beautiful, kick-ass, loving, angry, dancing, laughing, sorrowing, hungry, and full women (Stanford n.d.).

Writing allows individuals to tell stories. These stories form alternate realities for those who write them, in which the fulfillment of hopes and dreams is possible; “In writing, they can be the women they were before incarceration or would like to be after” (Stanford n.d.). Writing also may express individuals’ own past or current experiences. These types of stories serve as an empowering way for those in prison to communicate the injustices and reality of the events in their lives.

As with music, writing provides a space for creativity. It thus embodies many of the benefits explained above relating to music and creativity. The creative aspect of writing also allows individuals to physically reimagine and rewrite the world in which they live.

Writing, then, provides a liberating space in which to document experiences and opinions in a highly valued format. It also allows for creative re-assessment of lived realities.

Performance

Although songwriting, as mentioned above, is considered by some to indicate only the process of writing lyrics and composing musical accompaniment, I believe the full benefits of songwriting can only be experienced when a performance aspect is added. As Aigen states,

The impulse to music in human beings can demand public performance to reach its consummation...The experience of the music is essential to a conveyance of its meaning...its meaning and significance is contained within its sound, within the experiencing of it. (Aigen 2005:116)

Thus, performance helps communicate meaning through truly *experiencing* the music. The process of songwriting leading up to the performative aspect holds meaning and significance. However, *communicating* the emotions and energy that have been put into the songwriting process helps complete the experience. This communication can only be achieved by *performing* music.

Performance does not necessarily mean public performance. Performance can be as small as softly singing lyrics, tapping along to a song, speaking energetically, or humming an abstract melody while walking down a hallway.

Performance with the presence of an audience can be a highly interpersonal experience. We will first explore the benefits of this type of performance. A performer communicates to the audience, who then reacts and shares energy with the performer. Thus, performance helps cultivate communication and community. As Jodi Kanter explains,

Because performance is playful, the mode of play encourages an emphasis on experimentation and revision... This emphasis encourages community members to entertain diverse perspectives, thereby widening and strengthening community. (Kanter 2007:6)

Kanter illustrates that the impermanent nature of performance helps groups to entertain different possibilities in their actions. The same people performing perhaps ten minutes later may communicate the same material in a different way. This focus on diversity and multiple possibilities, then, expands out of the music and into the community, fostering a space of creative openness and multiple perspectives.

Performance can help communicate one's feelings and experiences in a cultural context:

Because performance is social, it helps us to place experiences and responses that may feel painfully isolated in a cultural context. With the understanding of ourselves as social actors comes a greater power to affect the culture. (Kanter 2007:6)

A performance necessarily takes place within a particular location and time. In this place and time there are likely to be many cultures represented, as well as the culture of the event contained in that space and time. Penny Eames cites the UNESCO definition of culture as,

...the set of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual, and emotional features of society or a social group, and ... it encompasses, in addition to art and literature, lifestyles, ways of living together, value systems, traditions and beliefs. (UNESCO 2001:2 in Eames 2007:6)

These features, values, and traditions will be present in the performance space, the individuals of the audience, and the performers. Those performing, then, place their emotions and experiences in both the context of that event as well as in the many cultural contexts represented in the performing group and in the audience. If the performance takes place in a location with a strong local culture, such as a prison, the performance can take on the role, consciously or unconsciously, of providing cultural commentary—explaining a situation or emotion that is taking place within this localized culture. Through this commentary, the emotions and experiences become a validated part of that culture. Thus, the performance of one’s own emotions makes them a part of the surrounding culture that can no longer be ignored by adding this new material feature to a specific social group.

To explore the benefits performance can have on individuals, we turn now to Jodi Kanter. Kanter explores the power and importance of performance in dealing with death because it is “one of life’s greatest dramas.” For all those incarcerated, time in prison is also “one of life’s greatest dramas” (Kanter 2007:30). For Kanter, one aspect of the power of performance in dealing with difficult subject matter is that performance involves an amount of uncertainty and “radical *unknowing*” (Kanter 2007:85). Even when a performance is heavily planned out, one never quite knows what will happen. Never can one anticipate every millisecond of the experience. This uncertainty makes performance an appropriate medium through which to communicate and explore that which is not well understood, such as times of trauma like incarceration. Performance emulates the confusion and radical inability to comprehend that often accompany experiences of incarceration. It mediates this

indeterminacy with an amount of controlled interaction and planning. In this way, performance can embody confusion as well as place that confusion into a comprehensible and partially controlled situation.

Performance also makes it possible to embody aspects of self that are not normally considered appropriate to express publicly, such as anger and other intense emotions. When individuals display such emotions in a performative context, these emotions can be viewed as fictional and therefore more tolerable (Kanter 2007:105). An audience witnessing this event can also be affirmed in their own similar feelings.

In direct relation to life in prison, performance can be physically emancipatory. As Kanter again explains,

The antithesis of the disciplined body is the body at play. A body at play is neither docile nor useful [in the mind of the prison institution]. It does not obey the rules. It does not get things done. It barks like a dog. It laughs. It takes real tours of imaginary places. (Kanter 2007:149)

Thus, performance helps release one's mind and body of the confines that often inhibit self-expression and creative thought. The act of performing requires a bodily engagement that is at a heightened level as compared to the body's engagement while writing lyrics or experiencing music. A performer's body must be ready to carry her through this expression of her hard work and creativity. This bodily engagement helps to bring to reality an alternative to the usual confined, systematized, obedient daily life of those who are incarcerated.

Performance can also be a harbinger of renewed personal and/or communal dignity. By performing, individuals and/or groups put themselves on the line and risk humiliation in front of peers. However, taking this risk and feeling successful at the end of a performance makes the performer(s) an accomplished individual(group).

This feeling of accomplishment could then give dignity to her(their) mind(s) and body(ies), for no matter how many times someone may tell a performer she is worthless, the performer knows she has carried out at least this one expression, and therefore has shown herself capable.

Performance, then, helps to facilitate community understanding of diverse opinions and provides space for expression within cultural contexts. It can also provide a fitting medium through which to process difficult events and feelings, and can bring physical liberation and dignity.

Thus, music, writing, and performance all carry qualities that cultivate well-being for both individuals and groups. I now move on to explain the collectivized benefits of songwriting.

Songwriting

Songwriting can be defined, as outlined above, as a process embodying stages of thought and action in relation to the creation of music. Kenneth Bruscia perhaps best explains the value of songwriting when he says,

Songs are ways that human beings explore emotions. They express who we are and how we feel, they bring us closer to others, they keep us company when we are alone. They articulate our beliefs and values. As the years pass, songs bear witness to our lives. They allow us to relive the past, examine the present, and to voice our dreams of the future. Songs weave tales of our joys and sorrows, they reveal our innermost secrets, and they express our hopes and disappointments, our fears and triumphs. They are our musical diaries, our life-stories. They are the sounds of our personal development. (Bruscia 1998:9 in Baker 2005:11)

Songwriting can be an important tool simply because of its relevance to most populations. Songs accompany us in elevators, at work, at parties, in the car, and in

many other locations of our lives. As Felicity Baker explains, “Our intimate knowledge of this cultural form gives songs and songwriting a special place...a new context, a freedom and strength to bypass...vulnerability,” and “an aesthetic context” in which to explore life and its possibilities (Baker 2005:10). Because songs accompany so many situations and stages of our lives, they provide a recurring soundtrack for life. It can be liberating to have the ability to create one’s own song to add to that soundtrack.

As previously mentioned, songwriting combines the advantages of music, writing, and performance into a holistic experience of the advantageous of its components. Although not all songwriting experiences will include all three of these aspects, there is always potential for their reference. Thus, songwriting combines the expressive, aesthetically explorative, communal, and creative aspects of music, with the associations that music carries in iconic and indexical signs. Songwriting adds to these benefits of music, the legitimization and power of the written word, and feelings of affirmation and verification that can be found in writing. Writing also contributes the ability to tell stories through words in an enduring form. Finally, songwriting includes the communicative, community-strengthening qualities of performance that can provide social commentary and a space for dealing with confusing feelings or experiences due to the uncertainty involved in the performance act. The performance aspect of songwriting also allows an embodiment of aspects of self that would not normally be acceptable, providing dignity and bodily emancipation for participants. Thus, songwriting carries an immense number of mechanisms with which to expand

one's perspectives, life skills, and artistic potential. Songwriting's integration of all the benefits of its components often leads to fuller experiences of these benefits.

Most discussions in life and literature about songwriting revolve around conceptions of songs that are strongly tied to Western pop/folk expectations of the elements that constitute "a song." Rock, country, hip-hop, and pop, which almost always contain both lyrics and musical elements, currently occupy the top market shares of music consumed in the United States ("2008 Consumer Profile" 2008). This indicates that it is quite probable that the majority of individuals residing in the United States have heard these genres of music. And, because many individuals will write songs similar to those they have listened to, most songwriting is likely to include some elements of lyrical creation and musical accompaniment (Baker 2005:97). However, songs and the songwriting process are not constrained to this music and lyrics norm.

Songwriting can constitute a process using only vocal sounds, having no specific structure, using free improvisation, using only rhythmic patterning, or a variety of other configurations. In many cases, individuals engaged in songwriting may perceive these non-traditional configurations as more relevant than a structured vocal and accompaniment song. In situations where lyrics are not present, the songwriting process would not involve the element of writing, and therefore the benefits particular to the written word would not be experienced. However, the benefits of music and performance will be more fully experienced because of the increased relevance this music holds for its creator, and because she was able to use her own agency in deciding to write an atypical song.

Songwriting is particularly effective as a means for self-expression and positive experience because it provides opportunities to fully explore and balance one's strengths and build around one's weaknesses (Baker 2005:99). If a participant is uncomfortable with the idea of writing, she may be more comfortable playing a rhythm that could be used to explore her feelings better than lyrics would. Thus, she could form a song with little or no lyrics and a strong rhythmic structure. If words are an individual's forte, she may focus on strong lyrical composition and include a sparse musical backing.

Trygve Aasgaard explains that songwriting offers a way for the children he works with in oncology wards "who seem[] to be 'stuck' in [their] role[s] as patient[s]" to expand their "role repertoire" (Baker 2005:155). Instead of being viewed as patients, while they write songs these children can partake of the role of a songwriter. This is an opportunity that any individual can access. By becoming a songwriter, even for a day, an individual can reach beyond the typical constraints of her social role.

Randi Rolvsjord suggests that participation in the songwriting process can imbue participants with skills and social roles that can contribute to their cultural capital. Cultural capital as conceived of by Pierre Bourdieu explains the phenomena whereby individuals are deemed culturally superior due to their competencies in certain spheres that are deemed connected to the heritage of a culture (Weininger & Lareau 2007:103-107). In their new roles as songwriters, participants have new tools to contribute to their surrounding social setting. This acquisition of cultural capital,

then, can increase self-confidence and sense of efficacy within society (Baker 2005:99).

Above, I discussed the way that music can act as a distanced embodiment of emotions that can be accessed through listening to a particular song. The benefits of this distanced emotional embodiment theory can be even more fully experienced in the context of self-expression during the entire songwriting process. Rather than expressing difficult emotions through conversation—a very direct, personal medium where it can be difficult to separate oneself from one’s feelings even when highly desired—expressing emotion through a self-written song offers a way to separate the emotion from its direct ties to the songwriter. The emotions become part of the art of the song, and although they may still profoundly affect the listener and performer, both parties have the option of viewing “the song” as a fictitious expression of universally felt thought.

Putting emotion into a universal art such as music can also help one to feel an emotional connection to generations of musicians who have expressed themselves in this way. As mentioned above, music has a historical lineage of expression. An individual exploring songwriting may draw inspiration from past songwriters and songs. She may feel a connection to Lauryn Hill and through writing a similar song find communion with her. This can lead individuals who have difficulty connecting to those around them to be able to experience a community through this historical line of songwriters even without the physical presence of a community nearby.

If participating in group songwriting, participants have the potential to collaboratively celebrate the strengths of each member. Some can write lyrics or

develop a musical motive, some can form rhythmic patterns, and all or some can perform. Even if not participating in *group* songwriting per se, an individual who has written a song might well be able to find someone nearby who is able and willing to collaborate on the performance of the song, such as a guitarist or pianist. The desire for a particular sound, then, may lead songwriters to seek out interpersonal connections with others who are interested in music.

Indeed, group songwriting can be an enjoyable way to introduce songwriting to those who have not previously experimented with it. Tony Wigram and Felicity Baker explain that group songwriting helps to “encourage social interaction, group cohesion and feelings of group supportiveness” (Baker 2007:16). Each member can participate as much or little as they feel comfortable. All group members can build upon each other’s ideas. This provides space for *individual* expression within a *group* framework. Differing ideas that arise during the process of group songwriting can be integrated into separate verses, or debated upon. By discussing differences and successfully settling them in relation to the song, individuals who participate in group songwriting are then better equipped to handle personal confrontations or differences of opinion in daily life.

Thus, songwriting integrates the benefits of music, writing, and performance, and carries with it a new social role to be experienced by those who choose to write songs. Songwriting can also be seen as a mode of gaining cultural capital.

Interpersonal relationships can be formed through group songwriting, which can also assist in cultivating skills with which to manage interpersonal conflict. They can also be formed through historical connections to past songwriters.

In this chapter, I have explored the full benefits of songwriting by focusing on songwriting's elements of music, writing, and performance. Each of these elements includes many beneficial qualities. Conceiving of "a song" in a very broad sense will assist individuals in finding the most fitting configuration of song elements with which to express their emotions and ideas. The ability to combine the expressive forms of music, writing, and performance in endless arrays imbues songwriting with a unique ability to provide a fitting form of expression for any type of individual. The result is songwriting as a process that can be liberating for all involved.

Chapter 2: Songwriting at York

My own experience with songwriting in prison occurred at York Correctional Institution, the only women's prison in the state of Connecticut. It houses a full range of individuals, from age 14 to 80+ and from maximum to minimum security ("York Correctional Institution" n.d.). At York Correctional Institution I co-facilitated a songwriting and rhythmic exploration workshop in which my focus was on songwriting. I was able to facilitate at York because of the Wesleyan University *Prisoner Solidarity Project*. For years, this group has been coordinating Wesleyan student facilitators with various Connecticut prisons that are receptive to student-led workshops. My co-facilitator and I were able to benefit from this coordination. We submitted a workshop description and title—originally called "Explore and Express Music"—and waited to hear whether or not women at York were interested in the workshop and if York could integrate us into their schedule of student-led workshops. In addition to submitting the description, we were required to acquiesce to background checks and fill out an institutional volunteer application. Once we were accepted into the program we attended a brief training session at York, which all volunteers were required to attend.

We facilitated weekly workshops from 8:30-10am on Tuesday mornings, and spent the half-hour drive back to Wesleyan University's campus from York after each workshop debriefing and discussing how the day's workshop succeeded and what aspects of it needed modification. Through my experience in this workshop, I was able to witness the benefits and enjoyment gleaned from songwriting. I also witnessed a myriad of problems that arose because of the prison setting and my own ignorance.

I share these experiences with the hope that they will aid the work of future workshop facilitators. In the following chapter I will elaborate on the lessons I learned from this experience.

This section serves primarily to display the difficulties of working in prison from my first-hand experience. While facilitating this workshop, I was not certain that I would be writing a thesis related directly to it. Thus, I did not use the workshop as a research or interview space and did not get the appropriate permission to publish the words that participants wrote during our sessions that would have been required had I used the space for research. I documented my experiences in journals that my co-facilitator and I shared with the goal of improving the workshop. I felt that there was a possibility my thesis would draw upon my experiences in this workshop, and therefore did want the experience documented. Thus, the lack of direct voices from the women I worked with in this section was the result of uncertainty about my thesis goals, as well as a lock-down at York which prevented us from giving the women of our workshop end-of-session questionnaires.

I entered the workshop knowing general statistics about prison and information about the prison environment gleaned from anti-prison activists. I also had contact with a friend who had previously facilitated a music appreciation workshop in York Correctional Institution who was able to give me pedagogical tips on how to successfully run a workshop and explain a bit of what it was like to work in prison. This contact with a former facilitator who was enthusiastic about my upcoming workshop supplied me with the necessary confidence with which to approach this project.

My sessions with the incarcerated women at York encompassed the entire range of songwriting as described in chapter one, including experiences of music, writing, and performance. I began by devoting the first sessions primarily to listening to recorded music, and slowly added more writing components until the last few sessions, when I tried to foster a space in which full songs could be formed.

The first session was a lesson in humility and illuminated my understanding of what the workshop would and could be. Since my co-facilitator was out of state that week, I facilitated it alone. My plan included introducing myself and explaining the reason I was at the prison, which was to share my love of music. I then wanted to open up the floor to group discussion of what type of music everyone liked, and how they used music in their own lives. We were then going to attempt a group exercise and proceed into listening to and discussing songs.

When I entered the classroom—York has a special wing that serves as a school—I was ready to wait for the women to arrive. What I did not anticipate was the arrival of each participant one at a time, with sometimes as long as ten or fifteen minutes between arrivals. I wanted to initiate conversation and interaction, so I decided to introduce myself to each woman as she entered. After introducing myself and learning their names, I handed each woman a sheet of paper on which to write song requests of music she did not have access to in the prison. This idea to offer the opportunity for song requests came from the experience of my friend who had previously facilitated in York. She had informed me that one of the most enjoyed portions of her workshops were the ends of each session in which the facilitators played a song that had been requested by a participant. Engaging in this process of

requesting songs seemed to help us all become mildly comfortable, since we were occupied with an activity before the workshop officially started.

As there was no clear point at which all the women arrived, and it was obvious that some of the women would not be joining us that day, I chose an arbitrary point at which to start the workshop, approximately half an hour to forty-five minutes after the theoretical start time to our workshop. I began by introducing myself, again, and telling the story of my interest in music. I had already received many questions about why I was there, so my formal introduction to the women was quite redundant. Several women explained that music helped them get through their days at York. Some went so far as to say that it would be impossible for them to survive in prison without music. It must have seemed to me that this was sufficient discussion of our backgrounds in music, because I never did explicitly ask what types of music the women enjoyed, or what personal experiences with music they had. Those comments about the helpfulness of music in prison were, however, quite encouraging to hear in the first minutes of our first session. They provided confirmation that the importance I place on music was not solely an individual view, and that the workshop was founded on ideas which the women themselves also held—that music holds great power and can provide assistance in daily life struggles.

After our introductions to each other I tried to initiate, embarrassingly, a humming exercise I had discovered in the back of a Music Therapy book. At this point there were seven women in attendance, out of the twelve signed up to participate. The goal of this humming exercise was help create group cohesion and awareness of how one's own sound interacts with the sounds of others. However, in a

group of seven, it was uncomfortably obvious which sound belonged to which person. Additionally, the women did not seem at all enthusiastic at participating in this exercise, which may have been too abstract and childish to introduce into such a strict, disciplined environment. The first point I learned about activities in prison, then, was that individuals in prison are not waiting for someone to come along and teach them how to get along, nor are they *unaware*, in any way, of the power of music to help in difficult situations. It seems unlikely that inmates will embrace contrived exercises, because trust cannot be built that quickly or easily.

We moved on by listening to two slow pop songs and discussing their characteristics and why or why not the women and I liked the songs. This was fruitful in encouraging discussion, and was educational for me because I realized how straightforward the women were. They quickly selected particular preferable characteristics of each song, such as understandable lyrics. They also easily identified or developed a story of what each song was about. I had expected the women to be more hesitant in their analysis of the music, and that they would perhaps be less open about their views and opinions. It was refreshing to receive such direct assessments of the music. However, their straightforwardness led the discussion to be quite short, making my plans for the day seem very inadequate.

I continued with my plan, and we initiated writing how we felt or ideas we thought of while listening to a song. Three women were open enough to read aloud what they had written, which encouraged me. However, as the listening exercises were the last event I had planned for that first session, it was then time for me to end the workshop. We parted after I fielded a number of questions as to why the session

was finishing so early. The women seemed a bit upset that the workshop concluded prior to its official end. Later I realized that this was because the two-hour block in which the workshop operated was a needed respite from the remainder of their daily programming. By halting it early they either had to request that the library allow them to spend the rest of the session's time in the library, or to go back to their cell areas.

As the sessions continued, we progressed from only listening to music, to writing words, and finally to songwriting and performance. First we spent sessions listening to various styles of songs and discussing their different qualities—whether they rhymed lyrically, had rich, layered accompaniment or just a simple background rhythm—and what qualities were common in different genres of song. I tried to broaden the idea of what a song could be, stressing that it did not have to be lyrical nor melodic.

We then interspersed writing sessions into these listening times. As we listened to songs I encouraged the women to write whatever the song made them feel. These writing exercises then progressed to writing anything, related or unrelated to songs we were listening to. My co-facilitator and I also continued to integrate into each workshop the music the women had requested at our first session. Each time we played a song of their choice it seemed to connect them back to their lives outside of prison, and everyone tended to be silent and reflective during and after these times.

When listening to music, discussing songs, and writing, my co-facilitator and I always made a concerted effort to participate fully in the activity at hand. We did not desire to seem like directors separate from the group. Because neither of us were professional musicians nor had extensive previous experience songwriting, we were

essentially on an even level with the women participants. We felt it was important to establish ourselves as group participants rather than individuals with special authority.

During our discussion of music, it was obvious that musical choice was important to the women. They seemed to identify well with artists such as Lauryn Hill, who had clearly-stated lyrics about life issues such as love, music, and honesty. As one participant explained, “Lauryn really *speaks*, and I’ve been listening to her for years.” This quote illustrates some of the roles that music can play in individuals’ lives. The values of Lauryn Hill’s songs seemed to coincide with those of the women, showing cultural relevancy. By referencing how long she had been listening to Hill’s music, the woman who said this showed that Lauryn Hill’s music had been an accompaniment to her life, supporting the idea that songs can be used to document or reference life experiences, even if only through listening to and associating particular songs with particular times in one’s life through indexical sign-object relationships.

Other songs related back to previous eras in history. This was shown in the reactions to Patsy Cline’s “Walkin’ After Midnight.” The women immediately giggled at the sound of the song, mentioning how old it sounded. The tinny sound of the instruments seemed to be iconic signs of an older era. The women explained that the people during the era in which this song had been produced appreciated that sound. The women were quick to show that they were not judging the music itself, but rather its presence in this new, contemporary context in which its sound was much less common.

One of the most enthusiastic overall reactions occurred after listening to “Gravity” by local artist Katie d’Angelo. This song has simple guitar accompaniment to slow, clearly-stated lyrics sung simply and emotionally. The women said that this song seemed very realistic and was easy to understand and connect to. They valued the fact that it would be easy to memorize.

The discussions of songs we had in our workshops always led me back to recognizing how ignorant I was of most pop music, and how little my alternative interests seemed relevant to most of the women. Playing a song by Modest Mouse elicited questions to me about whether or not I was sane to enjoy music that abruptly moved from slow ballad-like reflection to a section of highly-aggressive instrumentals and scream-like singing.

The writing portion of our explorations with songwriting did not proceed in a linear fashion, although I did attempt this. The first few workshops included at least one or two periods of writing, mostly while music was playing. Although I attempted to focus more and more on lyrical formation each week, subject material and writing methods remained relatively constant throughout the large majority of the workshops. In focusing on providing ample space for writing, I disregarded my broader definition of song and did not foster an environment in which to create non-lyrically based songs. As mentioned earlier, having an open-minded conception of “a song” leaves more space for individuals to fully engage with the songwriting process. One participant seemed quite interested in rhythmic construction, but we did not give her space for this expression until the last session she attended. Providing the opportunity for her to express her interest in rhythms throughout the entirety of the course would

have likely increased her engagement in the workshop. This would have been especially valuable since she often seemed unenthusiastic about our subject matter.

The inconsistency of attendance by the women who participated in our workshop made it difficult to have a linear progression in the workshop. Out of the twelve women who had initially enrolled in the workshop, about four consistently attended. Most of this inconsistency was due to the structure of prison life. Some participants were released and some endured segregation during the course of our workshop. At least one participant's work schedule conflicted with the workshop time, and she was required to obtain special permission to leave work and attend the workshop. Thus, there were days where she chose to continue working. Many times, the women were not released for school until half an hour after their scheduled release time, causing almost everyone to arrive at the workshop forty-five minutes late. The prison made it quite difficult for the women to successfully participate fully in each session.

Thus, with such a variety of attendance patterns for each session, it was difficult to build upon work done the previous week. In my attempts to gradually introduce the idea of writing a full song, I was hesitant to take a leap into anything I officially called 'songwriting' because I did not want to intimidate anyone. However, in my reluctance to use the title 'songwriting' from the outset, it was even more challenging to finally jump into it.

My first real attempt to foster individual songwriting occurred on the day one young woman was to be released. She had been quite enthusiastic during the beginning of the session, and we devoted time to giving her space to express her work

(see below), but she then had to leave quite early. The rest of the session I attempted to foster an environment in which all the women would feel comfortable initiating writing a song individually by playing some example songs and then giving silent time in which we could write our own lyrics. However, although some ideas were written down during these silent times, the group as a whole did not seem to be exuding much enthusiasm. One girl did not write anything, which was within her rights both because the workshop was a voluntary and free space, and because I had opened the ideas of what a song could encompass into anything, which did not have to include writing down a single word. However, I made the critical pedagogical mistake of directly giving her specific advice about how to spur thoughts of what to write down. This personal attention seemed to make her quite uncomfortable, and after the next listening exercise she asked to leave. This personal advice I gave her violated her ability to choose her own activity and comfort level. It also focused the entire group's attention onto her, which left no room for anonymity in her actions.

In comparison to my original plan for slowly introducing the entire songwriting process, the actual flow of the workshop did not foster as much full-fledged songwriting as I had hoped. Much of this was due to my lack of clear goals in the timeline of the workshop. I learned that it would have been best to set clear goals as a group from the very start, and to establish them from day one. In this way, we would have had solid goals towards which we could work.

However, the material that the women wrote during the workshop showed that music did indeed connect to their internal contexts and past experiences during the workshop. Many women wrote about themes related to the subjects of the songs we

listened to. While listening to Patsy Cline's lament of walking around trying to find a love that does not appear, "Walkin' After Midnight," one woman wrote about a vision of herself walking in the rain with no transportation and lacking support from anyone else. This woman's addition of walking to work without transportation to the themes of lost love and loneliness shown in "Walkin' After Midnight" seemed to indicate that the song carried not only the subjects it explicitly talked about, but that it signaled to this listener a general sadness and bad state of affairs. The song's subjects also must have cued an indexical connection between the action of walking and the state of being without transportation. These ideas seemed to arise from a personal place—her internal context—rather than from the song, and were likely effects of the song triggering slightly forlorn thoughts.

The women's writing also showed an openness to discussing issues through the written word. These issues were usually ones that we did not discuss verbally during our sessions, such as faith in God, heartbreak, feeling locked up and trapped inside, and feeling overwhelmed by sorrow. Many of the women started each session by writing about specific qualities of the songs or stories that were told by the lyrics of the songs we listened to. This often quickly developed into more imaginary realms of story creation, where alternate but related stories were told, as shown by the Patsy Cline writing above.

The workshop as a whole did seem to cultivate group cohesion and trust. Especially while discussing song characteristics and preferences during the listening exercises, everyone engaged in discussions and seemed interested in the opinions and views of the other women in the group. The last two sessions, which involved the

most time specifically devoted to songwriting, displayed a great amount of group support. The second to last session occurred on the day that one member was to be released. The workshop was to be one of her last activities in prison, and she was particularly enthusiastic about writing that day. She was inspired by the Chopin we listened to at the beginning of the session and wrote two pages of thoughts/lyrics while listening to Chopin. She was enthusiastic to share her words, and we as fellow group members wanted to accompany these words. However, we had no instruments. Since the other half of our workshop, led by my co-facilitator, focused on West African rhythms, we decided that the group should provide some rhythmic backing for her while she spoke aloud the words she had written. This proved to be a highly supportive, very engaging experience for all involved. Every woman there was enthusiastic about the release of this young woman, and supported her words as she proclaimed them.

During the following, very last, workshop, only three women were present. It was on this day that I decided to attempt group songwriting activities, since the supportive group rhythm with voice had worked well the previous week and the individual activities that had followed it were quite unsuccessful. We opened with a few listening exercises and some discussion time, and then devoted twenty minutes to these three women collaboratively writing a song in an area separate from my co-facilitator and myself. The directions were no more specific than to write a song, although I did mention that they could write lyrics or come up with ideas for rhythm or a melody.

Two of the women ended up writing the lyrics, while the third woman designated herself as the rhythmic backup, citing that she did not feel musically or lyrically inclined. They wrote a song about recollecting a lost love while driving, using verse-chorus form and rhymes at the end of most lines. It was a quite poetic song. After the women felt that they had finished writing, I asked them if they would like to perform it. I had brought my guitar that day, and after trying out several different chords and strumming patterns, these three women approved an accompaniment style. The two women who wrote the lyrics—one of whom swore at the beginning of the session that she couldn't sing—sang along to the guitar while the third woman played soft rhythmic accompaniment on the table.

After this performance, we were all quite relaxed, surprised, and proud of the day's work. The small group had found a voice in each of its members, and we came together to create a final product in which we were able to share an experience. The performance seemed to truly inspire self-confidence and dignity in the women—and myself. It was also a time in which we were all absorbed in the music at hand, forgetting daily life. The performance showed that despite their claims otherwise, the women were more than capable of contributing to a musical creation and performance.

It is important for me to mention that in the first session of this workshop only I was present to facilitate it. However, my co-facilitator was present during all of the following workshops. Her presence caused me to feel more comfortable because I knew she would notify me if it seemed that my actions were insulting or if a participant seemed uncomfortable and I had not noticed. We were also able to provide

feedback to each other about which activities seemed to inspire the most interest and enthusiasm. Our co-facilitation allowed us to de-brief from the experience of being inside a prison each week with someone who had been through the exact same experience. The presence of both of us in the workshop was also helpful because my co-facilitator and I had very different backgrounds and perspectives. She grew up partially in New England and partially in urban Taiwan, while I spent my entire childhood in rural Montana. Thus, the cultures that we embodied varied greatly and formed in us unique internal contexts. Our differing internal contexts led us to observe the behavior of participants and lead the workshop from slightly different perspectives.

I share the experience of my facilitation of this songwriting workshop because it illustrates some of the difficulties a facilitator may experience when entering a prison. My first time facilitating in prison was difficult—mentally, emotionally, and pedagogically—but extremely rewarding, and by telling stories from this workshop I hope to make another’s experience easier.

For me, reading more arts-in-prison literature before entering the prison would have been quite helpful. I knew the instability of the prison environment because I had personal contact with other students who had worked as workshop facilitators in this same prison prior to me. I also knew the complicated prison hierarchy and horrors that often occur in prison because of my interaction with anti-prison activists. However, after reading about others’ experiences as artist-facilitators in prisons around the world, I feel much better equipped to manage the art as well as the

complicated personal dynamics that inevitably occur in prison workshops, and group workshops in any context.

No amount of reading, however, would have prepared me for each and every situation that occurred during my workshop. I expect that the next time I run a songwriting workshop in prison I will run into many other difficult and challenging experiences that I do not expect. I also know that I will also witness more powerful, shared moments of learning, exploration, and fulfillment with the men or women participating. In order to prevent future facilitators from encountering the same difficulties that I did during my first songwriting facilitation, in the following chapter I will share these insights of how to best run a songwriting workshop in prison.

Chapter 3 The How of Songwriting in Prison

Above, I discussed the particular advantages of songwriting and my own experiences with it. I showed how songwriting combines the best of musical qualities, the action of writing, and performance. The affirmation, creativity, and interpersonal and communal aspects of songwriting make it an important expressive form for all individuals, especially for those who are incarcerated. My experience at York shows that songwriting can provide expressive outlets and interpersonal connections for participants. It also displayed many difficulties that can be encountered when facilitating in prison.

Rachel Marie-Crane Williams explains life in prison:

For most, prison means living for many hours each day in a small space the size of a modest household bathroom, enduring exile from family and friends, possessing a meager collection of necessary objects, and being treated almost like a child. Within this culture of control there are few outlets for expression, stress, memory, and creativity, and little relief from boredom. There are also limited options for making contact with the outside culture or for exploring self worth and identity. (Williams 2003:4)

and again,

Prison is a place where deprivation is part of the culture. Inmates are deprived of outlets to express emotions, ways to identify themselves and the culture of which they were previously a part, normal communion with their families, and the material and metaphysical freedoms available to most human beings. (Williams 2003:6)

These quotes identify key areas which can and should be addressed through the use of songwriting in a prison context. They include cultural expression, self-expression, identity creation, freedom of thought, reflection on and documentation of experiences, self-exploration, and creating a sense of community.

In my own experience of songwriting at York, explained above, I came into contact with all of these uses of songwriting. However, it was a very difficult process to understand how to best facilitate a songwriting workshop in prison. No handbooks had been published about the pedagogical methods and logistical demands of songwriting workshops in prison similar to those that had been written about writing workshops in prison. In fact, I could find few sources touching on songwriting that were not about creating a commercially successful songwriting career. This section serves to share the knowledge I gained through my own experience in York as well as from research into the uses of songwriting and the structure of workshops in prison.

Throughout the following pages, the logistics and difficulties of facilitating songwriting workshops in prison will be discussed. First, I discuss the particulars of working in a prison. Then, I discuss particular populations and considerations of diversity that must be addressed pedagogically when conducting a songwriting workshop in prison. Finally, I look at particular guidelines that are helpful to follow when attempting to create a concentrated and inclusive environment for songwriting workshops.

Gaining entry into a prison facility is a difficult process. As stated above, I had the advantage of working with a Wesleyan University group that had a long-standing, although somewhat tense and tenuous, partnership with York Correctional Institution. Even with this connection, it took much longer to get into York than we had ever expected. Additionally, the following semester when we had hoped to facilitate another workshop putting to use the tips we had learned through our experience the previous semester and through our research, our workshop, like most

other student-led workshops at York that semester, was not approved by the prison administration.

Individuals seeking to start a workshop in prison will likely have a harder time than I did gaining entry into prison. It may require multiple letters, phone calls, and visits to various administrators in the prison. For more detailed information, PEN America's *Writing Over Walls* handbook provides practical guidance for finding the most helpful prison officials with which to partner and gain permission of entry. Facilitating a workshop, however difficult to initiate and run well, is certainly a worthwhile experience, and with the following guidance I hope to make the experiences of future songwriting facilitators the least troublesome possible.

Similar to the difficulty that facilitators face in gaining entry into the prison, incarcerated individuals encounter many barriers to their participation in educational and arts opportunities. In order to gain entry into a workshop or class in prison, most incarcerated individuals are required to fulfill certain criteria and, once these are fulfilled, to write many requests for admittance. One participant may write hundreds of requests for entry into many workshops and gain entry into only one (Gardner 2010). The workshop is no small thing for those incarcerated individuals who participate in it, for as Lynda Gardner states about her experience with a theatre workshop in prison, "For that little bit of time it takes you away from [prison]" (Gardner 2010).

There is a bountiful selection of considerations that one needs to understand before entering a prison. One of the most important aspects is acknowledging that prison contains and fosters a unique, semi-autonomous culture. People from "the

outside” do not and cannot ever fully comprehend what it is like to be an incarcerated individual, or even to be a prison employee. One reason for this lack of understanding is the physical barriers that impede outsiders from entering and becoming acquainted with prisons, but the more correctible impediment is an informational one. Many on the outside have never heard anything about prison life from those who have been incarcerated or have worked in prison. I assumed that my prior experiences with anti-prison activism and talking to others would prepare me sufficiently for this experience. This knowledge prevented me from feeling apprehensive about entering prison, but it did not prepare me with the ability to identify with the environment in which the women were living.

Recently, literature written by incarcerated individuals and workshop leaders has become more readily available. “Prison literature,” as it is sometimes referred to, ranges from autobiographies of those who have been incarcerated, such as *Assata Shakur*, to collections of stories by incarcerated individuals, such as Wally Lamb’s *Couldn’t Keep It To Myself*, to personal accounts of work in prison, such as Richard Shelton’s moving *Crossing the Yard*, to Stephen J. Hartnett’s investigative poetry exploring the wide-ranging impact of prisons in the United States in *Incarceration Nation*. These publications can contribute to cultivating an understanding of what prison life entails, the difficulties that incarcerated individuals face each day, and the hierarchy of prison bureaucracy. They have helped me process certain aspects of my experience in York, and assisted in my understanding of the women with whom I worked.

Even with these resources, it is important to remember that each prison has its own unique characteristics and idiosyncrasies. In spite of my prior knowledge of the prison environment from contact with other facilitators and friends who had worked in prisons, I encountered many situations in which I was acutely aware that I did not understand the environment in which these women were living. I believe that I would have dealt with several situations better had I read the above prison literature previous to my workshop rather than after it, but I maintain that surprises abound in prison regardless of how prepared one is.

Some general rules of working in prison, drawn from my own experience as well as the experiences of various other facilitators and authors, are: restrictions on clothing—usually no revealing or baggy clothing; no swearing; passing through metal detectors is mandatory; materials brought in must be pre-approved; and state-issued IDs are mandatory, every time. Many times, a facilitator may feel the need for outside materials, especially in prisons where not even paper is supplied. In most cases, the supervisor of a program in the prison must pre-approve everything the facilitator plans on bringing in. In my case, the prison approved all the materials we proposed to bring into our workshop. However, had we not had a member of the prison's school staff who escorted us into the prison each day, I doubt that many of our supplies would have made it past the guards, since they often seemed apprehensive even about *our* entry until our escorts arrived. Even with pre-approval, then, there is a chance that the entrance guards will not allow certain materials to enter the prison. Thus, those working in prison must always be ready to change course.

Plans may need to be modified due to material restrictions as stated above, but many other factors encourage flexibility within prison. Lock-downs frequently occur, effectively shutting down the prison and preventing any outsiders from entering it. A lock-down can be in response to a variety of issues, such as a missing person or a large fight. Lock-downs may last one day or one week. Since lock-downs are not usually publicly announced, it can be helpful to call ahead to determine if the prison is open. This helps prevent unnecessary trips to a locked-down prison. However, prison officials may not answer the phone so it is likely that a facilitator will encounter an unexpected lock-down at least once in her career.

When planning workshop goals and activities, it can be helpful to schedule extra sessions or space within sessions to correct for time potentially lost during lock-downs. Important activities, such as end-of-semester performances or evaluations should not necessarily be left for the last possible date, as there is always a chance that the final workshop will be canceled. Optimally, alternate dates would be available in the event that a lock-down occurs. My workshop would have benefited greatly from planning our major events a few weeks before the final sessions' dates, since a lock-down made it impossible for us to return to the prison at the end of our workshop. We therefore were not able to complete the activities we had planned, which would have been the most major and, in our minds, the most engaging activities of the semester.

When working in prison, one will encounter a diverse group of people, racially, religiously, culturally, and musically. This is of paramount importance to be aware of in the context of running a songwriting workshop. The participants of our

workshop at York ranged from age 17 to 54, including African-American, white, and multiracial individuals. It was clear throughout the workshop that they had grown up in very diverse areas and cultures. Diversity of culture will most affect the functioning of a workshop, and must be addressed in a facilitator's personal pedagogy. The definition of culture previously given shows that culture embodies every aspect of material and personal life. Cultural norms affect the way individuals process information, react to situations, use and interpret body language, and express themselves (Sheets 2009). Each of us has embodied the cultural norms of the people and areas with which we have had the most contact.

With this in mind, it is important that facilitators be aware of their own culturally influenced mannerisms and mindsets. In her discussion of diversity pedagogy as it relates to classroom education, Rosa Hernandez Sheets stresses the importance of analyzing one's own behavioral patterns, examining the cultural origins of activities and routines, and realizing when one's behaviors benefit some participants while disadvantaging others. For instance, focusing on writing ideas down on paper may privilege individuals who already know how to write well, while simultaneously making the space uncomfortable for those who do not write well, or do not know how to write at all. Sheets points out that observation of one's own habits as well as those of participants is critical in cultivating diverse ways of handling situations, forming a more fully-inviting environment for all involved (Sheets 2009). During our workshop at York I became aware that I become uncomfortable when individuals choose not to engage in a particular activity. I believe this is due to my upbringing in which participation in discussions was heavily

encouraged, to the point that it was quite rare that anyone did not fully engage in a conversation or activity. However, in the context of our workshop, I learned largely to suppress my desire to compel each individual to participate constantly. Although a participant may have remained quiet for most of the session, in most cases, she engaged in one aspect of it, and in this engagement seemed quite content and even excited. If I had pushed her to participate earlier she may not have felt able to choose to engage on her own later in the session.

Areas of cultural relevancy must be found in the way one facilitates a workshop and relates to participants. They must also be found in the actual material of the workshop. When material shows a relation to the lives of participants they may be more willing and able to connect to it. As Thomas Turino explains,

The performing arts are frequently fulcrums of identity, allowing people to intimately feel themselves part of the community through the realization of shared cultural knowledge and style and through the very act of participating together in performance. (Turino 2008:2)

and Kenneth Aigen elaborates,

If you do not really care so much about the music activity, you could hardly expect to receive the full positive gains connected with it. (Aigen 2005:58)

A facilitator, session plan, and set of materials that seem familiar or similar to the cultural values of participants are likely to foster greater enthusiasm and engagement (Baker 2005:225). As stated above, I felt that the music the women chose cultivated much more interest than that which I chose.

At the beginning of a workshop, a discussion of musical preferences and personal histories with music can help the group to gain insight into each other's musical tastes. By discussing and documenting the likes and dislikes of participants, a

facilitator will be able to tailor future sessions to suit the interests of the group (Baker 2005:85). Any group, especially one in prison, is likely to contain a diversity of opinion. This variety can help pave the way for exploring various types of music that may expand the interests and understanding of participants. The song requests that we gathered during the first workshops served as tools for us to attempt to integrate styles of music that the women were familiar to, with varying degrees of success. There were times when only certain individuals identified with a particular song, but after explaining *why* they connected to the song the group became engaged in the discussion of this type of music. Thus, it is possible to cultivate a connection with certain songs that were not previously present, and in this way maintain engagement of participants, even when the musical material was not relevant at first.

In the context of a songwriting workshop, using only the facilitator's favorite music as example songs can alienate members of the group. Pop and rock may be the favorites of many group members, but may *not* interest just as many. Familiarity with all prevalent genres within the United States—pop, rock, hip-hop, dance, alternative, hard core, and electronic—as well as music from other heritages, such as samba, Afro-Caribbean, dancehall, and Native American, is critical to starting at a place where musical relevancy can be cultivated (Baker 2005:225). This is especially true because statistically there are a disproportionate amount of individuals from minority groups and from poor areas in prison than white or affluent individuals (Sabol & Couture 2008). Thus, it is likely that national trends of music will be different than the trends of music in prison. Additionally, since some individuals may be serving extended sentences, group members may know and like older music better than

contemporary music. If participants do not feel that the music has connection to their own lives, that it references their past experiences and feelings, they are much less likely to be excited by the prospect of creating music in that particular environment (Baker 2005:54).

As previously discussed, communicating a flexible conception of songwriting will allow participants to form the combination of song elements that is most conducive to their particular needs, interests, and abilities. In my workshop, I did attempt to communicate this. However, I did not provide many examples of non-lyrically based music. Max Roach's "A Drum Also Waltzes" was one of the few songs played that exemplified a novel song form, yet I waited until quite late in the workshop to play it.

To facilitate greater ability to produce hip-hop and electronic songs within the workshop setting, it may be helpful to bring in recordings of drum tracks and other sound effects (Baker 2005:127). Software such as Garageband provides loops of many different styles of drums and other musical instruments and effects. It is likely that the prison will be able to provide the workshop with a CD player, in which case the tracks need only to be burned to a disk and brought to the workshop to be sung or rapped over.

During the course of our workshop I realized that my musical choices and preferences are applicable and relevant to me, but may not be applicable to the lives of many others. My liberal-arts, ethnomusicology- and world music-focused music education has cultivated certain musical standards with which I evaluate music, such as having an element of surprise or uniqueness, obtuse or metaphorical language, and

strange or unique instrumentation and texture. These criteria are particular to my internal context and personal combination of cultures. Therefore, my preferences often do not match up with those of many others, including the women at York, who have grown up surrounded by different culturally mediated aesthetic values. My musical choices had little iconic or indexical connection to most of the York women's lives. Therefore, the music I chose was often less effective at engaging them than the music they personally requested. I felt continuously under-informed about musical styles outside of my personal interests during the course of my workshop. It would have assisted my own comfort levels to feel well-acquainted with a larger variety of musical styles before entering the workshop space. It also would have been helpful to pursue the preferences of the women and discussions of their musical preferences *in relation to their histories* in order to help validate their internal contexts and the cultures in which they have lived. Cognizance of the reasons behind participants' preferences also shows awareness of their histories.

I learned during my first workshop at York that the women had extensive knowledge and self-awareness of the strong role music played in their lives. By the sheer action of signing up for the workshop, they showed their interest in music. I should have assumed more prior interest and knowledge from them than I did. It is important pedagogically to be able to meet workshop participants at the point where they stand upon entering. Providing a more ambitious plan for the first session that would account for a variety of levels of musical knowledge, enthusiasm, and interest, rather than aiming for the lowest common denominator would have helped facilitate a

space that continually challenged participants, where the difficulty would be high enough to keep everyone engaged but not so high that they would be overwhelmed.

As shown in my own experience at York, in group discussions some participants may not feel comfortable speaking. Respecting these comfort levels will help ensure that a facilitator does not scare or push away participants. My disrespect for one participant's disengagement seemed to play a large role in her leaving our workshop early one day. Building trust should be a facilitator's primary goal in the first weeks of working with a new group (Baker 2005:70). Part of trust building is possessing the cultural awareness and relevancy discussed above. A facilitator should be aware of personal cultural characteristics, preferences, and ways of working for each participant. As formerly incarcerated Lynda Gardner explains, "Everyone is so different in [prison]. Everyone is an individual, and the way you talk to one person may not be the way you can talk to someone else" (Gardner 2010). I knew in my workshop that some of the women were quite chatty and others only liked to speak every once in awhile. Some enjoyed sitting near my co-facilitator and I, while others consistently choose a spot across from us. It was important to respect these preferences, so that everyone could feel comfortable in the room. Respect for individual communication or non-communication is important in any group, but especially in the context of the highly-volatile prison environment, where oftentimes there are restrictions on personal expression or, conversely, demands for specific responses and actions at particular times. There should also be room for anonymity in participation in workshop activities, especially at the beginnings of workshops.

One of the lessons I learned from my first session during the songwriting workshop at York, from the humming exercise and the dynamics of the room in general, was that the women were neither surprised by nor uncomfortable with the fact that we existed as a small group of strangers. As I wrote later, “I think the group was less awkward than it could have been because of the set up of prisons in general. The women seemed to recognize and expect that the workshop would not be a space where everyone knew each other, especially since the rest of the prison is full of meeting new people anyways.” Many of the women had participated in other student-led workshops, while others were in GED classes and were therefore even more accustomed to the dynamics of a small classroom of learners. Although it was important that I attempted to build trust between the participants and myself, it was not my role, to force the creation of a comfortable atmosphere, because the women were used to *uncomfortable* atmospheres. It was more important for the women and us as facilitators to become familiar with one another and allow the space to slowly become more relaxed than to try to forge immediate bonds through group exercises.

In an environment where survival depends on the ability to read those around them, incarcerated individuals can easily see through phony façades or highly-guarded personalities. Therefore, although certain precautions and personal boundaries are important to have as a facilitator, honesty and genuineness can increase the trust participants have in both the facilitator and the subject matter of the workshop. When I honestly shared my personal reasons for liking certain songs in the workshops, these explanations seemed to give me and the women participating a clear

way to connect. In general, I could tell that they noticed when I was opening up and when I kept feelings to myself.

Additionally, as William Cleveland states, “It is crucial for you to be open and nonjudgmental about what you learn from and about your prospective students and staff. If you are not, they will know it and probably freeze you out” (Williams 2003:34). It will only add to the stress of an incarcerated individual if a facilitator also judges her or attempts to direct her thoughts and feelings. That is her daily reality. A workshop should be a space of open honesty and communicative freedom. There were many times when the women of our workshop discussed fights or conflicts that had occurred recently in the prison while we waited for the workshop to begin. Although we were not completely comfortable listening to these conversations, we made a concerted effort not to comment on these discussions in order to ensure that we did not unnecessarily constrict the participants. Especially in songwriting, the participants should feel that they are able to share any subject in their songs.

Songs, because of their continuous presence in most humans’ lives, can have a powerful influence on the emotions of individuals, whether by imparting the songs’ feelings, reminding the listener of the last time they listened to the song, or bringing about an association with a friend or family member, as discussed above. All of these factors make it likely that a group will experience a wide range of reactions to material played or created in a songwriting workshop. This variety of reaction was clearly shown in my experiences at York. However, incarcerated individuals are constantly dealing with intensely stressful situations in prison, and likely even before

they entered prison¹. Thus, although many of the arts, and specifically songwriting, encourage deep introspection and expression of feelings of sadness, despair, and other intense feelings, this introspection may become more detrimental than helpful because of the intense stress of such situations. Robert Gordon explains,

When [an incarcerated] writer mucks with his demons...he runs the risk of awakening despair and having no place to run from it. If an incarcerated writer starts slipping into the abyss, he's in a perilous situation: there are precious few handholds to stop the slide and no soft spots to land on. (Gordon 2000:xx)

A facilitator must pay special attention to the emotional stability of those involved in a music workshop (Baker 2005:117). Discussing subject matter that is too distressing to process within a single session can be dangerous for participants. Especially at the end of a workshop, take care to ensure all involved are feeling secure that what occurred during the session has been emotionally resolved.

It will also facilitate smooth emotional transitions if the facilitator attempts to gauge the emotional starting point of participants during the sessions (Boyce-Tillman 2000:234-35). When participants seem depressed or especially low-key, starting the session with calm music and slowly increasing the tempo, intensity, or happiness of the music can help participants feel validated in their feelings, as well as preventing an individual from being emotionally jarred by a drastically different song. There were times when I choose to play a very intense, fast song at a point in the workshop when not all participants were at a high energy level. This seemed to be a harsh transition for those participants who seemed less energetic. In most of these cases,

¹ According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, in 1999 “about 60% of female state prison inmates reported having experienced physical or sexual abuse prior to their incarceration, about a third had been abused by an intimate, and a quarter by a family member” (Greenfeld & Snell 1999)

discussion of the song led the individuals to re-engage, but I believe it was a risky choice to play such music in these circumstances.

The potential for emotional volatility in music brings to light the importance of cultivating a trusting, open, yet confidential environment within the life-gripping environment of a prison. A final aspect that may help in fostering a musically-fruitful environment where everyone feels comfortable is attempting to create a non-hierarchical environment where the facilitator is not the ultimate authority but rather one who fosters an environment for musical exploration. The facilitator creates the space for a sharing of all participants' knowledge. Putting decisions in the hands of participants as much as possible can help create a shared space for creative construction and expression. As discussed above, this can also empower individuals and help them re-assert control over their lives (Boyce-Tillman 2000:233). When a group member expresses discomfort or concern, a widely-opened ear and careful consideration can go a long way in letting the participant know that her opinion is important.

It can be quite helpful to facilitate workshops with a partner. As shown by my experience of co-facilitating at York, a team of facilitators can observe each other's actions, ensuring the best and most inviting facilitating styles. Co-facilitators also provide different perspectives on the workshop material, making it more likely that a diverse group of participants will relate to their understanding of songwriting. Having a partner who can also attempt to gauge the emotional states and energy levels of participants will increase the likelihood of forming an accurate understanding of the

workshop's daily climates. At the end of sessions, co-facilitators can de-brief, helping one another process the experiences encountered in prison.

The psychologist and sociologist Mihaly Csikszentimihalyi articulated five premises that would assist the facilitation of an optimal environment in which ideas flow freely and one thinks only of the object at hand rather than daily life's troubles, a condition that he labels as *flow*. The premises for achieving flow are as follows: (1) having enough challenge to keep actors engaged, but not so much that they are unable to fully engage, (2) continual potential for increased challenge so as to meet the rising abilities of participants, (3) provision of space for constant feedback, from which one can adjust the level of challenge to meet individual and group needs, (4) activities "clearly bounded by time and place so that participants can more fully concentrate on what they are doing and tune out 'the everyday,'" and (5) "clear, well-established goals that are reachable within the bounded time and place and in relation to the skills-challenge balance" (Turino 2008:4-5) Using these conditions as pedagogical guides for one's workshop can assist in the successful implementation of the other considerations discussed in this chapter.

Constant feedback from participants provides the facilitator with the tools to adjust the challenge levels of activities to keep all participants engaged and active. This will also provide an avenue for participants to express concerns about any of the cultural relevancy and respect issues mentioned above. Questionnaires for the participants at the beginning and again at a later point in the workshop may be an efficient and concrete way to ascertain feedback in a form that can be retained and referenced later by the facilitator. (See examples in Appendix B). Although my co-

facilitator and I attempted to carefully observe reactions to each activity we engaged in, it was often difficult to feel secure in our choices. I would have greatly appreciated direct feedback on the workshop in the form of questionnaires.

To incorporate the fourth premise, a clear start and end to each session can help create a boundary around the session's time. It may be helpful to begin and end with a ritual, such as listening to the same starting song at the beginning and to listen to a participant-chosen song at the end of each session. Ideally, the session will occur in the same room each week, and thus will be physically bound. If it does rotate rooms, it may be helpful to place the seating in the same set up each session so as to create a physical coherence across each session. At York, we usually started the sessions with a medium tempo song and discussed it before beginning any other activities. We almost always concluded by playing a song that the women had requested. This seemed to create a boundary around the time of the workshop, although ending with a familiar song usually elicited requests for more songs, making it difficult for us to feel good about ending the session. We were lucky to have the same room each time, which we almost always set up in the same way, with chairs in a circle, sometimes around a group of tables so we could write more easily. Thus, the women and we knew what to expect in the physical room each week.

It is greatly helpful to set clear goals at the beginning of a workshop in order that everyone involved has an idea of what the workshop aims to accomplish. A starting goal may be for each member to have written a song by the last session of the workshop, or through group songwriting to generate a song by week five. It would be helpful to decide on these goals as a group. Group goal-setting will help ensure goals

are within the reasonable limits of the participants, help participants know that their voices matter, and foster engagement with the workshop from the first session on. As stated above, I believe my workshop would have greatly benefited from having clear goals that we agreed upon at the beginning of the workshop. Reflecting on these goals throughout the course of the workshop would have assisted the progression of songwriting as well as helped me tailor my plans for the workshop to the needs of the women participating in relation to reaching these goals.

I believe that the experience of our final songwriting workshop, in which we performed the song that the three women had written that session, showed a successful achievement of *flow*. We had set clear opening and closing actions of the workshop, and specifically that day set clear goals—to write a song. By that time in the workshop, the sessions had acquired an open and trusting enough environment so that the women could give us feedback at anytime and know that we were open to their opinions and disagreements with our methods. Thus, there was room for feedback and the goal of writing a song set a high level of challenge. However, the challenge level of the experience could be adjusted to the comfort levels of the participants since I did not set specific limits on what the song should look or sound like. The performance showed a high level of engagement in the activity at hand, so much so that I believe each of us achieved *flow* in the moment of our performance of the song.

As shown above, it will likely be difficult gaining entry into prison for a facilitator. It is also probable that incarcerated participants will encounter obstructions to their involvement in a songwriting workshop. However, by educating oneself about

the prison environment and carefully observing and reacting to the culturally-mediated customs and needs of participants, workshops are on the path to success. By showing relevancy to participants through the material that is shared within a workshop and by encouraging discussion and group goal setting, a new songwriting workshop facilitator will be well equipped for the challenges and particularities of working in prison. Honest interaction and careful observation of the needs and emotional states of participants will allow a facilitator to foster an inclusive environment conducive to songwriting through culturally sensitive pedagogical techniques. A pair of facilitators can assist one another in polishing facilitation techniques, relating to participants, and de-briefing from their prison experiences. Following the recommendations for cultivating flow will help focus the environment of the workshop. In summary, a facilitator's pedagogy must be flexible, providing consistent adjustments to the needs of participants. The myriad of challenges that arise while facilitating in prison can be overcome through integration of the best-practice methods and pedagogical techniques explained above.

Conclusion

I have shown that songwriting combines the many benefits of music, writing, and performance. Its musical components provide iconic and indexical symbols that connect a listener with feelings and events in their lives, as well as to other people and groups. The aesthetic qualities of music help individuals identify the preferences of others and find relevance in music, as well as provide aesthetically pleasing sounds that allow the listener to experience a preferred situation. Music provides a creative space in which individuals can further explore combinations of sounds according to their feelings, or simply out of curiosity. This creative license helps individuals feel control over their lives, and re-connect with their bodies. Music helps create community through co-identification with aesthetic choices, musically interacting with others, and identification with musicians from the past and listeners who also have experienced music. The creativity of music leads those involved with music to connect with others who are also creatively engaged in music. The writing components of songwriting provide participants with space to experience the legitimizing power of the written word. Writing helps individuals to verify and concretize their experiences as real. It also allows for creative space in which to explore, recreate, and re-imagine the world in which individuals live. Performance allows for a direct communication of emotion and experience to those nearby. The uncertainty of the act of performance acts as a suitable way in which to express confusion and unknowing that are often parts of traumatic experiences. Performance can also provide a space in which it is safe to embody parts of oneself that are not normally acceptable, and it can lead to bodily emancipation. Finally, performance can

provide cultural commentary for a group. The embodiment of all aspects of music, writing, and performance within songwriting allows songwriting to be a uniquely effective tool to allow individuals to express themselves while at the same time creating an environment for group cohesion and understanding. Songwriting also provides participants with a new social role to experience, and with skills that are often seen as cultural capital that will bring participants self-confidence and social regard. Songwriting offers these benefits packaged in a highly flexible form that can be constructed of anything a songwriter wishes.

I came into my own workshop without the prior knowledge needed to make the facilitation the most attentive and effective it could be. However, the benefits of songwriting became apparent throughout the course of our workshop and proved that songwriting can be an uplifting experience for those who choose to participate in it.

My experience at York showed examples of individuals co-identifying with musical aesthetics, and thereby validating one-another's experiences. I witnessed sharing of different musical opinions and, through discussion of these differences, a broadening of understanding about musical characteristics and reasonings.

Participants showed that they felt consoled by certain songs that reflected their lives, and that particular songs connected them to past experiences and feelings.

The final group songwriting session at York showed that Csikszentimihalyi's concept of flow seems to be achievable. In the moment we performed the women's song, we all, to the best of my knowledge, were focused on that song and making sure we were all contributing to the performance. In any situation, however, it is difficult to distinguish the thoughts and mind-states of participants. Some may be absorbed in

the situation at hand, achieving flow, while for others a certain sound in the music may have provided a connection through Turino's indexical and iconic signs to past experiences or acquaintances. In the later case, these individuals' minds are thinking outside of the present situation, almost in complete contradiction to flow. However, in either the case of achieving the concentration and singular focus that is flow, or in being reminded of situations or feelings outside of the present that occur through indexical and iconic connections, songwriting has served to liberate participants' minds from their present positioning in the confines of prison.

Group songwriting particularly fosters community cohesion and understanding. In group songwriting all those involved are able to contribute in some way to the making and performance of a song and in the process can discuss and begin to understand the experiences and preferences of others involved, shown by the final songwriting and performance in my workshop at York. Incarcerated individuals particularly benefit from this formation of community because prison can be a competitive and alienating environment. Even without *group* songwriting, the songwriting workshop space, if facilitated well, can develop into a place of community based on the comfort levels of individuals and ability of each member to express him- or herself. The creation of a space in which a group of individuals feels like a community can provide needed support from fellow incarcerated individuals, lifting up participants and allowing them to share their experiences and feel trusting and trusted.

Prison has a tendency to quash individuality, viewing each incarcerated individual as a mere number in a sea of criminals. At the same time, it does not often

allow for spontaneous human interaction and interpersonal connection since prison life is based on strict codes of conduct, association with other incarcerated individuals is highly restricted, and the population is often in flux, with some individuals being released and some being relegated to individual segregation. Songwriting offers a means to personal expression and re-connection to or establishment of one's own perspective and life history. At the same time, songwriting provides opportunities to make interpersonal connections and build communities. The bonds forged through songwriting can be founded on shared aesthetic values, co-creation of a musical entity, or discussions resulting from differing opinions of songs. In any of these cases, the connections are based on experiences outside normal prison life. Thus, the connections made through songwriting re-focus group interaction into a less controlled environment, contrasting the stoic atmosphere of daily prison life. The indeterminacy of songwriting, especially in its performance aspect, also helps contradict the crushing minute-to-minute schedule of life in prison. Songwriting, then, acts as a dual mechanism for individualism and communalism. These two experiences can occur simultaneously, since the individual expression does not negate the possibility to connect with others based on shared experiences or simultaneous expression of each individual's musical contribution.

Individuals who wish to facilitate a songwriting workshop in prison must have the practical and pedagogical tools to successfully cultivate an open, inviting atmosphere that is embrative of the wide range of participants one will encounter in prison. Through forming pedagogies of flexibility and cultural respect, facilitators will be able to confront the constraints of the prison environment.

Future work with songwriting in prison should aim to provide greater opportunity for culturally appropriate pedagogical techniques and song options. It should aim to quantifiably document the benefits of songwriting so that others who aim to provide songwriting workshops in prison can persuade wardens and directors of the benefits that songwriting confers on all involved. Songwriting will continue to open creative potential, self-expression, and exploration for individuals who experience it. Groups will continue to benefit from the ability to comment on the cultural context of their situation, explore diverse opinions, and validate shared aesthetic values through songwriting.

Appendix A

Practical Songwriting Exercises

Abstract Sound Song-Creation

(If participants express interest in making a non-lyrically-based song and have difficulty coming up with ideas)

Bring in a variety of sound effects in a recording

Have participants choose one sound effect

Then, have participants either

(a) replicate that sound over and over again with various implements in the room or their own body and voice

(b) sing/hum/tap over this sound until they find a pattern they enjoy

Verse-Chorus-Verse Lyric Creation

(for group songwriting)

Have one person write one verse

Another write a different verse

and a third participant write a chorus to connect the two.

Limerick-based Lyric Creation

(to be used when it seems quite difficult for participants to come up with lyrics)

Follow the syllable and rhyming schema of a limerick as laid out below.

If using group songwriting:

1. It may be helpful to come up with a subject ahead of time.

2. Only show the line most recently written (immediately preceding the blank line) to whoever writes the next line. (Writer of line 4 would only see line 3)

Line 1: 3 accented syllables, Rhyme A

Line 2: 3 accented syllables, Rhyme A

Line 3: 2 accented syllables, Rhyme B

Line 4: 2 accented syllables, Rhyme B

Line 5: 3 accented syllables, Rhyme A

Example Limerick (accented syllables in **bold**):

There **once** was a **fish** named **Mark**

Who **liked** to **sing** like a **lark**

He **jumped** on a **boat**

but **it** did not **float**

And **now** he can **no** longer **hark**

Appendix B
Questionnaires

Musical Interests Questionnaire
(For use at beginning of songwriting workshop)

How often do you listen to music/have you listened to music in the past?

Do you have experience creating or performing music? If so, what?

What are some of your favorite types of music?

Please name a few musical artists you enjoy listening to:

How have you used music in your life? Has it helped you in any way?

If you could write a song in any style of music, which style would you prefer?

Songwriting Questionnaire
(To be used for feedback at end or late point in workshop)

Had you written a song before participating in this workshop?

Did you enjoy writing songs? Why or why not?

Have you written songs outside of the workshop since it began?

Which did you find easier (or where they equally easy/hard?): Writing words, writing music, or performing?

Were there things that happened in the workshop that especially helped you in writing your song(s)?

Were there bands, singers, or artists that inspired your song(s)?

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Recommended Reading

Assata: An Autobiography

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Couldn't Keep It To Myself: Testimonies from Our Imprisoned Sisters

Wally Lamb, ed. 2003. New York: HarperCollins Publishers Inc.

I'll Fly Away: Further Testimonies from the Women of York Prison

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