

FORGING SELFHOOD: MASCULINITY, IDENTITY, AND WORK
IN ARIZONA'S INMATE WILDFIRE PROGRAM

by

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DEDICATION

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“We will not know our own injustice if we cannot imagine justice. We will not be free if we do not imagine freedom. We cannot demand that anyone try to attain justice and freedom who has not had a chance to imagine them as attainable.”

— Ursula K. Le Guin

“Compassion is a relationship between equals. Only when we know our own darkness well can we be present with the darkness of others. Compassion becomes real when we recognize our shared humanity.”

— Pema Chödrön

“Sometimes you wake up. Sometimes the fall kills you. And sometimes, when you fall, you fly.”

— Neil Gaiman

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FREQUENTLY USED TERMS

Both wildland firefighting and the prison system are spaces replete with jargon and acronyms. Below is a list of commonly used terms throughout the dissertation that, if reviewed at the outset of the manuscript, should help readers familiarize themselves with these social milieus.

ADC: Arizona Department of Corrections.

ADFFM: Arizona Department of Forestry and Fire Management.

Air show: The colloquial term for all of the overhead support on any given wildfire. Most commonly, this consists of 1) a small airplane with a pilot who oversees fire conditions from above, 2) helicopters dropping fire retardant on the fire, and 3) helicopters dropping water on the fire. The number of airplanes and helicopters on a fire depends on the fire's operational size.

Blue helmet: Also referred to as a **Squaddie** or **Squad leader**. A leadership position on the prison wildland firefighting crews. Blue helmet refers to the color of the safety helmet that squad leaders wear to differentiate their role. Each prison fire crew is comprised of 24 people. The Crew Boss, employed by ADFFM, acts as the liaison between the state and the prison. There are 3 correctional officers on each crew, one ranked sergeant and the other two officers. Then there are 20 prisoners. These 20 individuals are split into two groups, called squads. A Blue Helmet is designated leader of their squad of 10.

Buggy(ies): The mode of transportation for wildland firefighters. Buggies are large, boxy vehicles that can house up to 12 firefighters, with 10 sitting in the back compartment and two sitting in the cab compartment.

Chinook: A model of Boeing helicopter, officially titled the 'Boeing CH-47 Chinook.' The Chinook is the largest type of helicopter available in wildland firefighting, holding 2,000 gallons of water at a time. In Arizona, there is one designated Chinook helicopter always available to drop water on wildfires, with more available in other states if fire operations are large.

CO(s): Correctional Officer. Used interchangeably with Guard.

Dope: In Arizona prisons, heroin. However, dope can be used as a general term for drugs that are present on the yard. For instance, 'moving dope' is used by COs and prisoners alike to describe the selling of any sort of drug.

DUI: Driving Under the Influence. Legal name for the criminal charge associated with driving while intoxicated. Categories of DUI in Arizona are 'standard DUI,' 'extreme DUI,' and 'aggravated DUI.' Which category a person receives, and their subsequent punishment (ranging from fines to decades in prison) is dependent on factors like blood alcohol content and number of previous offenses. There is also the charge 'DUI manslaughter,' which is the charge a person receives if they kill another person while driving under the influence of alcohol or drugs.

Firewise/firewising: A type of forestry or wildland firefighting work that results in a certain area, often surrounding homes or communities, being better protected against the damages of a wildfire. A crew will ‘firewise’ a property, which entails cutting down small or dead trees, scrub brush, and grasses within sixty meters of a structure. Communities in rural areas can receive state and federal grants to be firewised, and then will contract with prison fire crews to conduct the work. Firewising projects make up a large percentage of prison crews’ workdays.

Hand crews: Also called Type-2 Crews, or FF2s. A designation of wildland firefighting crews that rank below Hot Shots in terms of both technical skill and pay. The majority of wildland firefighters employed by the U.S. Forest Service are hand crews, and all of Arizona’s prison wildfire crews are hand crews.

Heads: The prison terminology for leaders of a particular race on the prison yard (See Interlude 1 for further clarification on race and racial categories in ADC). Short for ‘figureheads,’ these individuals are responsible for monitoring the sale of drugs and other contraband on the yard, and control the movements and behaviors of their race.

Hot Shots: Also called Type-1 Crews, or FF1s. A designation of wildland firefighting crews that operate at the federal level, travelling across the country to fight wildfires. They are paid more than Hand Crews, based on their extra training and experience.

IRPG: Incident Response Pocket Guide. A small guidebook with critical information on wildfire safety, operations, and logistics that every wildland firefighter keeps on them at all times.

IWP: The Inmate Wildfire Program, my pseudonym for Arizona’s prison firefighting program.

Levels (1-5): The security classification for units on a prison complex. Each unit, or ‘yard,’ is designated with a particular security level, indicating the amount of security present on that unit. Level 1 is a minimum-security yard, while Level 5 is a ‘supermax’ security yard. Some individuals, depending on the type of crime they were sentenced with, will begin their sentence on a higher-level yard, and then over time move down to lower-level yards. All prison fire crewmembers are housed on Level 1 yards.

Mop up: An official wildland firefighting term to describe the process of extinguishing burning material after the fire has been extinguished. Fire crews will walk along or near the edge of the control line (where the fire was stopped), felling trees, moving logs/detritus, or putting out smoldering stumps/plants, to lower the possibility of re-ignition. This work is tedious, but makes up the majority of wildfire work once a fire is extinguished.

On the line: The colloquial term for fighting an active fire. It references a **fire line**, which is a linear barrier scraped/dug to bare soil, which wildland firefighters construct around the perimeter of a fire.

Oranges: The colloquial term for the mandated orange clothes worn by all incarcerated people in the Arizona Department of Corrections.

PPE: Personal Protective Equipment. This is the required clothing and accessories for all wildland firefighters to wear on the fire line. It includes, but is not limited to, 8-inch high-laced leather boots with lug soles, fire shelter, hard hat with chin strap, goggles, ear plugs, aramid shirts and trousers, leather gloves and individual first aid kits.

Politics: Also referred to as **prison politics**. A catchall term in Arizona prisons for racially-motivated actions and behaviors. If someone is ‘involved’ in politics, this can mean that a person is officially part of the hierarchical structure of his or her racial group. Most prisoners abide by prison politics (by following the socially mandated racial segregation on a prison yard, for example), while some are ‘involved’ formally. Politics are more formalized and more strictly followed on higher level yards. The consequences for a person disavowing politics entirely can result in their being hurt or threatened.

Sallyport: Also referred to as **the gates**. A physical area of a given prison unit where all individuals enter and exit. Depending on the security level of the unit, the sallyport can be heavily surveilled, including metal detectors, cameras, and more than one locked gate. All sallyports are staffed by a Guard. Work crews and other prisoners exiting their unit (e.g. to go to the infirmary or visitation center) pass through the sallyport and are cataloged by the guard on duty to keep track of their movements.

The yard: Another term for a prison **unit**, which is what a given prison complex is comprised of. Except for the few very small prison complexes across the state, which have only one yard, most prisons have multiple yards/units. These yards are of varying security levels, and they house prisoners with that security clearance. A yard is where a prisoner sleeps, eats, and works, unless they have an off-yard or off-complex work assignment. Prisoners are often transferred between yards, either from one level to another (from high to low if they are closer to release or have had no infractions, or from low to high if they have committed several infractions) or from a same-level yard to another (for various reasons, ranging from pure bureaucratic considerations to safety concerns).

ABSTRACT

The United States prison system is a true ‘black box’ of modern society; most penal philosophies, policies, and daily realities are obscured from the outside world. Because of this obscurity, the prison system is often presented as a reified institution that unilaterally enacts punitive and neoliberal mechanisms of control. My dissertation utilizes tools of in-depth ethnography to provide nuance to this potentially monolithic view. Lynch (2010) and Rubin (2015) argue that any state’s prison system, and indeed any one complex or yard, must be put in its social and ideological context. I draw on these premises to argue that prisons should be considered living, breathing spaces where individuals are capable of manifesting their own notions of selfhood each day. I explain how incarcerated people in a particular prison program find cracks in the seemingly solid, dehumanizing foundation of modern imprisonment, taking hold of spaces where access to dignity and hope remain.

I offer a case study of Arizona’s Inmate Wildfire Program (IWP), in which incarcerated people are contracted by the state to fight wildfires. I became a certified wildland firefighter and spent 15 months fighting over 30 fires alongside three prison fire crews. This labor program presents an experiential paradox for its participants. It is at once exploitative—with little pay for risky work, and little material support upon release from prison—while simultaneously transformative for those who fight fires. By ‘transformative,’ I mean that certain aspects of the job of wildfire fighting provide individuals with more complex and powerful notions of selfhood than would otherwise be obtainable on the prison yard.

There are three major aspects of incarcerated peoples’ identities that are positively impacted by the IWP. They are: 1) a physical and symbolic movement away from the social categorization that occurs in the carceral system; 2) a construction of alternative masculine

identities based on tenets of vulnerability, intimacy, and racial inclusion; and 3) an expression of complex working identities that offers a sense of self that is antithetical to the obedient and routinized modes of being on the yard. Even as this labor program operates within the strictures of an inherently punitive regime, it provides space for participants to reject certain aspects of modern incarceration's deleterious effects. Understanding the processes by which this program persists, and is experienced at a daily level for its participants, offers a more thorough view of the social complexities of modern incarceration. As such, this dissertation offers a dynamic case study that furthers debates in a broad array of literatures, including the anthropology of masculinity, the anthropology of work, and the anthropology of the prison.

Prologue: A story of exploding cows, or, a call for deviant case studies

*Field reflections*¹. Mid July 2016. It had been five straight days of fighting wildfires. Monsoon season had come to southeastern Arizona, and every day, thunderclouds would build up over the mountain ranges and threaten rain. Then like clockwork, lightening would strike in the early afternoon, and a tree or shrub or yucca would burst into flames. The nagging drought in the desert meant there was little moisture build-up in the plants; one tree on fire led to two, then ten, and then a mountainside. And so, the wildland fire crew would chase the storms. They were sent to put out these lightening fires because there was never any assurance that a monsoon rain would fully quash them. Besides—the remote areas where lightning struck were becoming ever-less remote as homes and livelihoods were taking over the exurban areas of the western United States.

By day five the wildland fire crew was road-worn. They smelled bad. They were running out of their back-up supplies of chew and rolling tobacco, which is foreboding to say the least. But that didn't mean they weren't ready for another fire. They were always ready. They had been sleeping on creaky cots or desert earth for the past four nights, but they were relatively well rested because on this particular five-day string of fires, two of the burns were easy, barely even a job. On one, the crew didn't even hike out to fight the fire; they monitored its movement while sitting at the bottom of the ridge the fire burned on, drinking coffee and catching scorpions for the new guys to eat as part of this particular crew's initiation ritual.

¹ Throughout the dissertation there will be excerpts from my field notebooks. Some of these excerpts are included in the dissertation with no major alterations except with small edits for grammar and clarity. These are called *fieldnotes* throughout. Other excerpts have been more heavily edited to include small portions of analysis or explanation of terms. These are called *field reflections* throughout.

The first fire in that five-day string was a different story. The crew got caught on an exposed mountainside in a sudden and head-splitting thunderstorm, with lightning bolts so close that their hair stood on end. After working 10 hours on the fire itself they had to drive to safety on a one-track road on the spine of a crumbling mountain ledge with zero visibility and no radio communication. As they tried to get to safety the dirt track zigged instead of zagged, and the person driving the truck nearly made the wrong turn of the wheel. If he hadn't corrected the truck's position as quickly as he did, it—along with the entire crew piled up in its bed—would have plummeted off the mountain ledge to a rocky outcrop below. That day was a doozy.

But the crew had had a day to recoup. Moods were light, despite the imminent tobacco shortage. The life-threatening lightning storm two days ago was already becoming lore, with anecdotes solidified, memories made. They were sitting at one of the Forest Service ranger stations waiting to be sent back to the prison, when another call came in. Another fire had been spotted, which meant another day away from the prison yard. After a quick scramble to get supplies and tools and personnel ready to go, they loaded up the buggies and were off.

This particular wildland firefighting crew was comprised of 20 prisoners, three correctional officers, and one State Forestry official who acts as crew boss and liaison between the prison and the state fire agency. Arizona utilizes 11 prison wildfire crews year-round for fire-related labor. Besides those on helicopters and engines, 100% of Arizona's hand-crew firefighters are prisoners. These crews fight alongside federal crews from the Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, and Bureau of Indian Affairs. They conduct the same work as hotshot crews while making \$1.50 per hour. They are, as one prisoner succinctly stated, "cheap bodies." Indeed, the state utilizes these bodies in ways that conform to the exploitative labor practices seen in prison labor programs across the country. They are valued only in so far as they

put their lives on the line. They do not get ‘good time’ pay for fighting fires, meaning that their sentences are not shortened because of this work, nor do they get any job assurances upon release.

This program, along with any prison labor program, can be used as an example of exploitation, the most prevalent way of describing incarcerated work in the scholarly literature. The notion that prison labor is inherently exploitative is the premise of my dissertation. And yet there is something else about this prison labor program, that henceforth I will call the Inmate Wildfire Program or IWP—something atypical, paradoxical, even. There are more complex and profound aspects of the program that do not quite fit the models of exploitation and deprivation so commonly invoked to describe prison labor and modern U.S. prison experiences more broadly. Attempting to describe this paradox will unfold in the pages that follow.

But for now, back to the fire. The crew drove an hour and a half northeast, passing small towns, large ranches, and patches of blackened desert scrubland that were evidence of wildfires past. As they neared the fire they saw a plume of black smoke rising from a mountain that was obscured from view—this meant a decent hike lay ahead to try and find its source. They turned right off of a small, rural highway and parked in a hilly area covered by mesquite trees. Their two buggies—big fire trucks driven by the correctional officers and capable of carrying 10 men and their equipment—had to stop at that point because there was a large muddy riverbed that would inevitably flood if a monsoon were to come.

The crew hopped out to greet the local fire department engine that had already arrived. This engine crew, comprised of three men from the rural town nearby, had arrived before the prison crew but had not hiked out to the fire itself. It was common for these other fire crews to wait for prison crews to arrive on the scene and have them be the ones to make the long, hard

hike. This particular prison crew always seemed to be the first one out on the fire line conducting the initial attack—they are known for their physical fitness and willingness to go where others wouldn't dare. Their reputation was a double-edged sword; on the one hand, crewmembers sometimes felt abused by local and federal crews and resented being sent in to do the dirtiest work while the others held back until it was easier, safer. But on the other hand, to the victor belongs the spoils. The first crew to hike to the fire gets the hardest work, but they also get the renown, the story, the thrill.

And so, when Incident Command arrived shortly after the prison crew, they were instructed to gear up and hike to whatever lay beyond. At this point in the fire season, mid-July, the crew was able to put their gear on and get in hiking formation—a long straight line with



Figure 0.1. The crew in formation.

chainsaws up front—within minutes. They marched through the muddy riverbed, following its curves until they hopped up the river ledge and turned right towards the plume of smoke. In the distance, but growing nearer, they could hear cattle mooing. They were hiking through a pasture being used by a local rancher. They wedged themselves between an outcrop of large boulders. They ducked under mesquite tree branches. Wildland firefighters do not hike on trails. They marched swiftly on, until a mile or so in, when they reached something that blocked their path.

A mama cow and her calf had been grazing on a yucca plant, improbably happy to chew through the spiky exterior to reach the nutrients inside. Then the lightning storm began. Above

the two cows was a large power line, extending through the hilly landscape to supply electricity to the increasing number of homes dotting the rural countryside. In a rare bovine case of wrong-place-at-the-wrong-time, a lightning bolt struck the power pole nearest the cows, which caused one of the power lines to shudder free from its holdings, whip through the air, and land directly on the unassuming duo grazing below. The results were gruesome. The calf was beheaded, and the head was nowhere in sight. One of its brown and white legs was blown free from its body and was lodged in a nearby mesquite tree. The older cow was struck in the middle, splayed open wide. There was little blood; the power line had cauterized the bodies. It was as if the cows had been dismembered and strung about by a twisted exterior decorator.

The first crewmember to see it screamed. When a fire crew comes across something that stops the line from moving, the first in line shouts ‘holding!’ and each subsequent crewmember repeats it, echoing back to the very last person in line. This time, instead of a calm and steady ripple from front to back, it was “HOLDINGWHATTHEFUCK?!?!” The crew broke formation and huddled together, almost in a defensive stance, gazing at the scene. Some of them were clearly disturbed, especially those who had seen violence in some traumatic form, like the ones in prison for DUI manslaughter. Others started laughing, the sort of laugh that emanates from the absurdity of the situation rather than the actual humor of it. It was 24 men, 20 of whom are currently in prison, all of whom thought they were going back to the yard just a few hours before, all standing together looking at the fire’s point of origin: two cow corpses still smoking, and beyond them, a blackened landscape that extended up a steep slope, where a wildfire was moving swiftly under a dark stormy sky.

“Jesus Christ,” one muttered.

“Are you OK?,” asked one crewmember to another who had turned pale and whose eyes turned distant, who had seen a guy’s throat get slit waiting in line for chow on his first day in prison 15 years before.

“I guess we know the point of origin of the fire. That doesn’t happen often,” said another, somewhat in awe from a firefighting standpoint.

“We gotta go guys. Form up. LETS GO,” said a correctional officer who had his eye on the fire, which was moving towards the direction of the ranch house a mile or so away. He had also glanced at the guy whose face had turned pale.

They refocused. They hopped over the calf’s body, avoiding the downed power line. Some of them were still laughing but kept it quiet. Regardless of the utter strangeness of what they had seen, they still had to fight a fire. It was dangerous and there were hours of work ahead of them. And so they did.

They were able to put out the flames, opting to hike back down to the buggies via the other side of the mountain to avoid the carnage. Incident Command asked the crew to stay on the scene and monitor some of the yuccas and tree stumps that still carried heat, even after the monsoon did eventually come. Rain doesn’t stop fire entirely. As they waited at the buggies, the story built up steam. “Did you SEE that though????” they asked one another, so that the others could answer yes, yes, and oh my god, the leg in the TREE. It was already becoming legend. One day, at the end of a five-day run already filled with legends, with the prison fire crew.

I begin my dissertation with this story for a specific reason. It seemed like an exceptional moment. Indeed, veteran crewmembers made it clear that wildland firefighters do not see cows explode every day. But the story’s exceptionality is, in fact, an apt allegory for the sheer

exceptionality of the job of wildland firefighting in prison. No two fires are alike. One day it may be exploding cows, the next it may be finding indigenous artifacts, another watching a rival crew all puke from dehydration, the next saving a roadrunner and her brood, all of whom were singed by flames. The ever-shifting, thinly controlled chaos of fighting fires is diametrically opposed to the tightly controlled and monitored reality of modern U.S. prisons. The juxtaposition is a central reason why this program needs to be studied anthropologically, why it needs to be placed in dialogue with other studies on prison labor and prison experience. In short, the Inmate Wildfire Program, in its exceptionality, adds complexity and contradiction to dominant narratives of prison scholarship. As such, one must ask *how* it is different, and why this difference matters.

Qualitative research projects explore various social phenomena, and after research is collected and data analyzed, they can contribute to an understanding of said phenomena in different ways. Using their particular case study, qualitative researchers may affirm the existence of a phenomenon in a particular place and time, or may offer insight into how a phenomenon works. Or, they may describe an example of how the phenomenon *doesn't* work, or isn't complete, or is distinct enough from other examples of the same phenomenon that it needs to be analyzed. I place my dissertation firmly in this third camp.

By focusing on the IWP, I am employing what is considered a 'deviant' or 'unique' case study methodology. I have chosen to research a prison labor program that "doesn't quite fit," or that offers an unexplored angle to existing studies of the broader phenomenon (Small 2009). This project is a 'deviant' (the more apt of the two terms, given the topic) case study of the modern American prison system in two different ways. First, I became a wildland firefighter and spent 15 months conducting ethnographic research with three prison fire crews. As a doctoral candidate in anthropology, participant observation is *de rigueur* methodology, yet what makes it

different is my exceptional access to Arizona's Department of Corrections, as well as to currently incarcerated people. The data I have collected is unique, because it comes from conducting ethnographic research not just on prison yards but after long workdays together, over weeks and months, in the wide-open landscapes of Arizona.

Second, my project is a deviant because it is not a straightforward critique of prison labor. I intentionally do not end my research with a claim of prison-labor-as-exploitation, but I begin with it. By choosing to focus on the ways that prisoners find meaning in the work of wildland firefighting—the friendships formed, the immersion into nature, the symbolic repositioning away from 'criminal'—I am fulfilling the goal of the deviant case study by moving the dialogue on prison labor forward in interesting ways. What potentials are we identifying when we analytically engage with prisoners' statements on the program being fulfilling in ways not captured by the little money they earn? Anthropologists are well positioned to complicate standard narratives, and to offer qualitative data that enriches macro-level research by giving weight to the experiences of those we work with (Small 2009). This is especially important in prison research, as much of the current literature offers us a single story of structural deprivation (Ferrell et al. 2004), when in fact scholars are now arguing for an analysis of the complex emotional geographies that exist behind bars (Crewe et al. 2014). What changes can we enact, as scholars, activists, and policy makers, if we focus not just on what is taken away from prisoners, but on the incredible ability of incarcerated people to find, and take hold of, spaces for hope?

Chapter 1: Introduction

Stevie's story

Stevie² served several years in an Arizona prison for killing his best friend in a drunk driving accident. Before the accident he was a self-described lush, a guy with few worries, a decent income, and a fun-loving wild streak. He drove under the influence, but so did everyone he knew. Most of the time Stevie and his friends spent their days drunkenly driving ATVs in the sand dunes outside of town, and maybe woke up with a broken collarbone and a story to tell. But one night he was driving his car, really fast, and something happened, and when he woke up in the hospital with a broken back he learned that his childhood friend who was in the passenger seat beside him was dead.

In the aftermath, his self-loathing was so virulent that he begged to go to prison, and got angry at his sentence for being too short—6 years—because he felt he deserved to rot for what he'd done. Once inside he was put on a high security-level yard. His cell-mates were lifers who had committed crimes much more severe than his own. He spent the first few years without any real sleep because when he closed his eyes a recurring loop of nightmares played on the back of his eyelids. He refused to engage in prison's violent racial politics, and on a level-4 yard, that meant he was beaten half to death and then socially ostracized. Alone, he saw himself as better than the prisoners who spent their sentences digging themselves deeper into the institution through drugs and gang activity, judging them for slowly morphing into the sub-humans that the guards and the public considered prisoners to be. But he also hated himself for what he had done. As such, he was stuck with an identity formed only out of negative space, some black hole of seeing himself and others as just different kinds of worthless.

² Throughout this dissertation all individual names, crew names, prison complex names, and fire names have been anonymized. Prison sentence lengths are also rounded up or down, to further protect anonymity.

He treaded water on those higher yards for a year or so, and in that short time felt a hollowing of some fundamental part of himself. After proving low enough risk for the powers that be, he got transferred to a lower level yard, bunking in a large open dormitory still divided up by invisible racial lines that he ruefully followed. This new space of incarceration was different than sitting in a cell for 20 hours a day, but not really any better. He still could barely sleep, because these dorms had no privacy and the snores and coughs and other bodily emissions of 90 men in one room left much to be desired in terms of drifting off to sleep. He still felt empty and misplaced.

He tried out for the fire crew because he was drawn to the thrill of it. The first few months out, he was quiet and quick to anger. His body ached from the physical exercise, which he threw himself into headfirst. He had gained weight over his first few years of incarceration because he didn't do much but sit around. So, the ten-mile-a-day hikes and 16-hour days on wildfires were a shock to his system, and his bad back flared up once in a while, reminding him why he was there. One thing he noticed, though, was that for the first time since his accident he was able to sleep. After finishing a workday and coming back to the yard, he'd flop onto his bunk and note his exhaustion, and how it felt different than the bleary kind incurred on the prison yard. It felt good. His body craved recharging. With sleep and movement, he began to wake up to some other part of himself.

One of the correctional officers, Rex, took a liking to Stevie in those first few months. Rex heard Stevie's quiet wit and appreciated his attention to detail and so he asked him to sit up front in the cab of the wildfire buggy as his co-pilot. At this point Stevie hadn't really bonded with any crewmembers much, and so he said sure; at the very least he'd have air conditioning. Over the course of a few years, the two became as close as their institutionally mandated

relationship allowed. They found each other rather funny; you'd often hear the two of them hanging out in the buggy, making each other laugh. They both had brash demeanors, made brasher by the roles they played each day as prisoner and guard. But everyone on the crew knew these exterior personalities belied a deep emotional intelligence that Rex and Stevie shared, just a little deeper down. Over time, the two began expressing this to each other; the asshole guard and the asshole prisoner were often seen sitting quietly at a picnic table in the forest, deep in conversations about life, about guilt, about the possibility of redemption.

Rex started asking Stevie to take on more responsibility. But each time Stevie's role as a leader on the fire crew became more delineated, he balked. He said he wasn't interested and wasn't worthy. This cycle continued until about two years in, when Rex made Stevie a Blue Helmet, one of the de facto leaders of the crew. Stevie couldn't really say no, because at this point he knew he was the one every other crewmember had come to count on. Almost without knowing it, Stevie had become a centering force on fires and on daily projects. Other crewmembers treated him like an older brother, a role Stevie did not take lightly. He knew he was lucky to have a family who loved him on the outside, and recognized that many guys on the crew didn't, so he took time to explain processes, work with them through their doubts.

He woke up one morning on the prison yard from a long night of sleep. He looked around and saw all of his crewmembers around him, some still sleeping, others already awake and stretching. Rested and surrounded by his people, Stevie had a realization. In his time on the IWP, he had become a deeply significant person not just in others' lives, but in his own.

Project purpose

I begin with Stevie's story for three reasons. The first is to provide a representative experience of participation in the Inmate Wildfire Program (IWP), a skilled labor program in the

Arizona Department of Corrections in which prisoners fight wildfires. Stevie's general trajectory towards healing is not singular; his was a common narrative that program participants described to me in my 15 months of ethnographic fieldwork with three Arizona prison fire crews. The range of experiences on the IWP varied from crew to crew and person to person, but a significant majority of the participants in this program found it meaningful—and here I define meaning affectively, as a kind of transformation that takes place beyond standard economic narratives about prison labor experiences, and instead within a narrative of *becoming*. I argue that this sort of transformation should be taken seriously as an analytical ethnographic field.

A second reason is to make the case that a study of prison labor, especially a study of highly skilled prison labor, cannot be a narrative simply about toil. The IWP is a unique program that does not adhere to common public and scholarly perceptions about prison labor; it offers its participants a form of work that is dynamic, meaningful, and highly skilled. In many carceral workspaces like factory-style sewing rooms and chow hall kitchens, it might be hard to divorce narratives of work from narratives of meaningless, exploitative labor and nothing more. But a study of a program like the IWP is more than a study of labor, and instead a study of work as a socially and personally meaningful pursuit. The primary research question I set out to answer at the beginning of this dissertation project was, how do incarcerated people experience the IWP, if it is both exploitative and meaningful at once? After fieldwork and data analysis, the answer can be broadly stated: those who participate in the IWP often experience a transformation of certain aspects of their identity, and these transformations challenge the seemingly totalizing, punitive and dehumanizing nature of the modern Arizona prison system. In the following chapters I will detail the specific aspects of identity that are impacted by participation in the IWP, including the social categorization of criminality, masculine identity, and working identity. Understanding

these processes not only sheds light on the experiences of program participants. I will argue that studying the processes by which prisoners undergo a reformulation of certain aspects of their identities through participation in the IWP offers us a concrete example of the way certain programs, people, and spaces in the era of modern incarceration do not succumb to total punishment.

The third reason I present Stevie's story is, perhaps contradictorily, because his narrative isn't actually as clear as I write it in the section above. Identity is not linear, but messy, and incarceration makes it messier. A person incarcerated at a men's prison complex may lose their role as father, husband, partner, worker, weekend soccer player, drug king pin. There is no prison program, labor or not, that can fully respond to the loss of selfhood, and often of humanity, that prison imposes. So, although I present Stevie's story as a trajectory towards transformation, it is of course not so clear. Stevie still harbored deep shame and guilt about his accident, and also bitterly resented other prisoners who 'chose' a path of institutionalization. He served as a mentor for some of his crewmembers, but not to all of them; others didn't even like him. One guy, Paul, had gotten a 12-year sentence for his very first DUI offense that had no casualties, and Paul hated the fact that his time in prison was twice as long as Stevie's, who had killed someone. Paul disdainfully chalked up the discrepancy in their charges to Stevie being white, and steered clear of him. Rex and other correctional officers on IWP crews spent time working with prisoners through the personal issues that arise throughout incarceration, but others didn't put nearly as much affective effort into their jobs. I therefore present Stevie's story as a narrative, but with an analytic caveat that runs throughout this dissertation: the process of asserting or transforming one's own identity in prison (or anywhere) is rarely straightforward, weighted down by the

pressures of the institution, the social branding that occurs both inside and outside, and the complexities of the individual person.

These complexities are important to consider to avoid romanticizing either the people in prison or the processes that take place in the IWP. Yet, my summary of Stevie's story was a paraphrase of his direct recounting. Stevie crafted a narrative of himself that provided new personal foundations from which to build, those that incorporated both the negatives of the IWP and the more positive effects it had on his sense of self. Incarcerated people are not blind to the social or academic narratives of prison, of its injustice or its exploitation. Yet, IWP participants took hold of their own narratives of selfhood in the face of knowing these realities. Even more interestingly, the IWP openly provided such a space to take back one's identity with the approval of Arizona's punitive prison regime. Stevie's story offers an important starting place to understand the institutional power of imprisonment in shaping, often negatively, the identities of those inside. Just as importantly, though, it shows that certain affective benefits experienced by crewmembers in the IWP—those that are not captured in most accounts of prison labor—are powerful points of analysis for understanding how incarcerated people may work daily to reject the structurally violent experience of modern incarceration.

Towards a complex view of the modern prison

Scholars have recently called for more thorough analyses of the current era of mass incarceration. As U.S. prison populations have exploded over the last three decades, the amount of qualitative research taking place behind prison walls has dropped precipitously. This is a result of penal policies that are geared towards safety and security, a departure from the more open-access era that preceded it (Reiter 2014). The restriction of qualitative researchers from the prison yard has resulted in a lack of in-depth analyses of actual prison experience, and as such,

there exists an incomplete picture of the complexities of one of the most powerful institutions in America. Over two million people are currently incarcerated in federal and state prisons, with about four million more under some form of governmental surveillance through parole and probation. As a new era of law and order dawns these numbers will grow, and the necessity of studying this phenomenon grows with it.

Just like with any institution, there are both macro- and micro-levels of analysis. Due to a lack of institutional access, prison scholars have produced several important macro-level frameworks for understanding how incarceration has been woven into in the political and social fabric of the United States. Three major frameworks emerge in this literature. The first is the historical trajectory of imprisonment in this country, and its direct correlation to slavery. Although people of color make up about 30% of the total population of the country, they make up 59% of the prison population. This statistic becomes starker if looking at the disparities for black people, who make up about 13% of the total population and 39% of the prison population. Scholars like Alexander (2010) and Cacho (2012) have detailed the laws, policies, and social attitudes that have resulted in the establishment of modern imprisonment after slavery, and how prison serves as a continued mechanism of control and exclusion to this day.

A second macro-level analysis of modern incarceration examines the rise of the Prison Industrial Complex (PIC). This phrase is used to describe the ways that both the state and private industry have colluded to create a culture of crime control, to advance the political goals of people in power and the economic goals of corporations (Cacho 2012). The most obvious example of the PIC is the shocking rise in private prisons in the last decade, with over 130,000 people currently incarcerated and earning profits for multi-million dollar prison industries like the Corrections Corporation of America or the GEO Group. In essence, scholars like Simon

(2007) and Wacquant (2001) have studied the way broader forces of neoliberalism have been firmly woven in the very fabric of the modern prison, where social control and economic progress become one in the same.

The third strand of inquiry into the current state of imprisonment is directly tied to the previous two, which is prison labor. The Prison Industrial Complex flourishes through the use of incarcerated people's labor. Beyond those incarcerated in private prisons, many corporations partner with state and federal correctional facilities, using prisoners for low-wage, menial work. This trend has been compared to slavery by several scholars (see: Armstrong 2012, Blackmon 2008) due again to the simple fact of *who* is incarcerated, as well as who ultimately benefits from this private/public partnership. The concept of rehabilitation, often used to justify prison labor initiatives, can be challenged by the lack of hard skills most prisoners acquire while incarcerated, as well as the high barriers to employment upon re-entry.

These three interconnected social science research areas regarding modern imprisonment are critical for understanding the historical and political-economic construction of what Simon (2007) calls the carceral state. This concept is used to define "the pathways through which the population becomes known and can be acted upon by the agencies of government at all levels, and how U.S. populations are mediated by the category of crime and the host of discourses and practices that have grown up around that category since the early Republic" (476). The carceral state is central to American political ideology. According to Simon (2007), the politics of law and order, the building and filling of prisons, and the social and legal control of minority populations have been central institutional tenets, resulting in the current state of warehouse-style imprisonment.

Much of the current literature on this era of mass incarceration paints a bleak picture. This bleakness is important to understand; unraveling the depths of inequality inherent in the American prison system is also an unraveling of ideologies that Americans have been told to find comfort in, like justice or public safety. It is necessary to develop a critical understanding of the role of crime and punishment in defining American citizenship, or for people with felony convictions, semi-citizenship. But what I argue in this dissertation is that this understanding is not enough. It is important to provide ethnographic evidence of the institutional and experiential differences within the modern prison system. Although the historical, political, and social trajectories of imprisonment can be described relatively straightforwardly, prisons themselves are not monolithic entities.

A burgeoning literature seeks to explore the complexities of the modern prison system. Moving beyond the idea of prison as a ‘total institution’ (Goffman 1961), or a space where individuals’ actions and selves are completely determined by that institution, scholars are now exploring the frictions (Rubin 2015), variegations (Goodman 2012), and emotional geographies (Crewe et al. 2014) of the modern prison complex. This literature looks at three ‘moving’ or ‘breathing’ parts of the penal institution: the prisoners, the prison staff, and prison policies, all of which are in constant negotiation in the course of daily life of the prison. Phillip Goodman, who conducted ethnographic research on prison wildland firefighting in California, argues that studying an exceptional prison program is necessary to “embrace the variegated nature of prisons and punishment, which vary across time and place, and according to the many nested and overlapping fields in which people and institutions are embedded. There is no single ‘prisoner code’” (Goodman 2014: 388). The view that there is no singular, capital-P prison, just as there is no monolithic prisoner, is upheld by Crewe et al. in their 2014 article on the emotional

geographies of prison. They seek to challenge “depictions of prisons as environments that are unwaveringly sterile, unfailingly aggressive, or emotionally undifferentiated” (Crewe et al. 2014: 56) in order to explore how individuals adapt to, and sometimes challenge, the structural realities of the carceral spaces they occupy.

This new area of research contributes to an age-old debate in social science: that of structure versus agency. Looking at how prisons function on the ground, at the level of the every day, requires us to confront the ways individual people or groups of people adapt, respond to, or reject the standard institutional norms and ideologies. Is resistance to the dehumanization of modern incarceration impossible? At first glance, the structure/agency debate seems almost misplaced in the carceral context. The very premise of incarceration, which has historically and systematically imprisoned people of color, poor people, and other marginalized groups at much higher rates, might make the idea of prisoner agency seem like an empty signifier, or even a naïve hope. Ashley Rubin (2015) cautions against an overly agential view of prisoners’ actions, and against the word ‘resistance’ in the prison context. Instead, she describes what might be considered ‘agency’ as ‘friction,’ or “most reactive behaviors that occur when people find themselves in highly controlled environments” (2015: 24). Goodman, who studies California fire camps, offers a similarly mediated view on agency even in penal spaces that seem to defy institutional norms, stating, “Fire camps are exceptional places...in which rules are bent and ‘played with’ and in which enforcement is deferred (sometimes forgotten entirely), but only so far and only in delineated ways” (Goodman 2014: 388).

This statement by Goodman, who is the only other social scientist to study prison wildland firefighting from a theoretical perspective, provides an opening for this research project. I am interested in how rules are “bent and played with”, especially in “delineated ways.”

A program like Arizona's IWP bends and plays with Arizona Department of Corrections rules at a much more profound level than in California's prison fire camps, and in the context of a much more punitive system. While institutional complexity is often studied through the lens of prisoners, staff, or policy, I choose to write about Arizona's IWP because all three are in play. Prison policies and ideologies are challenged by participation in the IWP, but are institutionally sanctioned—even celebrated—because of the program's good press coverage and the fundamental task the prisoners perform each day on the fireline. In a sense, the very exploitative processes by which the program exists—disposable imprisoned bodies doing risky work—is the premise on which a rejection of this dehumanization can exist. Any discussion of prisoner agency, or prisoner dignity or a reclamation of humanity, exists in this paradoxical space. The prison, as an institution, is a continual act of structural violence, but that does not mean scholars should not look towards spaces in this structure in which people maneuver to find hope.

This dissertation contributes to this burgeoning literature on the complexity of modern incarceration and specifically on prison experience by using the IWP as an example of institutional contradiction, the space available for change and possibility in every structure of power (Seo and Creed 2002). Rubin (2017) writes, "The prison regime is not only the force against which prisoners react but also the source material that assists or makes prisoners' actions possible" (650). I therefore examine the IWP as an exceptional prison space where prisoners and prison staff practice resistance—not against power itself, but against the effects of the power of modern incarceration. I do this through examining the ways prisoners and the correctional officers who participate in the IWP undergo profound shifts in identity formation.

Theoretical frameworks

The IWP serves different purposes for different stakeholders across the state, but at the level of the penal institution, the program offers many benefits. The Arizona Department of Corrections gets good press, they get to partner with Arizona State Forestry to defray personnel costs for its prisoners and staff, and they offer up labor for a critical need—fighting fires—at a fraction of cost to the state. These truths, all of which echo the previous section’s discussion on the exploitative nature of the Prison Industrial Complex, result in the program continuing its operations with overwhelming institutional approval. With this consent, the IWP emerges as a sort of ‘other’ carceral space; the program performs its institutional tasks, but also offers something more profound for incarcerated people while it does so.

In this way, the reason why the IWP is so important to study is because it is *not* subversive, but enthusiastically supported by the Department of Corrections as well as a network of state and local agencies. The labor of imprisoned wildland firefighters has also become so necessary for the public good that there is little option but for the program to continue; communities across the rural and exurban portions of Arizona know the crews well, and have come to rely on them not just for menial labor but to feel safe, or to have their lives actually protected. The program is a rare example of prison opening its doors and allowing the people inside to be seen, and as such, the IWP is protected not just by the institution but by communities who have intimate knowledge of the truth of prisoners as people.

The institutional consent and the public-facing nature of the IWP makes it a very curious case study in a very punitive penal system. The question I pose here is: what do these spaces and cracks that let the light into the black box of modern incarceration do for the people who participate in the program? How does a person like Stevie experience the program, and how do we analyze what he identifies as meaningful? Through 15 months of fighting fires alongside

prisoners, and after completing over 40 formal interviews with program participants and other stakeholders, I found that the operative concept most suited to understanding the program's meanings was *identity*. Identity, of course, has become a catchall phrase in anthropology, broadly defined as the way people relate to and understand themselves. Identity is also a co-constitutive relationship between an individual and the society within which he or she resides: a person's identity is never singular, but made up of intricate webs of both personal meaning and social structure.

Analyzing how identities shift through participation in the IWP coincides with many of the major scholars who have chosen to study the concept of identity over the past century. They argue that the self is not fully captured or entwined in the social structures that bind it, that there is room for creative expression, for negotiation, and for rejection of normative modes of being. In this dissertation, then, I isolate three broad categories of identity that are shaped by participation in the IWP: 1) what I call 'identity movement,' which is both a physical and symbolic move away from the restriction of selfhood which occurs in the carceral system, by entering the non-penal spaces of wildfire; 2) a construction of alternative masculine identities, for both prisoners and guards, which are based more on vulnerability, intimacy, and the absence of racial violence; and 3) working identities, which is the way the job of wildland firefighting offers a sense of self that is antithetical to prison policies that enforce obedient and routinized modes of being.

These three interrelated forms of identity re-constitution all coexist for many participants of the IWP, and they all contradict the sedimentation of a 'criminal' identity, or an Othered identity, so common on the prison yard. These negotiations of selfhood, of prisoner identity, are given space to flourish in the IWP, and this is the process that I detail in the upcoming pages.

First, I will highlight some of the key theoretical frameworks that allow me to analyze the complex experiences of the IWP. I draw on work that describes prison as a site of social categorization and identity loss, as well as social science theories on the various types of masculinities found in prison. I also present a theoretical framework for understanding identity work as a site of resistance, or at least rejection, of punitive regimes of power.

Prison as a site of social categorization

Since the 1990s, anthropologists have pluralized the concept of ‘identity’, using it to define the multiple racial or gendered identities present in a given social context (Golubovic 2011). However, any analysis of identity can be traced to a more foundational tension between structure and agency. That is, to what extent are peoples’ identities, or senses of self, determined by the social systems that surround them, and to what extent can individuals negotiate these systems? In the prison context, the scope of negotiation becomes smaller, as the penal institution works directly to ‘shape’ the behaviors of incarcerated people in the name of security or discipline. This process of an institution ‘molding’ individuals can be described as subject formation, and leads to a negative impact on a person’s sense of self (Taylor 2016).

A key theoretical framework to help understand how subject formation occurs in the penal context comes from Michel Foucault (1995) in his book *Discipline and Punish*. He describes the decline of the public execution and the rise of a more elusive, state-controlled ‘justice’ system in the 19th and 20th centuries, in which the state controls and manipulates the prisoner, denying his or her purpose as a singular *person* and instead as representative of an entire ‘criminal’ social category. This tectonic shift changed not just how punishment is delivered, but how classifications and then the social abandonment of entire groups of people

become commonplace. Categorizations (of the criminal, the poor, the refugee, etc.) allow the rest of the public to respond to those groups in predictable, and often dehumanizing ways.

A Foucaultian analysis of social categorization further explains the structural components of ‘symbolic interactionism,’ or the ways human beings attach meanings (and sometimes stigmas) to other peoples’ actions or behaviors (Goffman 1959). This approach also draws connective threads between power structures, stigma, and identity formation, and can be used to describe how institutions mete out not only criminal sentences, but also criminal subjectivities. When I say they are given ‘subjectivities’, I mean that over the course of imprisonment, a person’s sense of self is re-constituted by the prison regime, as each day individuals are told and reminded what the subject of the ‘inmate’ typically does and says, and over time, these categories can become embodied or accepted. Concepts like categorization are useful in dissecting how the idea of ‘the criminal’ is not a natural category, but a socially produced one that morphed from a person who committed a crime to an entire “criminal class” (Fletcher 1999) that has been molded to fit the normative regime of power. There are several studies that attempt to understand the impact of subject formation, or of being labeled a criminal (LeBel 2012, Schmid and Jones 1991). Scholars have determined that a subjectified identity is “an effect of power and [something that] can marginalize an individual, resulting in that person being disqualified from full societal acceptance” (Toyoki and Brown 2013, p.715-16).

The consequences of social categorization of incarcerated people ripple deeply into the lives of those behind bars, and also widely into the lives of the communities incarcerated people leave behind. A useful theory to explore the consequences of social categorization is Simmons’ theory of cauterization. Simmons (2011) uses the term to refer to how society deadens feelings towards particular marginalized groups, which has embodied effects for members of those

groups. Marginalized groups are labeled as beneath humanity, and are effectively sealed off from the polis. The process of cauterization results in regimes of power that brand those as morally Other, and thus inherently deadened.

Simmons (2013) utilizes his theory of cauterization to explain why prison is an a priori violation of human rights. He notes that the expansion of mass incarceration in the last few decades has resulted in an “exclusionary project” in which “people in prison are subhuman, and they are polluted and unclean. They must therefore be kept away from society, lest they defile the rest of us” (Dolovich as cited in Simmons 2013: 20). The increased cauterization of inmates in recent years echoes Foucault’s theory of disciplinary power, in which criminals are perceived “less as victims of social deprivation who merit civic support...and more likely are seen as dangerous individuals responsible for their own criminality and culpable for the suffering of others” (Crewe 2009: 16).

Several scholars note that the branding and exclusion of prisoners is not new, and in fact is constitutive in the making of the capitalist system of the United States. Lebaron (2012) notes that, beginning with the mid-nineteenth century industrial prison contract system in the U.S. north, prison labor has “underpinned and reinforced the racialized and class-based social relations central to specific forms of capitalist order” (328). Echoing Simmons’ notion that cauterization has embodied consequences, Lebaron argues that the branding of inmates as “unwilling and able-bodied men” had immediate and palpable physical effects, as “violent forms of corporeal discipline” have and continue to “facilitate prisoners’ ‘entire submission’ to the labor regime” (335).

The cauterization of “the criminal” upholds an entire hierarchical social structure, in which criminals are perpetually at the bottom. The concept of cauterization serves as a useful

addendum to the more discursive Foucaultian approach to social categorization. Cauterization not only denotes a symbolic branding and a social deadening to those in prison, but also the embodied ramifications of modern imprisonment. In the chapters that follow, the ways in which individuals are continuously branded and labeled in modern prisons will become clear, and makes the temporary reversal or destabilization of this cauterization on the wildfire crew all the more critical to analyze.

Prison masculinities

In their widely cited 2001 edited volume *Prison Masculinities*, Sabo et al. point out the lack of literature on prison masculinity by stating, “Prison is an ultramasculine world where nobody talks about masculinity” (Sabo et al. 2001: 3). That is, the type of manhood we think of when we think of prison is so widely accepted that it is not critically analyzed, to the detriment of scholars interested in unearthing the relationships between gender, violence, and oppression (5). And yet, what Sabo et al. end up presenting, as do almost all other scholars who write about gender in prison, is a set of masculinities that exist within a single continuum of violence, in which incarcerated men perform their gender based on some form of power and control (Toch 1998). The conclusion of most studies is that prison masculinities center on a compensation for the deprivation of key markers of manhood that incarceration imposes.

The most common theory that scholars rely upon to make sense of prison masculinity is hegemonic masculinity. First defined by Connell in 1987, hegemonic masculinity is aptly summarized by Sabo et al. in their 2001 analysis of prison masculinities. They describe hegemonic masculinity as a gender order, which:

consists of two main structures: a hierarchical system in which men dominate women in crude and debased, slick and subtle ways....and a hierarchical process of intermale dominance in which groups of elite males subjugate and dominate groups of lesser-status

males. These two processes reflect and feed one another. Intermale violence in one arena....fuels violence in another (5)

In other words, hegemonic masculinity is based on a hierarchical order in which men are sorted against one another in terms of relative privileges, and then always below even the most subjugated group of men are women. All performances and expressions of masculinity, according to the theory of hegemonic masculinity, work to uphold this hierarchy (Connell 1987).

Prison scholars also attempt to understand what role the prison itself plays in the performance of masculinity, versus how broader social norms of masculinity are simply continued but in a sex-segregated space. A deprivation model of prison masculinity, building on the original model of prison as a 'total institution' put forth by Sykes (1958), posits that the hyper-violent forms of manhood on display in prison are uniquely due to the dangers and dehumanization found there (Phillips 2001). Many scholars argue that a deprivation model is too limited, and ignores broader societal forms of gender performance in describing how men act in prison—after all, men or those who identify as men were such *before* they were incarcerated, and so it is necessary to understand how social structures continue to shape those behind bars.

This leads to the importation model, which states, "The prison system, though it isolates prisoners from mainstream society, is not an isolated intuitional element within that society. It is melded to the social landscape and to the social relations" of that society (Sabo et al. 2001: 5). As it relates to masculinity, an importation model would posit that any form of masculinity being performed inside the prison walls is simply a representation of the types of masculinity present in the broader society. Although the importation model adequately takes into account the fact that prisons are not isolated from broader social structures and norms, it is undeniable that modern incarceration in the United States is an exceptional space that magnifies or distorts broader norms. Thus, scholars have blended both the deprivation and the importation model to discuss an

‘integrated model’ of prison culture, understanding that prison is not isolated from the broader culture, but has particular attributes that either heighten or warp cultural processes in society at large (Bonta and Gendreau 1990).

There are many other models that scholars have used beyond importation and deprivation to attempt to analyze prisoner behavior, like the administrative control model (Dilulio 1987) or the lifestyle-exposure model (Hochstetler and DeLisi 2005). In this dissertation an integrated model of prison culture makes most sense, because forms of masculinity are learned over the course of a person’s life, not simply picked up in prison. It is critical to understand that the violence of prison masculinity has its roots in the violence of masculinity in society writ large. As Jewkes states, “Hegemonic masculinity in prisons is as bound up in aggression and violence as it is on the outside” (Jewkes 2001). Kupers and Rochlen (2005) explain that the ‘toxic masculinity’ present in the prison context, in addition to the gendered stigma of getting psychological help for experiencing such violence, has negative long-term effects on male prisoners’ ability to psychologically heal.

There is a small but emerging group of scholars who argue for a more nuanced view of prison masculinity. As Jewkes (2001) states, “Whatever their circumstances, individuals are not mere bearers of structure; they are complex amalgams of several influences, responding to their life experiences with greater or lesser degrees of compliance and confrontation, defining their own individuality in terms of both cultural conformity and resistance” (Jewkes 2001: 61). As Crewe et al. call for, there needs to be a “challenge to depictions of prisons as environments that are unwaveringly sterile, unfailingly aggressive, or emotionally undifferentiated” (Crewe et al. 2014: 1). Research is now being conducted that casts new light on the ways men in prison (and more broadly, men in other institutions like the military) have always had the ability, and have in

practice formed relationships that move beyond those simply based on ‘tit for tat’ or violence. Crewe (2009), in the same article where he describes the tenuous expression of emotional closeness due to fears of being considered weak or dependent, also describes the myriad ways men build close friendships and even fictive kinships with one another. This may be through acts like cooking for and with one another, a persistent act of nurture and care between men in many settings (Atherton 2009), like in supporting one another in drug recovery or job placement. I join with scholars who seek a more thorough, or nuanced, approach to masculinity in the prison context, which does not assume a monolithic masculinity across the broad range of people and spaces inside prison.

Identity and resistance

Individuals in prison are categorized and made into less-than-people, which results in their treatment as ‘criminals’ as opposed to full, complex human beings. This process is not simply discursive but also embodied; being in prison has negative effects both psychologically and physically, especially in terms of the way prisoners construct their own identities. Cautioning impacts people’s identities so deeply that it is easy for scholars to abandon hope for incarcerated individuals to be agential, to construct a sense of self that is not wholly determined by the subject formation of prison.

Scholars have had a hard time defining what that kernel of selfhood is that exists beyond the constitution of the ‘criminal’ subject, but some concepts include “agency” (Clegg 1975), “self-narrative” (Giddens 1991), or “self-meanings” (Burke 1991). Increasingly, people are looking to agential forms of identity construction even in prison (Opsal 2011, Rowe 2011, Smoyer 2014). Toyoki and Brown (2013), for example, describe the creative and sometimes empowering self-narratives that Polish prisoners construct to reject the stigma placed upon them

by their penal institution. They call this ‘identity work,’ or “the mutually constitutive processes whereby people strive to shape a relatively coherent and distinctive notion of personal self-identity” (717). That is, people in prison are capable of continually shaping and re-shaping who they think they are and could be, which therefore allows them to “engage in micro-processes of resistance” (718) against the limits of selfhood in prison.

Many scholars argue that there is a continual negotiation of social or institutional structures, as rigid as they may outwardly seem. Butler (1990) describes her theory of performativity as not only understanding normative discursive processes at work in society, but also the processes of ‘working the trap’ of these social norms that one inevitably finds themselves in. As Rowe (2011) states, “identities are imported into prison, shift in response to the experience and are negotiated – projected and defended – in social encounters” (574). Accepting the idea that individuals in prison can craft their own self-narratives, and do not necessarily submit to their own subjectification as ‘criminals’ but have potentials for other senses of self, allows us to see identity a site of negotiation and even resistance to apparatuses of power. The prison system in the United States is designed and operated to uphold the criminal social category, but this does not mean each individual in prison will blindly accept this categorization.

Given that applying the concept of resistance is difficult in a context of confinement because it risks romanticizing individuals’ efforts to navigate their life in prison (Bosworth and Carrabine 2001), I take these moves as challenges to dehumanization, or what Labotka (2014) refers to as “claims to dignity”. Within the resistance literature, the everyday practices of participants in the IWP are most similar to “weapons of the weak,” or small-scale acts of resistance to dominating power structures (Scott 1985). Although some scholars argue that ‘resistance’ is not the appropriate term when discussing individual acts of self-affirmation (Rubin

2015), there are other prison scholars who have noted that incarcerated individuals, even when utterly degraded and maximally confined in solitary conditions, and no matter how deeply they are marked by inmate symbolism, continue to resist punitive penal regimes through identity work (Feldman 1991, Rhodes 2005).

I, like Labotka, argue that participation in the IWP helps incarcerated men negotiate their identities and resist dehumanization. This maintenance of dignity is intimately linked to conceptions of what it means to be human (Appiah 2001, Orentlicher 2001). As Ignatieff (2001) argues, dignity is intertwined with ideals of human rights and freedom, both of which are essential in the formation of a sense of self:

Ironically, it is often those who are deprived of their liberty, slaves and prisoners, who remind us of the connection between dignity and freedom. They refuse to surrender the tiny margin of autonomy that is left them, and they use it to assert their unvanquished sense of self. Thus there is a chain of association that connects together the idea of dignity with the idea of freedom, and both in turn with the capability to maintain and express personal identity (165-166).

This dissertation examines a particular space—the Inmate Wildfire Program—and the processes by which incarcerated men construct fluid, non-categorical identities, and how these processes are a form of resistance against the dehumanizing effects of incarceration.

Outline of the dissertation

Overall, this dissertation explores the production of both carceral and non-carceral identities for participants in Arizona’s Inmate Wildfire Program. First, I draw on both existing literature and my own data to show how prison deleteriously impacts a person’s sense of selfhood, and the ways that modern incarceration overwhelmingly leads to subject formation and social cauterization. Then, utilizing my extensive fieldwork with IWP crews, I expand on the existing literature to show how the daily work of wildland firefighting challenges certain aspects of the restrictive, punitive nature of prison identity. To show how this process occurs, I engage

with three different examples of identity transformation for prison wildland firefighters: the physical and symbolic movement away from criminal categorization, the expression of alternate masculinities, and the embodiment of complex working identities. These three examples, taken up in the second half of the dissertation, offer the most salient ways in which participants in the IWP—both prisoners and correctional officers—intentionally craft a space that re-orient individuals towards non-normative penal identities and fluid notions of social categorization.

Chapter Two provides readers with necessary ethnographic context of the Arizona Department of Corrections. Prison is a widely mythologized but rarely studied social context, and therefore there are many ‘black boxes’ that surround prison ideologies, policies, and social realities. The first part of the chapter attempts to lift the lid of this black box, offering a demographic exploration of the current state of mass incarceration, as well as an organizational explanation of the specificities of the Arizona Department of Corrections. Additionally, this chapter provides the methodological background for the data presented in this dissertation. Prison is an ethically challenging research context, and further, my research could be described as extreme given that I was a woman operating in a doubly masculine (the prison and wildland fire) fieldsite. Therefore, the second part of this chapter explores my methodological approaches to the ethical challenges of prison research, as well as the gendered nature of my fieldsite.

Chapter Three, following a short interlude that offers a snapshot of a day on the prison yard, provides a baseline of ethnographic understanding of the lived realities of the era of mass incarceration. This chapter also situates the IWP firmly in the prison regime, understanding how Arizona’s ideologies and policies of prison labor have resulted in the existence of such an anomalous program that is equally exploitative and transformative at once. This chapter draws on existing literature that generally states that prison is a site of identity loss, social

categorization, and subject formation. Structured to mirror the following chapters 4-6, this chapter isolates three specific ways that incarceration deleteriously impacts a person's identity: 1) restriction (of physical and psychological space); 2) violent masculinity; and 3) boredom (in work, educational, and other capacities). By exploring how these processes occur and their impacts on incarcerated people, I provide a thorough framework for understanding the profound effects of participating in the IWP, which directly rejects some of these negative impacts.

The rest of the dissertation moves to the risky, thrilling working culture of wildland firefighting. There is another brief interlude, which offers a descriptive account of one of the wildfires I fought alongside the IWP crews. This re-orientates the reader to the space of the prison fire program, one that is distinctly different in nearly all ways from the deadening nature of modern incarceration. Chapter Four is the first of three chapters that provide specific ethnographic evidence for the transformative forms of identity work that take place on the prison fire crews. In this chapter, I present a unique analytical concept, which I call "movement," that describes both the physical and symbolic shift away from criminality on the IWP. In direct contrast to the restrictions of incarceration, the IWP provides prisoners with the ability to move out of carceral spaces. I describe the IWP as a move to 'place' rather 'space,' describing the effects of working, sleeping, and dwelling in the open landscapes of the IWP as a profound shift in self-relation for program participants. The emplacement that occurs on the IWP allows individuals to symbolically challenge the structures of carceral power that limit a person's sense of dignity and personhood.

Chapter Five expands the existing literature on masculinity in the prison context, which often frames masculine identity as a reified embodiment of violence and domination. Drawing on emerging scholarship that calls for social scientists to provide a more nuanced approach to

analyzing masculinity in punitive contexts, this chapter explores how men who fight wildfires on the IWP perform an alternative masculinity for themselves and with each other. This alternative masculinity is practiced in several ways. First, the work of wildland firefighting allows for more vulnerability and humility than the common, heteronormative depictions of firefighters may suggest. That is, the risky nature of the job, and the challenge to notions like ‘winning’ or ‘defeating’ such enormous wildfire threats, allow individuals on the IWP to engage in more vulnerable, non-dominant expressions of self. The chapter goes on to describe how such vulnerability allows for daily acts of physical and emotional intimacy between crewmembers. These intimate relationships provide individuals with emergent notions of friendship, kinship, and acts of care within these spaces. Finally, alternative masculinity is demonstrated through the IWP zero-tolerance mandate of racial inclusion, which simultaneously challenge normative gendered and racial structures on the prison yard. The intersectional expressions of vulnerability and intimacy are fostered each day on the IWP, and as such a form of alternative masculinity is evident, and often described as one of the most meaningful aspects for program participants.

The third and final ethnographic example of how IWP participants construct non-carceral identities comes in Chapter Six. This chapter utilizes the longstanding anthropological concept of ‘work’ to examine how incarcerated individuals construct a working identity through the daily act of wildland firefighting, and the effects of such a working identity on the social categorization that occurs in prison. Specifically, a wildfire working identity is antithetical to other types of working identities typically found on the prison yard. Being a wildland firefighter requires mental acuity, critical and creative thinking, a willingness to challenge authority in situations where safety becomes a factor, and a myriad of actual hard skills. Additionally, a wildfire working identity is inherently public facing and distinctly non-cauterized, in that

individuals in communities recognize prison crews as people beyond the criminal classification placed on them by the penal institution. A wildfire working identity, as such, offers a concrete, embodied opportunity for IWP participants to re-direct their senses of self towards identities that extend beyond prison walls. This positively impacts not just prison firefighters, but their families and kin support networks.

Taken together, Chapters Four, Five, and Six provide an in-depth ethnographic survey of an incredibly uncharacteristic prison labor program, which I argue directly challenges some of the dehumanizing and restrictive effects of identity loss inherent in the modern system of incarceration. In Chapter Seven, I briefly address a set of unanswered questions this ethnographic example uncovers. I argue that the type of ‘identity work’ that occurs on the IWP cannot be appropriately labeled as a form of ‘resistance’ against the prison regime; even as individuals engage in transformative re-orientations of selfhood and reclamations of dignity, the IWP still remains as a labor program, and thus bares the ideological burden of low pay, high risk, and low post-release opportunity. The program also operates with the institutional consent of the ADC, and thus cannot be considered ‘resistance’ in any true political way. With these necessary caveats to the meaningful nature of the IWP for program participants, I conclude the dissertation by describing the necessity for anthropologists to engage in such complicated narratives and experiential paradoxes like the IWP so clearly represents. I argue that, particularly in such punitive contexts, it is necessary to understand the ways in which individuals adapt to, resist, and creatively expand normative modes of power. On the IWP, this occurs through the daily acts of care, hope, and identity transformation for those who fight wildfires while incarcerated.

Chapter 2: Research context and methodology

Introduction

This chapter serves a dual purpose. My first goal is to describe the broad apparatus of the Arizona Department of Corrections (ADC), and within that, the Inmate Wildfire Program (IWP). This is necessary in order to have a working knowledge of these two complicated bureaucracies, and will orient the rest of the dissertation to these spaces. My second goal of this chapter is to explain how I place myself within the upcoming text. I choose to combine research context and methodology into one chapter so that I can fully explain my positionality—as a woman, as a person who has never been incarcerated, as a researcher turned wildland firefighter—in the context of explaining the field site.

I believe this will frame the project appropriately: my data would be fundamentally different if all of my interviews and participant observation took place inside the prison walls, as opposed to the relatively open space of the fireline. Similarly, as has been noted by several female scholars conducting research inside prison, both informal and formal interviews are guided by implicit gendered biases on the part of both researcher and informant (Kilty 2014). For example, although I will argue that participation in the IWP helped individuals to enact alternate forms of masculinity based on emotional intimacy and vulnerability, a fraught topic that prisoners never chose to discuss with me was sexual assault and its ramifications. I heard allusions to crewmembers' experiences with it here and there over 15 months, but they refused to speak about it with me.

As one crewmember told me bluntly, in a conversation that was the closest I got to the subject, “We aren’t gonna tell a girl about that, it’s nasty business.” In response I wanted to point out what might be considered my ‘feminine’ credentials, as a former crisis counselor for

survivors of sexual assault, or as someone who has experienced such violence myself, in order to get access to this critically under-discussed aspect of imprisonment. But when my informants *a priori* excluded me from this discussion, I chose not to push the issue, because of my fear of ‘forcing’ prisoners to discuss something so raw about a situation I will never fully understand. Yet, though I was excluded from that specific conversation, once our interviews ended a few informants told me that they hadn’t shared particular experiences of incarceration with anyone else, but chose to because they felt a level of ‘comfort’ with me as a woman, particularly a woman representing a non-carceral regime. Thus was the give-and-take of my fieldwork experience; on the one hand surprisingly open, and on the other entirely closed off.

In order to write a rigorous account of prison experience, I first had to acknowledge my positionality, and thus the boundaries of my knowledge of my informants. But I also want to explain the amount of ethnographic access I was given, and what is meaningful about this access. In my case, the limits were clear: I have never been incarcerated, and as in-depth as my research methods were, my project’s conclusions are bounded by the time I spent with prisoners in the IWP as opposed to with other prisoners in other places within ADC. And yet, the exceptional practices of the IWP also provided me with access to incarcerated people that many prison researchers do not have in the modern age. This provided me with insights on emergent analytic concepts like hope, possibility, and creative individuality not often discussed in prison literature. In this chapter, then, I provide an explanation of the Arizona prison system, how the IWP fits within it, and how I came to explore both.

The Arizona Department of Corrections: a primer

Demographics of mass incarceration in the U.S. and Arizona

The first step towards understanding the current prison system of the United States, and Arizona specifically, is to determine who is incarcerated where. There are many different types of detention across each state of the union. As seen in Figure 2.1, a 2017 chart by the Prison Policy Initiative, the three largest detention categories are: local jails, state prisons, and federal prisons. Often, people use the words prison and jail interchangeably, but these spaces serve very different purposes. Jails are most often used as holding cells for individuals who have yet to stand trial or be sentenced, whereas prisons are the place where sentences are carried out. Jails also house individuals who receive minor sentences for smaller crimes. That isn't to say that jails are full of short-timers, though; because of slow-moving court systems and a bail system that results in poor people being unable to post bond, jail sentences frequently last years (Wagner and Rabuy 2017). However, the largest portion of incarcerated people serve their sentences in state prisons, which operate under their own state policies and ideologies, as opposed to nation-wide policies implemented in the much smaller federal prison system.

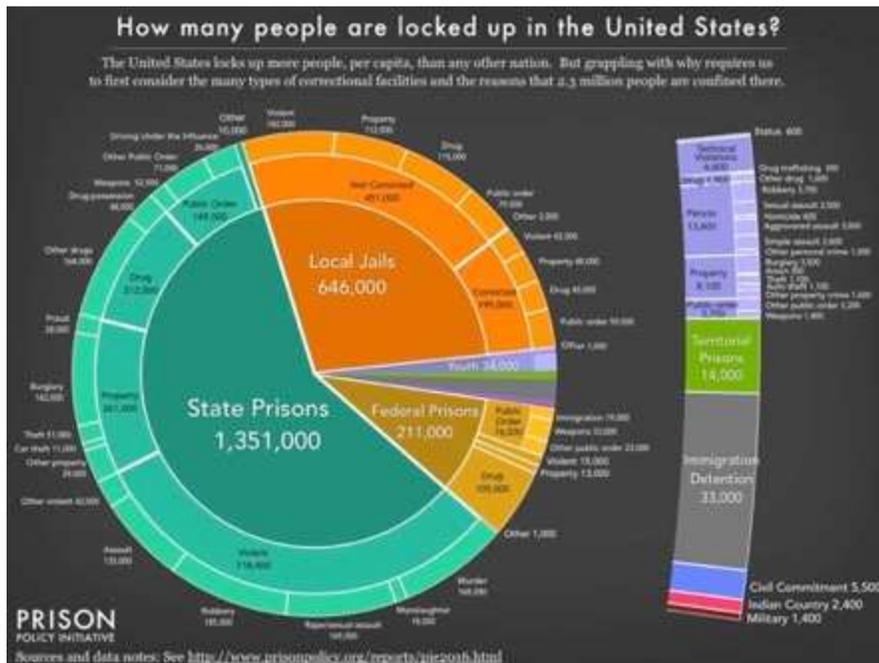


Figure 2.1. Types of Incarceration. (Wagner and Rabuy 2017)

Not indicated in the above chart are the increasing number of both state and federal prisons that are operated by private companies. In 2015, the number of Americans in private prisons was 126,272, an increase of 45% since the year 2000. In Arizona, the percentage of people incarcerated in private prisons rose by 352%, from 1,430 to 6,471 (The Sentencing Project 2017). The economic and ethical implications of private prisons have long been debated across the criminological literature (Aman and Greenhouse 2014, Kang 2009). The consensus is that private prisons do not provide any economic growth or cost savings to the state, and further, there are moral conundrums when making a profit off of another person's incarceration (AFSC 2010). Although the topic of private prisons is increasingly relevant, it still remains that the great majority of incarcerated people in Arizona serve their sentences in publicly run state prisons.

Another unique aspect of the penal landscape in Arizona is the high percentage of people detained in immigration facilities. Across the country, 19,000 people are in federal prisons for criminal convictions relating to violating immigration laws, while an additional 33,000 people are detained by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). Eight percent of this total is in Arizona. Just as with private prisons, certain scholars argue that current immigration detention centers are of increasing concern in the 21st century, given that the policies which surround these rapidly expanding penal spaces are often under-defined and challenging to enforce (Saldivar and Price 2015). These authors argue that the rise of both private prisons and immigration detention centers demonstrate that, in the U.S. broadly, incarceration might be seen as a strategy for punitive attitudes towards crime and 'othered' social groups (Simmons 2013).

Historians like Alexander (2010) and Cacho (2012) who study the relationship between race and imprisonment claim that criminal justice policies have always been felt more acutely for

certain groups of people in the United States compared to others. Another critical understanding of the prison system both nationally and in Arizona is the racial make-up of who is incarcerated.

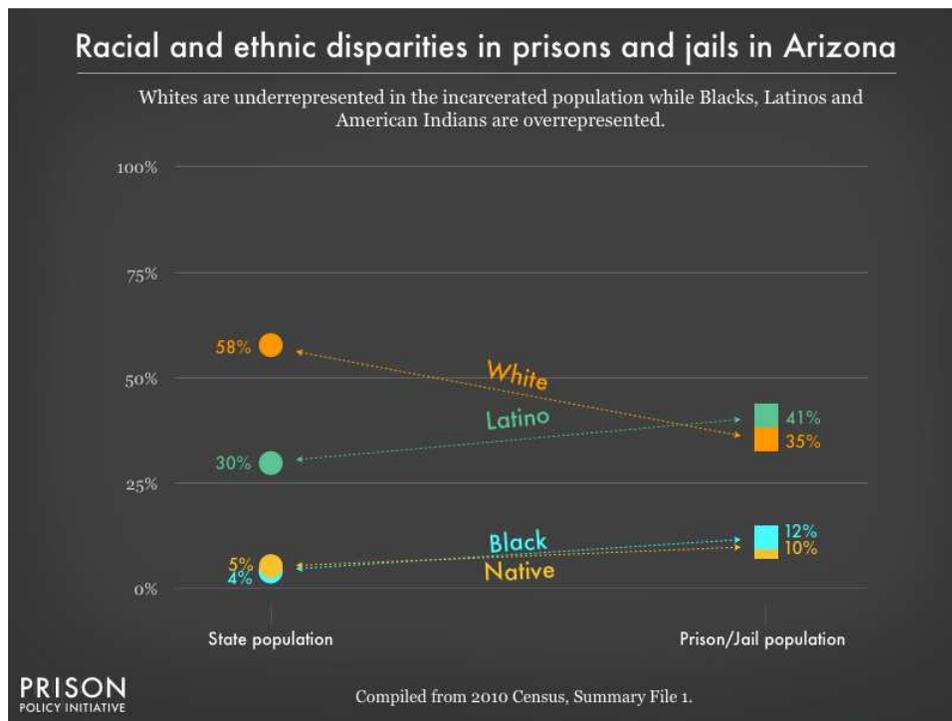


Figure 2.2. Rates of incarceration based on race. (Wagner and Rabuy 2017)

As seen in Figure 2.2, compiled by the Prison Policy Initiative (2017) based on 2010 census data, Arizona’s racial disparities in prisons and jails mirrors broader national trends. For example, Black people make up 4% of the total population of the state, but 12% of the incarcerated population. These racial disparities are seen in every state of the nation. This indicates that there are policies and ideologies surrounding crime and punishment, directly tied to the unequal social structures of both race and class, that have shaped the nature of the U.S. criminal justice system over time (Armstrong 2012). These trends have continued into the modern era, and in this regard, there is debate in the critical prison literature about whether to call the current prison system ‘broken,’ or to acknowledge that it functions just the way it was designed (Cacho 2012, Wacquant 2009).

There has been a recent trend towards examining the effects of imprisonment for individuals once they are released, as the “revolving door” into and out of prisons and jail remains a statistical concern for correctional departments and communities alike, and severely impacts not just incarcerated people but caretakers, families, and entire communities (De Claire and Dixon 2017). Across the country, approximately 95% of all incarcerated people will eventually be released. In Arizona, 37.5% of people who are released from prison return within three years, with much higher numbers reported for people who were incarcerated for drug-related offenses (Arizona Department of Corrections 2005). Since the early 2000s, the obvious problem of recidivism and the more trenchant issues of racial disparity and warehousing trends are being addressed from multiple perspectives in American politics.

For example, prison abolitionists argue that an entire re-thinking of American attitudes towards crime, a re-structuring of policing mechanisms and the court system, and a dramatic decrease in actual incarceration with an emphasis on abatement courts, restorative justice, and community sentencing is necessary to dismantle the prison apparatus (Gottschalk 2006, Sudbury 2000). More politically conservative individuals and think tanks have begun to show interest in prison reform, purely from an economic (rather than social justice) perspective, advocating for a better fiscal management of both the prison and parole system which would result in lower rates of incarceration (Durlauf and Nagin 2011). These varied approaches are emerging as points of discussion across the country, but as I will describe in the next section, it is critical to understand how each state’s prison system often operates as an ideological and policy island, making any sort of wide-scale reforms of the U.S. prison system hard to enact.

The Arizona Department of Corrections: ideological underpinnings

In the only comprehensive history of the Arizona Department of Corrections, Lynch (2010) offers an argument that is key to understanding both the penal system of the U.S. writ large, and also the reasons why particular prison programs like the IWP can exist. She writes, “There are significant differences regionally and jurisdictionally in crime-control politics, policies, and practices and...these penal patterns result from a complex interplay of social, cultural, and political factors” (16). In essence, Lynch argues that it is critical to consider each state prison system within its own sociocultural context, instead of trying to map national ideologies or policies onto that state. I would take this argument one step further. After spending 15 months in three different prison complexes just in southern Arizona, I claim it is necessary to examine even more granular particularities between complexes, run by different wardens with different agendas and outlooks on punishment. Indeed, narrowing the focus even further, one can examine differences between prison yards or programs on the same complex. Like Lynch alludes to, I argue that examining prison systems at this micro-level offers a more thorough, and ultimately more effective, view of such a wildly complex bureaucracy.

Before detailing the actual departmental layout of Arizona’s prison system, it is important to briefly describe Arizona’s penal ideology. Lynch describes it:

The establishment of Arizona’s Department of Corrections in 1968 perfectly coincided with the beginning of the end for the rehabilitative penal philosophy that had shaped many punishment practices in the United States for most of the twentieth century. Rehabilitation was not institutionally rooted in the state, so its introduction with the modernizing of the system through bureaucratization guaranteed its fragile status. Arizona had historically embraced a punitive approach to lawbreakers....[and] so within two decades of its inception, this department had abandoned its flirtation with rehabilitation and had come to exemplify the model of the harsh, postrehabilitative mass incarcerative warehouse-style prison system that had come to prevail in jurisdictions across the nation (4).

Based on the above quote, it is notable that the Arizona Department of Corrections (ADC) was established nearly a half-century later than the state itself. The approach to punishment during

the early decades of Arizona's statehood mirrored the shoot-em-up, 'get tough' attitude towards criminal justice across the American west. This attitude persisted long after ADC was established. Illustrations of this include the blue jeans that were standard issue clothing for prisoners up until the 1990s, or the prison that is still housed in a rickety, wooden, 1800s-era military fort once used to detain Billy the Kid and Geronimo. Arizona's punitive prison ideologies run deeper than Wild West aesthetics, though: ADC was one of the first correctional systems in the nation to build a supermax facility, was one of the first to re-introduce chain gangs, and is still notorious for Maricopa County Sheriff Joe Arpaio's 'tent cities' that house prisoners outside in 120 degree heat (Lynch 2010). Lynch describes the ADC as an exemplary form of 'sunbelt justice,' a harsh punitive style based on western states' cultural particularities, which fundamentally differ from experiments with Quaker-inspired rehabilitation throughout the American northeast and Midwest.

Arizona's retributive approach to criminal justice is related to its home in the Sunbelt in political as well as penal ways. Detailing the political trajectory of the U.S. during the 1980's, Lynch argues that "the New Right political movement...developed directly out of the suburban Sunbelt areas of the South and West" (8). She describes the political movement as "a sometimes contradictory blend of antitaxation sentiments and a desire for limited government; an allegiance to an unregulated free market economy; attention to morals' issues; a retreat from civil rights; and a commitment to law and order" (8). This political movement resulted in an increase in punitive criminal justice: although high-growth Sunbelt states like Arizona had increasing prison population numbers simply based on the explosion of the overall population, the *rates* of incarceration rose exponentially higher over the latter half of the 20th century, too. The 11 high-

growth Sunbelt states housed 22% of the nation's state-level prisoners in 1950; by the year 2000, they housed over 50% (Lynch 2010).

Overall, when considering Arizona's current carceral reality, it is necessary to understand its political, ideological, and sociocultural context. No prison system exists within a cultural vacuum, and although one can assess general nationwide or regional trends in penal philosophies and policies, each prison system must be examined on its own terms. This means understanding the ADC in relation to Arizona's historically punishment-heavy, non-rehabilitative, 'outlaw' style of incarceration that persists. However, the same rugged cultural ideology fits well with the culture of wildland firefighting, making a program like the IWP an interesting connection between the two. In later chapters, I will provide a clear example of why this granular view of prisons is important: it not only allows us to examine the complex inner-workings of a seemingly unflinching, monolithic government system, but it also allows us to see how people within these systems maneuver creatively around institutional norms and strictures.

The Arizona Department of Corrections: a bureaucratic overview

The Arizona Department of Corrections (ADC) is comprised of 16 total complexes, 10 of which are state-run and six of which are privately operated. A prison *complex* is made up of several units, which are sometimes referred to as 'yards,' where different groups of prisoners, called populations, are housed. With a few exceptions, all units of a given complex are situated side by side, often in direct view of one another. Some prison complexes are small, with only one or two units and a couple hundred people, while there are other 'major complexes' with up to 10 units and over 5,400 prisoners. Because the IWP only operates in the public state prisons and I only conducted research in these spaces, I will be referring only to the 10 publicly operated complexes when I describe 'the ADC' throughout the dissertation. Yet here, all general statistics

and demographics are calculated from the total ADC population, including privately contracted complexes.

As seen in the map in Figure 2.3, the complexes are spread across the state, with many concentrated near the major population centers of Phoenix and Tucson. Of the ten state-run complexes, there is only one female complex, housing approximately 3,900 people. As such, women make up approximately 9% of the total incarcerated population of Arizona, though in this state and across the country, women are one of the fastest growing incarcerated populations (Harmon and Boppre 2015). In addition to the single women’s prison complex, there is one complex dedicated to housing death row prisoners. There are only four complexes that house maximum- and close-security prisoners (these four are publicly run), with the remaining 12 housing medium- and minimum- security prisoners. Nearly all US prison systems restrict maximum- and close-security prisoners to a small number of complexes, to ameliorate security concerns and personnel issues.

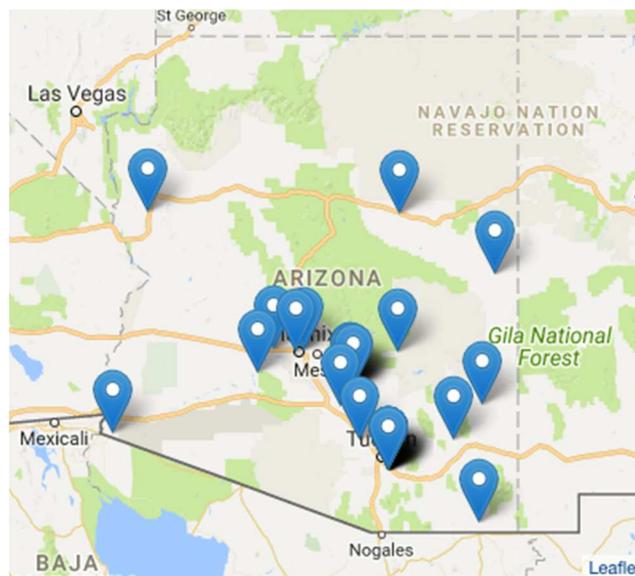


Figure 2.3. Map of all ADC complexes. (ADC n.d.)

I worked with three IWP fire crews housed at three different complexes across the state: one was a large, urban, multi-security-level complex; another was a semi-rural complex with medium and minimum security units; and the third was a very small rural complex with only one minimum-security unit. Although all prison complexes operate using the same security and procedural policies, each complex I spent time on was clearly a distinct carceral space. The geographic location of the prison (rural vs. urban), the size of the complex, and the types of units on the complex changed the way each prison was experienced by prisoners and guards. Even though policies were the same throughout the entire ADC system, prisoners I talked to discussed how the smaller prison complexes with no maximum or close security units felt more relaxed. However, the downside to these smaller rural complexes was in their remoteness; there was less potential for family visitation, skilled labor program opportunities, and educational opportunities than in the major complexes near urban centers.

There are several branches of the ADC, and two I worked with: administration and operations. Administration oversees the functioning of the ADC department as well as the operations of its complexes, and is headed by the Director of the entire department. The Governor appoints this position, and the Director sets the ideological tone for all policies and procedures enacted. Within the administrative branch, there are several hundred employees working in various offices including the budget office, the contract office, the office of prisoner education, and the research office, through which my dissertation project was approved and supervised. Even though each prison complex runs its daily operations at the behest of its own organizational chain of command, the administrative 'central office' of the ADC in Phoenix is the ultimate authority on all matters. After my project was approved and my research was underway, I worked very little with individuals at the administrative level, except for my

occasional project updates and the eventual presentation of my policy report and recommendations. Most of the interactions I had occurred at the operations level.

Within the operations level of ADC are the 16 complexes, each of which is run by a Warden. Wardens will transfer between complexes rather frequently; three warden transfers occurred during my 15 months of research. This upper-level personnel movement can have real impacts on prisoners within a complex. For example, a particular Warden might value educational programs as a means to an institutionally-mandated goal or outcome set by Administration, but then be replaced by a Warden who instead thought that more work assignments or punitive measures were the most effective way to achieve that outcome. The result would be that programming opportunities (AA meetings, volunteer education classes) could easily disappear or reappear depending on whomever topped the chain of command at that particular prison complex. Each complex has a Major, who is the second in command for the Warden, and is the head of security of that complex. The Major works with his or her own security officers, along with the officers in the chain of command of each unit.

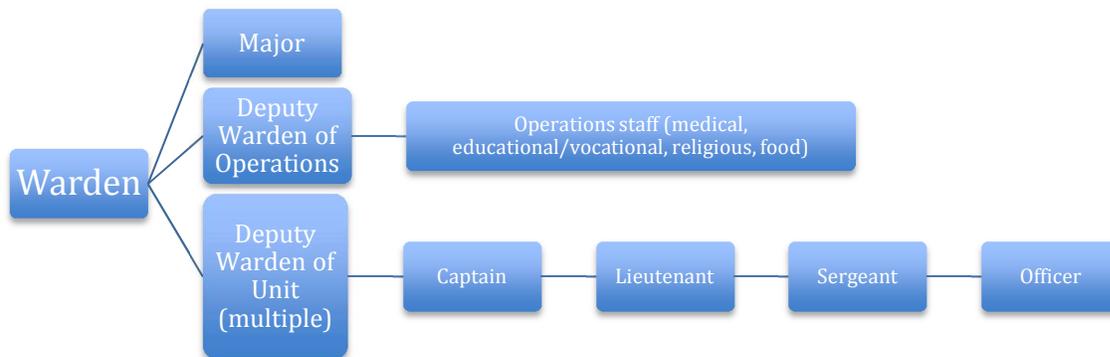


Table 0.1. From left to right, staff hierarchy of an Arizona prison complex.

At more rural prison locations, Wardens often live in a house or trailer on the complex, meaning their presence is an all-day, every-day affair. This sets the tone of an almost family-like atmosphere. Each complex has a wide assortment of buildings, some of which are little more than doublewide trailers with faulty air conditioning. There are one or more administrative buildings, where the Warden's office is located, along with all other support staff, like medical staff, food and beverage contracting staff, and chaplains. Other prison buildings include intake centers for new prisoners being transferred to that complex, volunteer training or education spaces, medical wards, and workout spaces for guards.

For incarcerated people in Arizona, the particular units where they are housed become their social and environmental biomes. Although the unit/yard is the smallest bureaucratic component of the ADC, it is where daily life occurs, and thus is where all social processes are enacted. The head of each unit on a complex is called the Deputy Warden, or DW. The DW oversees the nitty-gritty, daily details of prison life—fights, drug running, gangs, deaths, release dates being moved, influenza outbreaks...the list goes on. The DW is sometimes referred to as the Mayor, for his or her continual presence and decision making that impacts incarcerated people most quickly. The DW is the direct supervisor of all guards on his or her unit. These guards fall under the rankings of Captain, Lieutenant, Sergeant, and Officer.

These last four correctional positions are the worker-bees of any given prison complex, far outnumbering higher ranks like DW, Major, or Warden. Officers can begin work in the prison system out of high school, but based on my research, many formerly served in the military or Border Patrol. Every guard attends a seven-week training at the Correctional Officer Training Academy in Tucson and is then required to pass a 60-question exam, a physical exam, and a drug test. Once hired, he or she puts in the hours and participates in extra training opportunities to

move up the institutional ladder. This hierarchical stratification mirrors the ranking in the U.S. military, and operates in a similar fashion. That is, there is a very clear chain of command, and even the simplest decisions or bureaucratic changes need approval all the way up the ranks to the administrative levels in Phoenix.

However, as will be made clear over the course of this dissertation, this institutional structure is not a totalizing environment. In my 15 months of fieldwork, I witnessed the malleability—sometimes surreptitious, sometimes benign, and sometimes made absolutely necessary by the powder-keg conditions of the prison yard—of this bureaucratic structure. Each Warden has control over his or her complex, and as such, the ideological intentions of that person helps shape the daily experience of that complex. Each Deputy Warden makes hundreds of decisions a day, often at the level of individual prisoners whom they have become acquainted with over years of work, that may defy direct orders from the Central Office but need to be made to avoid a catastrophe. There is less procedural wiggle-room for lower-level prison guards, but as I describe in later chapters, in spaces like the IWP they have opportunities to shape the daily experience of incarceration, sometimes far outside of punitive penal norms.

The IWP

Though very few records exist, several forestry and correctional officials recount that Arizona prisoners have been used to fight wildfires in informal capacities as far back as the early 1970's. Formally, however, the IWP was created in 1984 with a contract between the U.S. Forest Service and the former State Land Department, now the Arizona Department of Forestry and Fire Management (ADFFM), which initially subcontracted for two prison crews. Although this institutional history is well recorded, current employees don't trace the founding of the IWP to agency agreements, but to a man named Doug. Now in his late 60's, he was a young correctional

officer at a rural Arizona prison in 1984 when the Land Department put out a call for guards to volunteer to head up the first of the prison fire crews. Having fought a few fires in his early teens, he jumped at the chance. Over the next few decades, he scraped together—“lied, borrowed, and stole”—resources from wherever he could to outfit the crews responsibly, he formed long-lasting relationships with non-prison crew leaders in the Forest Service and BLM to gain acceptance for his prison crews, and was a strong advocate for the usefulness of the program when questions arose about its risks or impediments to ADC operations. He is still employed by ADFFM and maintains a steady influence on the program. Doug is a frequent presence on wildfires; he doesn’t fight them directly anymore, but he takes the occasional assignment as Incident Command Officer, the person responsible for all the operations on a given wildfire. He is tall and lean and tan, and speaks with both a Texas twang and deep-south drawl, an accent that many rural Arizonans adopt. His humor is wicked and steeped in his trades, a raunchy and biting jokester who has spent decades in both law enforcement and wildfire.

The fact that I was able to pinpoint—let alone interview and spend hours on the fireline with—the person who everyone considers the founder of Arizona’s IWP is an initial indication of the program’s difference compared to other, much larger state wildfire operations. Another marker of this difference is the small and rugged agency of the ADFFM itself. Even though the IWP is deeply entwined with the ADC, both its daily operations and its institutional culture is based out of ADFFM. Unlike other U.S. state’s forestry agencies, most notably the massive bureaucracy of CAL FIRE in California, ADFFM is relatively new, emerging as the ADFFM from the erstwhile State Land Department in the mid-1990s, and has relatively few personnel. ADFFM’s mission is similar to all state forestry departments, with joint goals of fire suppression

(through wildland firefighting) and prevention (through stewardship, education, and technical assistance).

Even though ADFFM has expanded as an agency over the past few decades, as far as actual wildland firefighting goes, ADFFM has very few in-house wildland firefighters. There are five engine crews, made up of three to five people, who are responsible for operating wildland fire engines and dozers (water tankers). There are also a few ADFFM helicopter pilots who drop slurry (fire retardant) on the fire's edges or monitor the fire's status from the sky. But unlike other state or federal agencies, ADFFM has remarkably few internally staffed fire crews that operate on the ground, either Hot Shot or Type-2 hand crews. In fact, up until 2017 when ADFFM formed their first paid type-2 hand crew, the Department's on-the-ground crews were 100% comprised of prisoners. On their website, under the tab 'State Forestry Crews,' the description is solely about incarcerated wildland firefighters who are used both for fire suppression and prevention measures every day throughout Arizona.

The reliance on prison crews for all aspects of ADFFM's mission shapes the way these crews are regarded at this agency. That is, they hold positions of equal bureaucratic power and reputation to the engine and helicopter crews and are given the same material resources as one would think any state fire crew might receive. The connection between ADC and ADFFM is even more deeply entwined, given that several employees of ADFFM are former correctional officers. This again stems from Doug, who served in his position as a correctional officer assigned to head his prison's fire crew for several decades. This position is called a Crew Boss. Now, based partly on the career trajectory of Doug, the Crew Boss of each prison fire crew is an employee of ADFFM, and acts as the liaison between the ADC and ADFFM (see Figure 2.4). Much like Doug, nearly all Crew Bosses are former ADC employees who once served as one of

the three correctional officers in charge of their given complex's fire crew until they reached retirement in the Department of Corrections and made the switch to ADFFM.

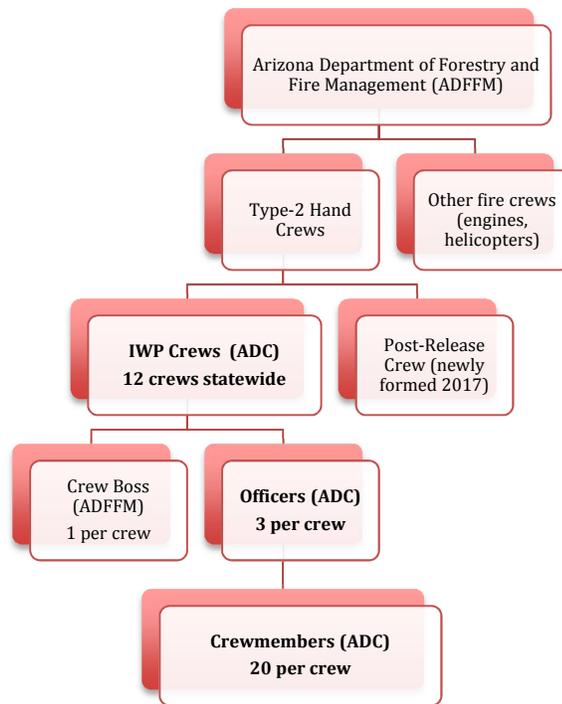


Table 0.2. Organizational Chart of ADFFM and IWP Crews. Bold font represents ADC contract with ADFFM.

Although the Crew Boss works for ADFFM, he or she is the head of a given IWP crew and is stationed at the crew's workspace on the prison yard. He or she is the authority charged with making decisions during wildfire operations (like determining which squad goes where on the fireline, or whether to agree with Incident Command or reject their work orders). The person in this position is also responsible for securing daily work projects, working closely with federal agencies or rural communities near their prison to conduct large forestry projects to clear overgrown landscapes or fire-scarred forests. Working alongside the Crew Boss on each IWP crew, although technically under the Crew Boss's authority on wildfires, are three correctional officers. Of the three, one is a Sergeant and two are Officers, providing a small chain of command should issues arise on the crew.

The crew itself is ideally comprised of 20 prisoners, although this number may fluctuate based on who is released, who is sick, or who is fired for misconduct. The crew has two ‘squaddies’ or ‘blue helmets,’ Squad Bosses responsible for 10 crewmembers each. This position is worked towards over years, and is assigned by the officers sagaciously. The other ranked position on the crew, which denotes a level of higher accountability and seniority, is Sawyer, a person who has passed the exams and practicums to operate a chainsaw. As one can see from this brief description, The IWP holds hierarchies within hierarchies: on the crew, in ADFFM, and in ADC. But the work itself is much more flattened—prison officers work directly alongside prisoners both on projects and on fires, and on the fireline, even a two-day old firefighter is expected to speak his or her mind, ask questions, and challenge authority if safety concerns arise.

Doug doesn’t attribute the existence of Arizona’s prison fire program to himself, like most others do, but to the prisoners who fought fires during the first shaky years of the program’s operations. In that early time period, incarcerated wildland firefighting wasn’t a full time job. Instead, prisoners would hold their regular day-jobs—as cooks, clerks, or barbers—and were called out to fight fires when they arose. Their training was sporadic, often done on weekends on theirs and Doug’s own time. In order to gain a solid reputation with federal agencies that would eventually come to rely on ADC crews, and in order to gain resources for full-time operation, these early prison firefighters had to work hard, and equally importantly, had to feel called to the work. Doug described the instrumental role that prisoners themselves made in the IWP getting started, stating,

They made it what it is today. They were the pioneers and they made a commitment. They were good guys that made a good solid commitment in the program and ran with it. For them it was beneficial, it gave them some structure in their lives. Because let’s face it, some needed that. It gave them a sense of belonging to something that meant something. So that calling was there for them, and they were there for the public, and that’s what made it work. The back and forth.

This description of the crew's early years is equal parts a description of meritocracy—the crews having to put in hard work—and of wildland firefighting being more than a job but a higher calling. As we will see in later chapters, these two sentiments serve as the cultural backbone of the IWP and of wildland firefighting more broadly (and even beyond this, of most skilled labor professions). As the IWP got its start, it was able to lean on these cultural tenets of wildland firefighting to recruit prisoners, establish shared meaning with non-prison crews, and make a case to the myriad departments that would have to sign off on such a risky program.

Despite the hard work of the crews and those early correctional officers, the establishment of the IWP wasn't without difficulties. The crews were met with resistance at multiple institutional levels. Several ADFFM employees as well as correctional officers described ADC's initial (and in some cases, continuing) uneasiness with the program. They note that upper-level ADC administrative officials were thrilled with the IWP from the get go, having positive press and measurable cost savings to present to the state legislature. However, at each particular complex where these crews were being formed, Wardens had to contend with the perceived risks of sending prisoners out for weeks at a time, along with correctional staff being dedicated to something other than security. Although some Wardens have come around to fully embrace the program, others are not sold. Yet, because of the upper administration's enthusiastic support of the IWP, and because there is no real evidence of manifest risk on the crews, these non-enthusiastic Wardens continue to accept the IWP, as one ADFFM official said, "without 100% support, but without shutting us down, either." For the most part, the IWP now operates as a well-oiled machine, and the amount of institutional support—in the upper levels of ADC, at the ADFFM, the Forest Service, the Bureau of Land Management, in other local and federal

firefighting agencies and rural community organizations—keep any naysaying Wardens to a quiet grumble.

During my first few months of fieldwork, while I was attempting to put together an institutional history of the IWP, I did not expect the program's inception—let alone its continual operation—to come with such a personal backstory. That is, I did not expect to hear individual names, either of Doug, or other former crew bosses, or even some legendary early prison crewmembers, who made the program what it is today. That a prison labor program could feel so steeped in a home-grown, almost family-like ideology surprised me, and as I will write in later chapters, this forms the basis of much of the behavior and practices of the IWP that differ so greatly from the cold, harsh, and routinized mechanisms of much of the rest of the ADC.

Entering the prison, then leaving it: the ethnographic flow of prison firefighting

Methodology

Having spent the last few pages providing the social and institutional context of my dissertation, I now turn to placing myself within the IWP. In this section, I will briefly describe my methodological strategies and experiences over the course of 15 months of fieldwork. First, the nuts and bolts of the methodology. After obtaining IRB approval from the University of Arizona, I submitted a 9-page research proposal to the research branch of the Arizona Department of Corrections. I was able to lean on my past work and volunteer experience in ADC, as a mentor for incarcerated men and women at a Tucson non-profit, to expedite this process, and surprisingly (based on the extreme challenges I had heard other researchers having in gaining access), my project was immediately approved.

As per standard procedure, I was assigned a point-person in ADC who would guide me through setting up my research project in the Department. I happened to be assigned an

individual in the upper levels of ADC administration as my point-person. This meant that at the outset of my project, I was provided great institutional leeway, avoiding the struggle of reaching out to Wardens and guards who had no motivation to speak with me. Within weeks of starting my project, this point-person made a call to every single set of ADC officers serving on fire crews throughout the state, requiring them to come to the Correctional Officer Training Academy in Tucson, some traveling 4 or 5 hours, on a certain date and time to meet me. And, as he wrote in the email, “To be of any assistance Lindsey may need to achieve her project goals.”

Only in retrospect did I realize how lucky I was to be assigned such a high-level official as my research coordinator, given that many prison researchers, even if they gain approval from administration, will spend months or even years trying to gain access to a particular prison complex or yard. In my case, the complex staff were not given a choice by this upper-level administrator, and all I had to do was spend the first few months convincing the crews I chose to work with that I was not a spy from ADC administration, and that I was capable of doing the work. At that first meeting, I dressed up in a skirt and professional blouse, and quickly realized my mistake when all of the officers came dressed in their wildfire gear. There were only 3 other women in the room, 2 officers from the women’s prison fire crew, and one other who was the sole female guard working on a male fire crew in the entire state. I sat facing the 36 of them, 12 groups of prison guards, 3 per fire crew, and described how I expected my project to unfold—to visit the crews at the prison yard in between fires, and maybe go visit them in their fire camps if given access. Everyone’s arms were folded. After a lengthy silence, one Sergeant stated flatly, “If you’re gonna do this, you need to do this. Get your certs, come out, and fight fires with us.” Some of the guards smirked, others shifted in their seats. I surprised myself by saying, “OK, will do. Then what?”

I found the last available course to take to become a certified wildland firefighter and passed the written exam easily. The physical exam took more effort. I ended up passing what's called the "pack test" twice, once per fire season, which is comprised of strapping a 45-pound weight vest onto your back and walking (never running!) three miles in under 45 minutes. I trained for several weeks on the hills and mountains around Tucson and came in around 40 minutes both times. From there, my institutional barriers overcome, I conducted a purposive sampling strategy, by choosing 3 representative prison complexes in southern Arizona, which is the area of the state that is called to the most fires. I rotated between these three crews for 15 months, spending each workday with a given crew every two weeks (occasionally longer, if I was with a crew and we were called to a multi-week fire), living in rented apartments or guest rooms in the towns closest to that prison. On fires, I would camp alongside the crews, either in a cot outside or in my Toyota SUV, which served as my home, coffee shop, interview space, kitchen table, and bed for the majority of those 15 months. During regular workdays I would perform whatever work the crew was doing or conduct formal or informal interviews. During active fires, I would fight alongside the crews, taking pictures as I mostly tried to keep my head on straight and not catch on fire. I fought a total of 32 fires with the crews.

In addition to interviewing crewmembers and officers, I interviewed prison officials (such as Wardens and Deputy Wardens), and state Forestry officials. I also spent several days on various prison yards, both minimum and medium security, away from the fire crews to have some counterpoint to the experience of the IWP. For this perspective, I also drew on my previous non-profit work experience in prisons throughout Arizona prior to attending graduate school. In total, I conducted 46 formal, tape-recorded interviews across three different IWP crews. Each of these interviews lasted between 30 minutes and 1.5 hours. On each fire crew, about half of the

crewmembers consented to be formally recorded, and therefore I completed 31 interviews with prison wildland firefighters. Six of the nine correctional officers with whom I worked consented to be formally recorded. The other 9 interviews were with agency officials. All interviews with were transcribed, and those with prisoners, correctional officers, and ADC officials were made anonymous. I also gained consent to use data from the few individuals who have identifiable positions, like those in ADFFM.

I conducted hundreds of informal interviews throughout my 15 months working alongside crewmembers and others, and all of these individuals signed a consent form to be mentioned anonymously (i.e. “a prisoner stated” or “like one prison official described”) throughout the text. These conversations were jotted down in multiple notebooks, all of the notes from which were eventually typed up. My final methodological component, in addition to participant observation, informal, and formal interviewing, was photography. I used this in two ways. The first was to capture images of wildland firefighting that enrich the ethnographic moment in far better ways than words can. The second was more strategic, using a method called “photo elicitation,” in which I conducted informal focus groups with prison crewmembers after a certain event (a crazy fire, a long workday, a beautiful sunset) and showed them images I had taken, and used these images as a jumping off point for ethnographically-led discussions (conversations about risk and safety, labor concerns, or nature).

Throughout my 15 months of fieldwork, as I moved through each of my ethnographic methods, there were certain unexpected issues and questions that arose based on the particularities of my research. There was no template for understanding how to conduct qualitative research while fighting wildfires alongside incarcerated people, but there were scores of methodological analyses about ethnography I could turn to for guidance. Over time, I isolated

two major areas of concern my research addressed: 1) how to conduct ethically sound and emotionally relevant research in a fraught ethnographic context, and 2) how to approach, and exist in, overtly masculine spaces as a woman. In the next two sections I will briefly explore how I navigated these concerns, and over the course of the following chapters they will unfold through fieldnotes snippets and occasional ethnographic reflections.

Self-reflexivity and emotions in prison research

The first major methodological concern that arose during my fieldwork was to acknowledge my own positionality as a non-incarcerated researcher who wanted to engage emotionally in her project. To help explain this, I turn to my early days of fieldnotes. I found an entry that serves as an apt summary of two interrelated ethnographic moments: the movement of the crew from the prison yard to the fireline, and in that movement, the tension I held as an ethnographer doing research in such different spaces. A segment of this day's fieldnotes reads:

Fieldnotes. Early June, 2015. At the beginning of regular workdays, the crew files into the sallyport of their prison yard. This is a small square open-air antechamber tacked on to the corner of the yard, made up of barbed wire, that serves as the entry and exit for inmates and staff. Starting around 5 or 6 in the morning, every Monday-Thursday, work crew after work crew file into the sallyport and are counted, given their lunches, and shuttled on to white vans to pick up trash off the side of the highway, or prune flowers at the courthouse of the local town. The wildfire crew goes through the same motions as these other crews, but I noticed during my observation of the sallyport that there occurs a subtle transition that differentiates the fire crew from the others: a transition of bodily posture, camaraderie, and a general sense of selfhood.

I joined the crew in the sallyport today. Rex and Chief, two of the crew Officers driving the wildfire buggies, picked me up and we drove on complex to the yard where the crew was. The crew was called out of their sleeping quarters, ready to go, and filed into the small caged space. The exit process takes about 5-10 minutes, depending how fast or motivated the guard is. While we waited, the crewmembers who identify as Christian passed around scripture chosen by Cowboy, the de facto pastor of the group. Reading from a small scrap of paper with a bible verse scribbled down in pencil, Cowboy recited today's affirmation of grace and recovery. While that occurred, other guys start stretching, prepping their muscles for the physical exertion of today's project. Rex and Chief chatted with the guard manning the sallyport, figuring out logistics, seeing if anyone called out sick (not today).

The personal jokes between crewmembers got going at this point. Just yesterday, a new crewmember had started, and today the sallyport served as a space of sly initiation. Donald had almost quit on his first day, when one of the correctional officers did the obligatory first day

death hike with him, strapping 90 pounds on both their backs and hiking straight up the ridge of a mountain that was on the land where they were doing a project. But he made it, barely. He smoked, he had no teeth so it was hard to eat, he was in his 60s, he was homeless for years before going to prison. His body was not attuned. But he showed up again today, his second day, to some good-natured ribbing from other crewmembers. “Hey old man, yeah! You made it, you’re standing up!” One guy joked, slapping him hard on his back, causing him to waver on his feet a bit. Donald smiled a gummy smile and said, “I’m stronger than I look, fellas,” and raised his bicep like Popeye the Sailor. Everyone laughed. [Over the months, he would become known for his uncanny ability to hike 10 or 15 miles without stopping, cigarette in his mouth. But that day, his assertion was just a promise of strength.]

The most surreal part of my morning in the sallyport was how distinct a space it is (both literally and metaphorically—it means leaving), but also how in view it is to the rest of the prison yard. If leaving the prison is a daily ritual, then the sallyport is the ‘separation from the main group’ stage, but not really: this yard is flat and dry and made up mostly of dirt, which means that this small square fenced off area was in full view to all the other inmates who weren’t leaving that day: either because they were sick, or didn’t have the proper clearance to leave the complex and thus had to work on the yard itself. It felt almost cruel to keep glancing at the groups of men wearing orange sweatpants and white shoes, sitting on the picnic table or standing under the singular mesquite tree on the yard, all who were staring at the crew as they started to joke and nudge and pray. No one on the crew looked back towards them, but I did, several times.

As I wrote these fieldnotes during the first few weeks of my research, I became aware of the dual nature of my fieldsite—the prison and the fireline—and the tension therein. The prison yard is one of the few places in the world where daily life is nearly as routinized and restrictive as it is made out to be; this is not to say that prisoners simply fall in line, or become automatons, but the prison as an institution is designed to create a space of total control. On higher security yards, the sallyport doesn’t represent much of anything except maybe the way to get to the medical clinic, because leaving the prison isn’t an option. But in lower-level yards, the sallyport becomes a portal to something else, somewhere else. I would talk to newly minted firefighters on the day they had left the prison for the first time in 3, or 5, or 20 years, and they would explain the profound effect of leaving on every single one of their senses, let alone their psyches. The concept of coming and going—of *movement*—is one we as free people may not think twice about, but I sensed its power after that day in the sallyport when I could not stop glancing behind me to look at the individuals who would not get a chance to leave that day, and then turning back

to watch the fire crew gently push their way out of the holding cage, pile into the big wildfire buggies, and emerge just a few minutes down the road in their firefighting clothes, laughing, all physical markers of their incarceration gone.

There were myriad moments throughout my fieldwork where I had to confront my positionality as a researcher who is not, and has never been incarcerated, and with that the inherent privilege in my own movement in and out of the lives of those I worked with. At the end of each workday, the sallyport appeared in view again, but this time it meant that the crew had to ‘pop and squat,’ or be subject to an anal cavity search, before entering into the main space of the yard and going about the rest of their afternoons. Just like I spent some mornings observing the crew leaving the yard for the day, I also spent a few afternoons watching this invasive and dehumanizing reverse process, and when I turned to leave the prison and drive to my rented casita in the nearest town, I was wrenched with an observer’s—an interloper’s—guilt. Other prison researchers have similarly explored what feels like a sense of voyeurism into the inner-workings of the carceral system (Beyens et al. 2013, Hannem 2014), particularly because of our ability to write comfortably about it after the fact, in a space of our own choosing.

This is, of course, an established concern in anthropology and the social sciences more broadly, the intricate dance between obtaining access to oppressed groups while taking care to conduct research (and later, analysis and writing) ethically and reflexively. I agree with researchers who underscore the need for ethnographers to be transparent about their role—often emotionally charged—through the data collection, analysis, and writing process, in order to most rigorously explore the ethnographic questions they set out to answer (Liebling 1999, Crewe 2007). In my research this happened in two ways. First, I recognized that my positionality as a non-incarcerated person directly affected my research, and therefore my conclusions. At the

beginning of this chapter I wrote that crewmembers wouldn't discuss sexual assault with me; this is one of several aspects of prison life I do not understand, and my research must acknowledge the inherent limits to my understanding as a white, upper-middle class woman with no criminal record. There is a growing field in criminology called 'convict criminology,' which is criminological analysis from those who are currently or formerly incarcerated, and my work does not compare to their insight. Lorna Rhodes, one of anthropology's foremost prison researchers, approaches this issue,

“Fundamentally, no outsider/observer can ‘participate’ in the situation of the prisoner....the ethnographer may get past the tour to an extent, but prisons are pervaded by an interpersonal opacity that thwarts even those who govern, manage, or live in them. To forget one's position as an outsider is to be in danger, not only from interpersonal trouble of various kinds but, more enduringly, from alarming emotional and intellectual identifications. Here the ethnographic desire for alignment with one's subject(s) must be relinquished or at least bracketed” (Rhodes 2001: 76).

I only partially agree with Rhodes's assessment of non-prisoners doing prison ethnography. While I find it is necessary to acknowledge—both while conducting fieldwork and in the writing process—the distance, opacity, and possible elements of coercion that may arise in doing research as a non-prisoner in the prison context, I do not think this results in needing to bracket or 'relinquish' emotional alignment with prisoners. Instead, I believe the honest, reflexive accounting of the emotional nature of prison research can be incorporated into the ethnography to further the project's goals.

As such it is necessary to confront the inherently emotional nature of criminological research, with its competing challenge of humanizing a dehumanized population while addressing the hurt they caused others (Hannem 2014). In addition to the emotional labor (Hoschild 1977) required by my informants in sharing their stories, a different but similarly challenging form of emotional labor was required from me. I write about this emotional labor at

occasional points in my ethnography, not in order to myopically over-state my role in the project (Crewe 2007), but to highlight how moments of confusion, or pain, or disgust I felt led me to ask more interesting ethnographic questions. My initial research question was broad, to understand the meanings of work for skilled laborers in the prison system, but I was quickly thrown down more emotional rabbit holes like those raised in my first visit to the sallyport: what does freedom come to mean for men who leave the yard for the day, only to return? What feelings emerge for crewmembers when they change out of their prison clothes for weeks on end, and is this ultimately meaningful when they eventually have to put that orange garb back on again? How do I theorize the raw emotion I hear time and time again in my interviews, when crewmembers state that facing a wall of flames feels safer than being on the prison yard, because on the fireline they have family who will fight for their lives?

The fact that the IWP engendered these emotionally resonant questions is, in itself, an interesting analytical dimension to my dissertation. But also, based on my daily observations, the emotions of my informants, and occasionally my own, appear front and center as a critical site of reflection. They become an analytical lynchpin of the following chapters. Increasingly, the field of anthropology is acknowledging the need to incorporate the emotional aspects of ethnography into final analyses, breaking from the age-old dichotomy between rational/emotional, objective/subjective (Doucet and Mauthner 2007). Liebling, in her foundational piece on the need for emotionally engaged prison research, states,

“There is no doubt that, at its best, the careful ‘art of research’ is a deeply satisfying undertaking. Its joys and its pains are part of what makes it meaningful. Without some account of its real nature, we misrepresent the nature of knowledge. The very term ‘empiricism’ (the Greek word *emperia* means ‘experience’) refers to the view that all knowledge comes from experience, from perception and from sense-data” (Liebling 1999: 165).

Liebling argues that approaching prison sociologically must be synonymous with approaching it emotionally, while still retaining rigorous data collection methods and the acknowledgement of what position one has as a researcher. Over the course of disseminating my data, both to scholarly and non-scholarly audiences, I have been asked if my research methods are fully valid given that I have an obvious passion for maintaining the dignity of incarcerated people, and because I engaged in fieldwork that ended up resulting in emotionally close relationships with the incarcerated men I worked with. I flatly reject that anthropology must maintain emotional distance to be theoretically or methodologically sound. Like Liebling, I was able to achieve my qualitative data measurements while accepting the emotional nature of my fieldwork. Indeed, as later chapters will attest, I made emotions a centerpiece of the analysis. All ethnography is inherently relational, and thus emotionally engaging, and this is a boon for ethnographers. We are capable of placing ourselves within our texts responsibly, stating our inherent biases, our limitations, our unique vantages, and our personal connections, all which serve to increase the emotional resonance of our work.

Gender, wildfire, and prison research

I'll use another set of fieldnotes to summarize the peculiar challenges I faced as a woman fighting fires alongside incarcerated men. This excerpt is much shorter than the one in the previous section, and in its original form, was scrawled across the pages of a small notebook I carried in my pants pocket on fires. In massive, shaky block letters, signifying both my adrenaline and my stifled laughter, I wrote, "OMG I JUST SQUATTED TO PEE AND I LOOKED DOWN AND I WAS PEEING ON A RATTLESNAKE BUT I COULDN'T YELL BECAUSE THEN 20 DUDES IN PRISON WOULD COME RUN TO HELP ME AND THAT WOULD BE AWKWARD WOULDNT IT???"

I choose to include this relatively personal set of fieldnotes here in part because it's an apt description of the bewildering predicaments I found myself in, given the relatively extreme nature of my project. But I also include it because it isolates one of many moments of intimacy in the course of fighting a wildfire. Many things are stripped bare when out on the fireline for weeks at a time, including actual bodies. In moments like the one above, when I found myself hovering over a very upset rattlesnake, I was reminded of my positionality yet again—not only as a researcher, but as a woman deeply immersed in a masculine cultural landscape.

There has been a range of scholarship on the way women precariously enter into, or are barred from, normatively masculine workspaces like firefighting (Ainsworth and Batty 2014, Thurnell-Reed and Parker 2008). Research has similarly been conducted that describes the challenges women face when working inside of prisons (Farnworth 1992, South and Wood 2006). These researchers conclude that masculinity operates to exclude both women and non-hegemonically masculine men from participating in certain arenas through key strategies (questioning a person's physical strength or their ability to participate in 'locker room' discourse, or perhaps outright harassment or assault). Interestingly, however, there is little methodological literature on the ways female researchers are excluded from normatively masculine fieldsites. Feminist prison scholars rightly point out the lack of research conducted in female prisons, but the increasing number of female researchers studying women's carceral spaces has resulted in very few reflections of female researchers studying inside of male prison spaces. At the outset of my research, therefore, all I could do was wonder what challenges I would face.

A few pages back, I mentioned that meritocracy was a key tenet in wildfire fighting culture. Indeed, researchers who study women in male workplaces have found that this cultural tenet is one of the ways a woman can challenge gender norms. Showing that she is capable of the

work allows men to re-think who, generally, is capable of supposedly ‘masculine’ performance (Maleta 2009). I found this to be true during my fieldwork. The fact that I chose to actually fight wildfires alongside incarcerated crews showed two things to these individuals (relayed to me over the course of several months): 1) that I was not afraid to take on the challenge of hard, risky work, and 2) that I was interested enough in their lives to spend days and weeks with them, as opposed to just going in and out of the prison yard for interviews. On the very first wildfire I fought, which happened to be my first day of research, I hiked up the spiny, crumbling ridge of a mountain in 105-degree heat. My nerves, the exertion, and the heat got to me—I threw up within 30 minutes of hiking. All but one correctional officer hiked on to fight the fire; he and I sat on a rock while I drank Gatorade and recovered. As soon as I felt ready, we kept going. When I eventually stumbled up to the top of the ridge a few miles later, I was greeted with outright glee by the crew. On my first day, I had passed a test I didn’t know existed: I pushed myself hard, too hard, and that’s what this crew expected of their fellow members. From that point forward, I was “in.”

Not once did I feel excluded from working with this group of men, or any of the three crews, because of my gender (to be clear, I fully understand that decisions may have been made without my knowledge to shape my experience of certain tasks or fire events). Over 15 months, I felt that my ‘othered’ position was always as an outsider—the crew reminded me often that I wasn’t in prison, and that I wasn’t going to be a career firefighter (the scars, burnt pony tails, and hospital bills for kidney stones made this abundantly clear to me as well)—not as a woman. That isn’t to say that these crews operated with a non-biased approach. I’ll detail in later chapters the way prison wildland firefighting was clearly a patriarchal space, with individuals holding a bias

against the all-women prison fire crew in particular. But from my vantage as a researcher, lack of access to my fieldsite due to my gender was not a major concern.

However, there were other gendered concerns that arose during my research. Importantly, for me, these did not include my safety, although my life being in danger was of utmost concern for most people I talked to when I embarked on this project (sorry for the 15-month anguish, mom). The idea of a woman hiking 20 miles out into a forest with a group of all-male incarcerated people and prison guards, and camping there for weeks on end, presented a shocking, almost taboo research context. However, for reasons I can't fully or methodically describe, I was not afraid, nor was I ever given a reason to feel afraid. The concerns that arose for me were less overt, and again had to do with the power differentials between the crew and me. In short, and in retrospect what I realize was patronizing and assumptive, I was afraid to exert femininity lest I create a distraction or temptation for IWP crewmembers. Based partially on directives from ADC, but also from this fear, I felt a compulsion to perform masculinity in as many ways as I could to avoid any awkward encounters with crewmembers. As a person who in daily life often has painted nails, wears makeup, and wears skirts and dresses, I made every attempt possible to avoid these markers of femininity.

This is custom for all non-prisoners entering the prison space. Wives and girlfriends of incarcerated people will be sent away from visitation without seeing their loved ones if their shirts are too low cut or their pants too tight. As gendered norms are put under a magnifying glass in the carceral context, there is a fear of women's sexuality in prison, coupled with the fear of the uncontrollable sexual nature of men. It took time for me to approach this critically. Because of my previous work inside of prisons and because of the strong suggestion from the guards of the IWP to wear only my fire clothes around the prison crews, I heeded this fear. I was

also told, and followed, the directive to not physically touch any crewmember over the course of 15 months. Of course, sometimes on the fireline this would be impossible—one crewmember helped put my burning pants-leg out by bear-hugging my leg, another caught me under the arms when I took a tumble down a rocky hillside. But even as I came to know the crew, I was impeded by typical physical displays of intimacy—slaps on the back, high-fives, or hugs—that crewmembers showed each other.

Over time, I was able to reflect on my own initial assumptions about my presence as a ‘distraction,’ and my militant obeisance of shielding my femininity. I came to understand these choices as an attempt to maneuver through a complicated social system. As an anthropologist, it is interesting that it may take us a little bit of time to remember that our own interactions with our informants are beholden to the same social structures that we so easily deconstruct in others, and moreover that we are capable of thinking critically about how we choose to move through our fieldsites, and to choose to encounter those structures of power in creative ways. In my case, I challenged myself to move past my initial assumptions about what disturbances my presence would cause, and instead I learned to adapt to the growing familiarity we felt with one another. Essentially, as reductive as it sounds, I found it subversive and empowering to see each crewmember as a full and complex person who, believe it or not, had interacted with a woman before.

I never directly challenged any of ADC’s orders about physical contact or dress code, but after 6, 9, or 12 months fighting fires with these individuals, I certainly presented a more full version of myself to them, and shared in the vulnerable, funny, and inherently corporeal nature of firefighting alongside them. The first thing I did after quickly disengaging from my snake encounter was to run and tell them the funny story, and they howled. As I discussed in the

previous section, I chose to incorporate the emotional nature of prison research into my questions, my reflections, and ultimately my analysis. I did this because I was led to it by the very data itself—what I saw, and what I heard. Similarly, I chose to face the gendered power dynamic of conducting fieldwork as a woman within a deeply masculine space. The push and pull of this dynamic—having a certain power as a researcher, yet also the institutionally designed lack of power as a woman in a patriarchal bureaucracy—led me to think critically about this dynamic, challenge it in my daily interactions and shared intimacies with the crew, and eventually incorporate it into my ethnographic reflections.

Conclusion

The renowned historian G. Sykes is known for the phrase ‘the pains of imprisonment’ (1958). He writes that while prisons shifted their punishment practices away from bodily suffering throughout the 20th century, incarcerated people still suffered great pain. He describes this pain as a series of deprivations—of liberty, autonomy, and heterosexual relationships, to name a few. These ‘pains’ are still referenced in the literature, particularly because they have only become truer throughout the 20th and 21st century. With the reflexive turn in the social sciences, prison scholars began writing about the pains of *doing* criminological research. To bear witness, often without the ability to enact structural change, to the deprivations and inhumanity of incarceration can be harrowing (Beyens et al. 2013). Liebling describes the necessity for researchers to address this pain, while also recognizing that incarcerated people are capable of living entire lives inside of prison, incorporating pain into their daily practices while not necessarily succumbing to it (Liebling 1999). Yet, although Liebling argues that we should understand these ‘pains’ in the context of the full emotional lives of prisoners, the literature

almost always positions emotion as synonymous to pain for researchers, because deprivation is the thing a researcher is most directly confronted with when they enter the carceral fieldsite.

This leads me to my final methodological concern, and the one I held in greatest tension as I conducted my fieldwork. There was no question that I encountered pain as Sykes and others have eloquently described it. During my interviews and over months of informal conversations, incarcerated people shared stories with me about the trauma of incarceration, or the trauma that occurred in their lives that partially explains their presence on the prison yard. I was confronted with ADC policies and ideologies that shocked me in their inhumanity and degradation. But in the open spaces of the IWP, where I spent the majority of my time, this inhumanity was challenged. I make this a lynchpin of my theoretical argument because of how much the IWP felt like a site of resistance against the daily pains of imprisonment, however subtle or ultimately encased in the prison regime the program is. How could I reconcile the joys of so many moments during my fieldwork with the pains of imprisonment that led me to study this very program?

I sat alongside a group of prisoners on a ridge of a mountain peak I had never visited prior to conducting fieldwork, in a pine forested wilderness that had become a second home for the fire crew and me over a summer of Forest Service contract work. There was no cell phone service for miles; the guards had to take turns driving 30 minutes away once a day to call the prison complex and check in. It was the height of summer and the air was so saturated with monsoon moisture that when you looked around, the trees and grass looked painted in oil. I had joined a small group of prisoners who had decided to take a post-dinner walk to watch the sunset from a vantage that spilled out down the mountain, far beyond to the east, into the flat plains of New Mexico. We found a spot to sit that was next to a blackberry bramble and we ate them until our fingers turned purple. Two crewmembers hiked a little further on, saw a mama black bear

and her cub on the other side of the ridge, and turned quickly around to rejoin us, eyes wide and laughing in awe. We sat and watched the sun dip golden over the horizon of another state. As we each nestled into our patch of grass, the older toothless prisoner from the sallyport, Donald, sighed. I asked him what the sigh was for.

“Do you think this might be what freedom is?” Donald replied. I laughed, and so did another crewmember, Stevie, who was standing and mindlessly playing with a long blade of sawgrass next to him.

“What do you mean? We’re in prison, remember?” Stevie replied.

Donald thought for a minute, and then tried again. “What I mean is...even before I was locked up, I didn’t know about this view. I didn’t feel this peace I feel right now. I’m not free,

but I *feel* free, just in this moment, you get what I’m saying?” Stevie stood silent. A third crewmember reached for a blackberry and squished it between his fingers. The juice dripped on the forest floor.

After a five second pause, Stevie replied. “Yeah, I get that. I actually feel pretty fucking good right now too. Maybe, you know, that’s all that freedom means?”

His voice up-ticked into a question, and the moment stretched into silence and eventual twilight. We hiked back to camp. It was also a moment that profoundly affected me as a researcher, grappling

with the very question that Donald and Stevie considered. The daily moments of the IWP were



Figure 0.4. Stevie at sunset.

so inherently different than the moments I spent on the prison yard, and this tension was held for me as a researcher and for participants of the program as well. Over the course of conducting research and of writing this ethnography, I struggled with addressing the duality of my project: the pains and joys, the deprivation and fulfillment, the prison yard and the wildfire. In many ways, I had to leave this tension as a question, like we did on that mountain ridge. I ask, with no real possibility of answering fully, how moments of peace or feelings of freedom can help to challenge the overwhelming pains of incarceration. But, in the following chapters, I use my 15 months of observations and data collection to start to address this complexity, the experiential paradox, of the IWP.

Interlude 1: A day on a minimum-security prison yard

Over 15 months I collected observational data on various prison yards for a few days at a time, in order to describe the daily realities of prison for individuals who don't go and fight wildfires during their incarceration. Below is a full-length largely un-edited entry from my fieldnotes. They were written three months into fieldwork. I include this piece in my dissertation because it summarizes much of the complexities of modern imprisonment that I heard about in interviews and observed during my research. The key elements to this complexity are: racial violence; drugs; profit and debt; strict hierarchies; and the difficulties of maneuvering through the bureaucracy of the Arizona Department of Corrections (ADC). I present a day during my fieldwork where a prison official and a group of prisoners enter into an intense negotiation, operating in a decidedly 'grey area' of ADC policies. I do so to describe the daily negotiations that occur on the prison yard based primarily on violence and prisoner commodification. I do so in order 1) explain the most prevailing social realities of Arizona's carceral system, and 2) to ultimately present the Inmate Wildfire Program as a space that is profoundly distinct from such realities.

It is necessary to address two analytical concerns in order to appropriately frame the fieldnotes that follow. The first issue to address regards race as it operates in the penal system. It has long been established in the literature that 'race' does not exist as a biological concept, but instead is "a signifier of meanings ascribed to perceived biological and cultural traits" (Walker 2016: 1053). In this way, race should be understood as a sociohistorical process by which categories are created and upheld through ideological processes (Omi and Winant 1994). As race is both a "cultural symbol" and a "structural phenomenon," racial projects "are attempts to create meaning structures around racial categories and simultaneously organize resources according to

those categories” (Walker 2016: 1053). In Arizona’s prisons, racial projects range from the segregation of prison yards by various races (as defined over time by prisoners, guards, and the penal administration [Goodman 2008]) to the existence of gangs based on racial affiliation.

Racial categories quickly become reified through the daily racial projects of imprisonment, and social patterns are fundamentally shaped by such categories. Specifically, violence becomes a normative way to mete out adherence to racial segregation and race-based gang activity (Walker 2016). Additionally, social groups are formed hierarchically, with each level of the social group holding a title (i.e. a “head” or “figurehead” being the de facto leader of a particular prison yard’s race). This creates a very tightly controlled social system, with little room for individual identity expression or interpersonal relationship building outside of mandates based on racial categories. In the fieldnotes below, I reference several race-based terms that, outside of the penal system, would be considered problematic. However, given that these are direct fieldnotes, whatever terms I use are ones I heard from prisoners or prison officials that day. Here, I engage with a trenchant anthropological conundrum: presenting a fraught aspect of a fieldsite in a straightforward manner, while understanding the sociocultural and ideological concerns behind such a presentation.

The second analytical concern regarding these fieldnotes is in the concept of negotiation. We will see that the Deputy Warden engages directly with leaders of the races on the prison yard, and that both sides want and negotiate for a specific outcome. For the purpose of this dissertation, this process of negotiation is even more important to understand as a reality of incarceration than the shocking racial segregation of the prison yard. In later chapters, I will describe how individuals on the prison wildfire program negotiate their identities in creative ways that reject the punitive nature of the carceral system. However, in this vignette, a very

different type of negotiation occurs; this type is much more common, and is one that cements certain negative aspects of incarceration. Particularly, it reifies the economic imperatives of interaction between prisoners and staff, which ultimately end up commoditizing incarcerated people in insidious ways. In other words, in the vignette below, prisoners are not considered people, per se, but chips on a poker table, potential assets lost or gained, or means to bureaucratically determined ends. This is ultimately dehumanizing, and I present it in order to underscore just how easily these types of daily negotiations morph into months- and years-long processes of the degradation of personhood behind bars. Understanding this view of carceral negotiation allows us to see the other, identity-level forms of negotiation I discuss in relation to the prison fire program as particularly meaningful in comparison.

With these considerations in mind, this set of fieldnotes should be considered an opening to the next chapter. There, I theorize how incarceration shapes the daily realities of prisoners in deleterious ways, specifically as it relates to individual- and group-level identities. On this particular day on the prison yard, I bore witness to a small set of a seemingly infinite number of social challenges, adaptations, and negotiations for both incarcerated people and those working inside the prison. I found that this recurring loop of social strategizing shapes all matter of life inside, with mostly negative effects for those incarcerated.

Fieldnotes. Early August, 2015. I was given a piece of cake when I walked into the meeting room in a ramshackle building that serves as the headquarters of the Manzo Unit. No one told me what it was for—a birthday, maybe—but it was covered in syrupy cherries and had pink and white frosting globbed onto the side. It was 7:30 am, and I was on Complex rather than with the fire crew up in the mountains, so I could get a glimpse at a day on this yard.

In the room were the Deputy Warden, the Captain, and a few high ranking Sergeants. They were sitting around a large table, eating cake, discussing the day's problem: heroin, and the violence that surrounds it. They had no hesitation jumping back into the matter at hand after I was introduced—right away, the Deputy Warden (DW) said to me, “What we’re trying to figure out is how much we want you to see...how much we want you to know about Corrections.” I responded that I would be happy to see however much they let me. They explained that there has been more dope than usual coming into the Unit, and that the race who controls the sale of this heroin are the Chicanos.

The problem was not the heroin itself—it was openly admitted by everyone around the table that there was no way to stop drugs inside. Instead, the issue was that people of all races were buying dope from the Chicanos on debt, and some people were unable to repay their debts when the time came. This pissed the Chicanos off, which in turn resulted in the other races being pissed off at them. Essentially, these individual debts were ballooning into race-based debt wars on the yard. The ensuing inter-racial violence could erupt at any moment, and was getting close today. Guys had started walking around the yard in groups of 3-4, called “rolling deep,” as opposed to just by themselves or in pairs. Officers noticed this over the past few days, and because rolling deep is usually a precursor to an outbreak of widespread racial violence—and in the worst case, a riot—on the yard, something had to be done.

What the Deputy Warden had decided to do was hold a meeting. It would be unlike the meeting we were currently in, an official one made up of correctional leaders of this particular yard. The meeting that was next on the docket was between the DW and the heads of the unit's four major races. The meeting's agenda would have one item: prisoners and cops reaching a deal to quell any further dope-based violence. The DW looked at me and asked, “Do you want to sit

in?” I was shocked that I would be able to be present at such a meeting, its very occurrence a definitively grey area of ADC policy, but I said yes. I realized that when I first arrived, and the DW was attempting to figure out ‘how much he wanted me to know about Corrections,’ what he was essentially saying was how much of this grey area he wanted me to be privy to. Policies bend and twist in ADC, sometimes for the safety of the prisoners and the staff, and sometimes just to get through the day. In this instance, it was both. He made the decision to let me in on this particular bend and twist. He told me to finish my cake, which I pretended to do, flattening the sickeningly sweet frosting down into the Styrofoam plate. As I folded the plate into the trashcan, I noticed that someone had written “Stay Curious!!!” on the whiteboard.

I walked through a monitored hallway that led to the door that opened onto the dirt lot of the Manzo Unit. Walking onto a prison yard is an unsettling experience. Before you enter, you can move about freely, and after you’ve arrived, you are surveilled. There is a buzz of a metal door, then a short walk past an ante-yard that is devoid of anything but a few flowers and some gravel, then an opening of a large metal gate reaching 15 feet up, topped with barbed wire. Once the gate is opened and shut, you are inside the yard itself. There is a large open area for recreation—there’s a basketball court, ping pong tables, a workout area—and surrounding this open area lie the various buildings for sleeping, medical, chow, and programs. In general, buildings at this prison complex are pretty shabby. Most of them look like they’re made of plywood painted over in dull bluish-grey, with hand-painted numbers indicating what building is which. There are men in orange meandering from one building to another, but just a few of them, as most are working. On this Unit on this day, there were about 700 prisoners. Three hundred or so were let off of the Complex to work, another 200 were working on the yard itself, and the rest either could not, or simply weren’t, working (because of paperwork issues, school, release dates

approaching or visits from family). Those men, and the total of 11 correctional officers who work on Manzo, would be my companions for the day.

We walked into the visitation building, which is set closer to the main entrance of the Unit. It was dark inside—there was no visitation currently happening, so it was empty and the lights were off. Towards the back of the building was the kid’s play area, and the walls were adorned with hand painted images of giraffes, butterflies, and songbirds flitting around in a blue sunny sky. Tucked into the play area there were four plastic tables with four chairs surrounding each. Sitting in those chairs were the heads of each major race on the Unit—the Whites, Mexican nationals, Chicanos, and Blacks. Each race had two members represented, except for the whites, who had three. They had arrived early to the meeting, which surprised the Deputy Warden. We, along with the Officers who had attended the earlier meeting, walked in and found seats at the tables close to the heads. The tension in the room was palpable. Most of the prisoners had poker faces on, and only one actually made niceties with any of the Officers—a head of the Chicanos, who has been in prison for over 20 years, and has “grown up” alongside the Officers with whom he was about to meet, asked how things were going. But that was about it for pleasantries. After the group was assembled— 9 prisoners, 5 Officers, and me—the meeting began.

“This right here is a real fucking town hall. This is when shit gets worked out,” the Deputy Warden started. He wasted no time getting to the reason of the meeting, and wasted no falsities on his frustration with the increasing drug usage and violence on the yard. For about 10 minutes, he explained to the figureheads his position in all of this, which was essentially: you respect me, I respect you, we all get out of here alive. He swore liberally, with fuck being every other word and shit every third. He got some of the figureheads to nod their head at certain points of his speech, like when he described that prison isn’t what it used to be, that there can’t

be unmitigated violence anymore, that the younger kids who are coming into the yard don't understand how authority works, and that it is up to them, as leaders, to teach them.

He wanted two things from this meeting: 1) For the heads of each of the races to tell their underlings how to approach violence and the transaction of drugs. Racial figureheads determine the protocols for the rest of their race—a huge number of people, in some cases— in regards to selling drugs, handling unpaid debts (for drugs or gambling or anything else), and general interaction. The DW expressed that the figureheads needed a tighter grip on the hotheaded underlings who want to prove something, so they don't wind up beating the shit out of a debtor to the point where he ends up dead or in the hospital. 2) For the race heads to communicate with each other, so that everyone knows who wants to buy dope without the money to pay for it, so that these problems don't escalate in the first place. An example: Let's say R-Dogg, a member of the Mexican Nationals, continually buys heroin off the Chicanos and has accrued 300 dollars worth of debt, and then can't pay it. What the DW wants is for the heads of the Mexican Nationals to talk with the heads of the Chicanos to make sure R-Dogg doesn't buy any more dope. R-Dogg will then get beat, but it will be a 1-on-1 fight between him and another member of his own, to remind him that an unpaid debt is a sign of disrespect for his race. This, as opposed to a group of 3 Chicanos who take a sock full of gravel to R-Dogg's skull, as an *ex post facto* act of revenge.

What the Deputy Warden said he was offering was an olive branch to the figureheads, a chance to communicate and work something out man-to-man. More specifically, he was looking for a dénouement to this particular situation. In the process, he openly condoned both the sale of drugs and the use of violence. He informed me afterwards that there was simply no way to stop either on this yard. The turnover of prisoners on Manzo is immense, as it is the gateway yard

from higher security to lower security ones, and with scores of new prisoners coming in and out each month, the flow of drugs and cell phones and other illicit items is inevitable. What the DW cared about was the escalation of violence because of these items. He sat on a plastic chair, with his elbows on his parted knees, occasionally standing up and walking past the figureheads to the trashcan to spit his chew, explaining that what he needed from these men was an exchange of respect, an understanding between official and unofficial law enforcement on the yard. He needed them to talk to one another, to control their underlings, and to keep the violence and drugs at a level that passes as an undercurrent and doesn't roar over the yard like a tsunami.

After his speech, he asked if they had any questions. A Chicano member expressed his frustration at the amount of movement between yards, and because of this, it was hard to control his race. A Black figurehead echoed the Chicano—it was hard to keep track of who was moving to what unit when, and wanted some kind of advance warning from ADC so he was able to keep tabs on the comings and goings of his race. Another black figurehead reminded the DW of the stakes of ADC cracking down on the sale of dope. He noted that the buck doesn't stop with them—even though they run their races on this Unit, there are even higher-ups for each of these races on other Units, in the form of gangs like the Aryan Brotherhood, Border Brothers, and the Mexican Mafia, who will come calling if the heroin money from Manzo doesn't come in. The DW acknowledged this fact, and answered openly and honestly about the policies in place, those that he has control of and those he doesn't, and said he would do what he could to ensure that the figureheads would be the ones on the ground keeping things under control.

What I witnessed was none other than a business meeting, a bargaining between two sides of the same operation. Later in the day, another Officer said about prison, "It's a corporation, and we are all trying to make it run." I've never read *The Art of the Deal*, but I

imagine Mr. Trump would be impressed with the maneuverability of both groups at the table. There was give and take. There were no platitudes, but there was a certain form of respect between prisoner and cop—what everyone that day described to me as the kind of respect valued on a prison yard, a kind that recognizes and upholds the transaction of money and goods to the highest order. In essence, what the DW did was acknowledge the primacy of a prison economy as it operates: through races, in the form of drugs and debt.

After the few figureheads spoke their piece, the DW again insisted that they needed to get their underlings in order and maintain communication between themselves, and of course, with him. They adjourned. The prisoners walked out of the visitation hall—past the painted giraffes and butterflies—back out onto the yard, and immediately got to work. The heads of the different races perfunctorily shook one another's hands and then scattered into each individual race, devising game plans of how they would talk to each of their respective underlings, manage them, keep violence to a non-paperwork level. The great apparatus of what's broadly called Prison Politics was set into motion, and as it moved, the Deputy Warden and I walked the yard to hear its machinations whirl.

We spent the next few hours, until lunchtime at the chow hall at 12 p.m., with our ears to the ground, checking to see if his Town Hall meeting worked. We visited two sleeping quarters, so that the Deputy Warden could have face-to-face interactions with various members of the races who might pose a problem to this newly imposed order. Because there are so many men getting transferred from the medium-security Unit on this Complex, where racial politics are much more extreme and often more violent than on lower security yards, this Unit holds much of the same powder-keg racial explosiveness, as seen in the heroin debt situation currently happening. The DW wanted to see how these newly arrived prisoners would interact with him, to

assess whether they would comply with the deal he had just hammered out with the figureheads a bit ago. The DW introduced himself to a newly arrived Chicano prisoner in one of the sleeping quarters, an 80-person dorm in which men sleep in tiny cubicles with a 3 foot U-shaped wall, which serves as their personal space (think of the drabest cubicle-style office place you can imagine, drop the cubicle walls to waist-height, add a twin-sized bed to the desk you're picturing in each, and that's space in which many of Arizona's prisoners, including the wildland crew, live and sleep). The Chicano prisoner who had just transferred was high-up in the hierarchy of his race on the medium-security yard. The DW introduced himself, asked the prisoner how he liked Manzo so far. The man responded curtly but politely, and we walked away. I asked the DW what that interaction meant, and he explained that because the prisoner had actually spoken to him and made eye contact, it meant he was willing to work with the Officers—not in any meaningful way yet, like the figureheads did today, but in the sense that he most likely wouldn't cause any major disruptions to the politics at hand.

The Deputy called his job a chess game—he tries to think three moves ahead of each prisoner. He leaks bits of information to the prisoners, who then return information back, and the system of covert communication and maneuvering continues. Another Sergeant I spoke with, while the DW was busy listening to the complaints of a prisoner who wanted his compliance level raised enough to have a long birthday visitation with his family, put the situation this way: “Have you ever seen the movie *Ants*? At the end, the ants realize there's a shit ton more of them than there are grasshoppers, and they finally figure out they can take over. Here there are 737 ants, and 11 grasshoppers. And us grasshoppers don't carry guns. If there's a way to communicate with these guys, to gain enough respect with them, then guess what? The ants won't win at the end.”

On the surface, throughout the next few hours, the town hall that was held earlier in the morning seemed to be working. As we walked through various sleeping quarters and across the yard, racial groups seemed to be talking amongst themselves, which meant word was being passed along. I sat at the chow hall and watched a long, snaking single-file line of prisoners extend out of the doorway, organized starkly in order of race (Whites first, then Chicanos, then Mexican Nationals, and then Blacks), to get their sack lunch. As they passed by, I saw occasional black eyes and broken noses, and a few guys who walked gingerly due to “body shots,” or beatings that occurred under their clothes so the Officers would be less likely to notice. The evidence of the violence that the Deputy Warden wanted to quell was there.

He, along with other officers, explained to me that the strategy taken this day was rare. Not many Deputy Wardens or Captains will engage in racial politics in such a way as to condone it with strict parameters, and instead will deal with the aftermath punitively. But because of this particular DW’s experience, approach, and attitude towards the ADC’s slow-moving bureaucratic response when it comes to the prison politics, he decided his actions were necessary. At the end of his shift, as we walked back through the gate, the ante-yard, the metal door, the building, and finally out into the parking lot, I asked him how he felt it all went. He explained that, for many of the guys on this yard, their sentences were coming to an end, and the last thing he wanted to see was a bunch of violent crimes tacked on to their sentences because of the heroin trade that will happen no matter what. He just wanted to manage the situation at hand. Matter-of-factly, he said, “I just wanted today to go smoothly,” and then added, “I wanted to get home on time today. And I want these guys to get home on time too.”

Chapter 3: Situating the IWP in the modern prison regime

Dog days of summer, and being treated like dogs

There were some days that the work was so tedious, so far from exciting, that it was laughable when I thought about the people I knew at home who might be saying, “Lindsey? Oh, she’s out fighting wildfires; she might even be battling the flames this very second!” For two weeks, I had been working with a crew who was assigned a contract to clear out brush and overgrown mesquite trees from a large swath of state-owned land. It was next to a Walmart parking lot on the outskirts of a rural Arizona town. The acreage was enough that the project spanned months, even split between two prison fire crews. At 5:30 a.m. the crew left the prison yard, changed out of their oranges, and drove 45 minutes to the town, where the officers parked the fire buggies on the already-steaming asphalt. The crew moved robotically through the daily safety and weather briefing, a required procedure for each crew at the beginning of a workday. They sluggishly filled up their water storage packs, lined up in a lazy formation, and walked into the brush.

I took stock of what our view was for the day. A half-mile in front of where the crew had just started working was a loud two-lane highway. To their left was a baseball field with the only grass in town, swarming with mosquitos. To their right was the Walmart. For the next six hours, the crewmembers would have to pick their way through windblown trash to cut down the prickly, dry vegetation that could ostensibly catch on fire, although everyone agreed the risk was low and this was mostly a beautification project done under the guise of ‘firewising.’ Nobody was happy. A few crewmembers were nervous about finding drug paraphernalia in the brush, triggering their addictions. For similar reasons, others hated the hundreds of beer bottles and cans they had to toss out of their way to cut down the trees. Not one part of this assignment was

meaningful or glamorous. Although their oranges were absent, there was no question that I was observing straight-up prison labor.

It was the middle of June. The sun grew unbearably hot by mid-day, made worse by being surrounded by asphalt. When the temperature hit 110 degrees at 11 a.m. the crew started dragging. They would walk back from the yellowing brush to collect more water, over and over, because they kept running out. Sammy, a newly minted blue helmet, was working his squad in an area of the brush closest to the trucks and would emerge frequently to get a drink and update the officers, who had given up working and were squatting down in the foot-wide sliver of shade the buggy cast on the ground. Sammy had just made the rank of squad boss a few months ago. A little bit older, with an imposing physical presence and a pre-prison work history of running construction crews, he was a natural choice of succession when the previous blue helmet had been released from prison a couple months before. Sammy didn't necessarily want the job, though. He hated the responsibility, or more accurately, he hated being in the middle. The middle of the bureaucracy, the grind, the machine that seemed explicitly designed for punishment on days like today.

Sammy was one of the most forthright crewmembers I got to know over my months working with the IWP. He minced no words about prisons, prison labor, and his role in it. When I asked him in our interview what he would do when he got out of prison in a few years, his answer was surprisingly honest. "I'll stay out until my dad dies, then who knows, I'll probably get in trouble and come back for another visit," he said, 'another visit' referencing the several times he'd been incarcerated in various prisons across the country over the last few decades. He registered my eye-widening at the response, and then laughed. "What, you think I'm just magically gonna become a good, rule-following citizen? I know who I am, and I'll do what I

need to do to stay out and be with my Pops for his last years. I'm not worried about having a good time after that, wherever that shit ends up leadin' me."

His honesty made him a good leader for the crew, with his 10-person squad knowing exactly what they'd get from him. He drove them hard, rarely doling out compliments like other blue helmets. Sometimes his squad grumbled about Sammy loving the 'foreman' role a little too much. But they also respected him, and came to learn that his honesty let them follow suit, talking earnestly about their experiences at work on a given day, or about prison generally. Sammy's attitude allowed me to talk with him at length about the harsh realities of prison life. These conversations would often begin with him approaching me at random, with a question about what I thought I knew of incarceration. "So, Lindsey," I would hear from behind me as I was writing notes or chatting with officers, and I knew Sammy was taking a break and ready to chat. His questions were often deep and open-ended, like, "Are you writing about how you think this is slave labor?", or, "What's your opinion on book banning on the yard?" He'd listen to my response, often laughing gently at my ignorance of the on-the-ground realities of prison life, and then fill me in.

For example, we once spent hours during work breaks discussing our opinions about private versus public prisons, since he had spent many years in both. I assumed he would hate the private ones, given that we had previously agreed on the moral bankruptcy of making a profit from a human being's incarceration. But when we finally got around to his opinion, he told me bluntly, "Yeah, so I'm a dollar sign to them. On the one hand that's disgusting, it's criminal, *they* should be the ones locked up or even worse for that. But you know what else that means? I'm a *customer*. If shit is about profit, then guess what? I get TV, I get hot meals. They don't want bad reviews. They want status quo, and status quo is really good [as a prisoner]." These

conversations were enlightening, mostly because they incorporated current debates in prison scholarship into his own personal experience, sometimes affirming these debates, or sometimes adding complexity or contradiction to them.

One area that Sammy felt strongly about, though, that directly aligns with nearly all of the literature on the pains of imprisonment (Sykes 1958), is the perception of prisoners in the outside world. As straightforward as he was about his own actions leading to his (past, present, and future) imprisonment—addiction, a predilection for challenging the “finer points” of the law—he would become furious at the thought of being considered *just* a prisoner. His most biting criticisms of his squad came when he called them ‘inmates’ or when he would holler, “Quit acting like an inmate!” for the world to hear. The word takes on a slur-like quality when one incarcerated person uses it against another, because it signals that they have acquiesced to the guards, wardens, and the whole regime that keeps them locked away. Over the course of 15 months, I noted the multiple indexicality of the word ‘inmate’—fire crew guards wouldn’t call their crewmembers that until they got back on complex, crewmembers would only call themselves it self-deprecatingly, or it would be used as Sammy did, as an insult. The word indicates that incarcerated people have a deep knowledge of their own dehumanization: to be an inmate is to be an Other, and this other is less than human (Simmons 2011).

Sammy wanted to talk about this subject on that early June day in the Walmart parking lot. I was sitting in my truck, trying to figure out how to work the radio the officers had bestowed upon me as an ‘unofficial crewmember,’ when I heard Sammy walk out of the brush, muttering under his breath. He was in a mood. I looked out past my truck and asked him how his day was going. He began, as always, with no preamble. “Did you ever read the part of the IRPG about us *inmates*, Lindsey?” I wondered if he was bringing it up because he had used that word just now,

to insult one of his crewmembers he was frustrated with, or if the idea of prisoner perception was just on his mind. I told him I hadn't read the IRPG thoroughly since last fire season. This is the Incident Response Pocket Guide, a critical component of the wildland toolkit, that every certified firefighter is required to carry at all times on fires. They are quizzed often on its components, which include information like wildfire types, common safety hazards, incident chains of command, and other key operations. Sammy was referencing Appendix 28, titled "Use of Inmate Crews on Fires." Because the IRPG is used nationally for all wildland firefighters, there is a one-page summary of how individuals should interact with prison crews. Some of the commands read,



Figure 0.1. Sammy looks at the IRPG.

- Contact with inmates should be done through the corrections officer-in-charge in camp.
- Contact with inmates should be done through the forest crew supervisor on the fireline.
- Consult the officer-in-charge before giving supervision to crew members over fellow inmates.
- Keep relationships with inmates on a business basis. Do not play cards with, carry messages for, bring gifts to, accept gifts from, make purchases for, etc., the inmates.

Prior to Sammy bringing this up with me, I hadn't thought critically about this section of the IRPG. But for whatever reason, that day, he felt the need to talk at length about the implications of non-incarcerated

wildland firefighters needing a handbook entry for working with *people like him*. As I listened to Sammy's particularly lengthy screed, I was able to formulate a much bigger picture about the

way many Inmate Wildfire Program (IWP) crewmembers felt positioned in relation to the culture of wildland firefighting as a whole. There are several repercussions of this relationship for the continual barrage on identity and selfhood incarcerated people must contend with.

“Check this out, OK,” Sammy stated as he pulled out the IRPG and walked over to me. One by one he read the bullet points out loud, emphasizing certain words, particularly ‘inmate.’ He laughed caustically at the last bullet point specifically, about the limited relationships other firefighters were supposed to have with prison crews. “You know what they should call this? A how-to guide to deal with sub-humans,” he stated flatly. I cringed at his cruel self-reference, but stayed quiet. “This is shit. It’s totally shitty! They treat us like trash. Don’t they know we’re out here doing this goddamn work too? That we’re PEOPLE, TOO?” His voice raised into a crescendo at this point, and then he stopped himself. He laughed in a way that signaled he was done talking for now, and I laughed too, uncomfortably. I learned that Sammy’s protest against this page of the IRPG was met with similar unease from others: some felt indignation, while others approached it more fatalistically. Through the rest of my fieldwork period, I made sure to ask how prison firefighters felt about the inherent separation between them and non-prison crews.

The majority of these conversations ended up with crewmembers describing what it felt like to be doing a thing ‘free’ people do, while always knowing that this freedom is not theirs. On one fire, we spent the night at a close-by Forest Service ranger station, bunking down on cots inside of the engine bays, or outside on the asphalt, anywhere we would fit. Once the Forest Service crews assigned to that station left for the night, a crewmember joked, “Look at that, the people get to go to sleep in their houses, and us dogs get to sleep in the garage.” At the end of those long, hard workdays, prison crewmembers were starkly reminded that they were

categorized, beholden to different rules, restrictions, and perceptions than other firefighters on the line.

In the upcoming chapters, I will explore the myriad ways that participation in the IWP provides incarcerated people a space to challenge certain pains of incarceration (Sykes 1958). But in order to adequately describe how powerful this experience is, it is first necessary to spend some time explaining the world of prison from which these incarcerated wildland firefighters come, and to which they return, at the end of a workday or at the end of a fire. The experience of the IWP is a paradox—at once exploitative and meaningful for those who participate. The next three chapters will explore the ways individuals can create meaning and selfhood even with the inherent exploitation found in prison. But, in this chapter I will explain the IWP as part of that exploitative process. It's hard to imagine a Forest Service Hot Shot crew regularly being asked to weed-whack a patch of scrubland next to a parking lot while getting paid \$0.50 an hour to do so. Indeed, imagining that crew fighting a fire for a dollar an hour is even more laughable. The IWP was founded, and persists, primarily because of the cost-savings of prison labor. And although it was never explicitly described to me as such, I believe it persists because the inherent value of incarcerated lives on the fireline is cheaper, too.

Over 15 months of fieldwork, I was met time and again with the harsh dehumanizing realities of imprisonment for IWP crewmembers, when I witnessed their interactions with non-fire crews, listened to their stories of their prison experiences, and observed these realities on prison complexes. In this chapter I isolate three specific ways that imprisonment deleteriously impacts a person's sense of self and their economic and social wellbeing: 1) restriction (of physical and psychological space); 2) violent masculinity; and 3) boredom (in work, educational, and other capacities). These penal processes affect nearly every incarcerated person to some

extent, including IWP crewmembers. They are also the three major areas that participation in the IWP explicitly challenges. In this chapter, however, I will analyze how each of these affronts to identity and personhood occur over the course of incarceration.

Prison and the restriction of space and selfhood

The color mauve: how prison makes a prisoner

Imprisonment is a process of restriction, both of a person's physical space and of their societal classification. Just as Sammy intoned in the vignette above, this results in incarcerated individuals becoming regarded as less than fully human, and treated as a morally-branded 'criminal' subject (Foucault 1995). According to Cohen and Taylor (1972), the penal institution delineates the parameters of what it means to be a criminal through a myriad of policies and ideologies. Then, individuals within that institution are subjected to those policies and ideologies daily. This might result in individuals beginning to operate within those parameters, recognizing themselves as being no more than this process of subject formation. As one crewmember described to me when we were discussing how his experience of imprisonment has changed over 24 years of incarceration, "The meals get worse, the visits get less, and you end up turnin' into the scumbag they tell you you are." This individual aptly summarizes the process of the penal institution establishing and maintaining a carceral identity for those inside.

Goffman (1959) argues that within prison as well as in the public sphere, defining what a 'prisoner' is has implications for incarcerated peoples' perceived moral fiber. This comes at a high social and psychological cost for those inside (Slay and Smith 2011). By articulating definitions and social characteristics of criminality, not only do individuals in broader society feel free to disavow themselves of any responsibility to help prisoners (Crewe 2009), but prisoners themselves begin to think they deserve treatment as a particular kind of person. This

process of social categorization by the prison system results in a sort of “existential death” (Jose-Kampfner 1990, Williams 2011) for those who serve time. Although I don’t agree that prison has a totalizing effect on a person’s sense of self, there is no question that the modern prison has been designed both ideologically and architecturally to mold prisoners into a categorical archetype.

It is necessary to analytically link the physical space of incarceration and the psychosocial space of prisoners because of the inherent connections between built environment and identity. The very buildings that house prisoners—their material qualities—deleteriously shape the mental, personal, and social lives of incarcerated people (Fairweather and McConville 2000, Rhodes 2004). This is shown by the direct correlation between certain physical prison conditions (overcrowding, faulty plumbing and electricity) and prisoner infractions (see Morris and Worall 2010). There is also the more structural relationship between prison space, prisoner control, and identity. Drawing from the foundational work by Sykes (1958), who describes the negative effects of living in a space with “naked electric lights, echoing corridors, walls encrusted with the paint of decades, and the stale air of rooms shut up too long” (7-8), Hancock and Jewkes (2011) write that prison architecture serves an additional function:

“The concomitant psychological compression of inmates. Such compression is not only experienced as a pain, a deprivation, a restriction, but, it can be argued, also leads to the production of an institutionalized mode of subjectivity; one congruent with the demands of docility and dependency continually placed upon the prison population” (617).

The prison as a place which demands docility and dependency was a topic of great consternation in my interviews. A Cocopah crewmember in particular *loathed* the paint color choices in buildings across ADC. He described what he saw and felt when being moved to his current complex,

Mauve. Mauvemaudevmauve. I sat in [the receiving room at a prison complex in northern Arizona] to get moved over here. I was pissed. I stared at the wall for hours, a mauve wall. Painted that way to calm me down, I guess? Didn't work. Then I got thrown in a van, and it was dark. Then I came out of the van and got put in another room. In another prison. *Six hours away*. Guess what I saw? Mauve. Another wall, but the same wall. It's all the same, *everywhere*. Do you know what that does to a person? You go crazy, you go fucking crazy. Because you're not anywhere when you're here. You're in hell, and hell is mauve.

As Hancock and Jewkes argue, and as scholars like Foucault (1995) and Lefebvre (1991) have argued before them, space and place are instrumental in the articulations of power and control. Prison is one of the most striking examples of space being highly regulated and meticulously contained. Over the course of my fieldwork, I began compiling a list of the prison's physical features that were brought up as a daily part of existence and that were loathed by crewmembers: barbed wire; lack of vegetation; concrete; linoleum; paneled ceilings; paint color. Every day inside prison walls, with the world becoming as small as the barbed wire and concrete those walls are made up of, prisoners are subjected to this organizational and ideological control. The negative impacts of this reality may be straightforward: mental illness manifests (Nurse et al 2003), prisoners rebel against the routinization (Bottoms 1999), guards approach the prison as an 'other' space where their behaviors have fewer consequences (Leibling et al. 2010). More profoundly, though, the space of the prison severely impacts the way prisoners consider much more abstract self-references, like possibility, or hope (Rhodes 2004).

Shaved heads, orange clothes: embodying the restriction of imprisonment

How is the space of the Arizona Department of Corrections felt on a given day for minimum-security prisoners like those in the IWP? And moreover, how does this daily space of incarceration shape their overall identity? A person becomes categorized as a 'criminal' immediately upon entering the prison system. When I first began my fieldwork, I was asked to wait for an extended period of time in the receiving building of one of the state's massive prison

complexes to give my fingerprints and to take my security badge photo. For whatever reason, they weren't able to take my fingerprints quickly, and so I bore witness to two groups of newly incarcerated individuals being processed into the system. One group was destined for the minimum-security yard on this complex, another group was headed to a maximum-security complex in the central part of the state. The minimum-security prisoners were loosely supervised in the main part of the receiving building alongside me, the maximum-security prisoners were chained at the foot and wrist and put into a small holding cell in the corner of the room.

They were all wearing brand new orange clothing, and many of them rubbed and tugged at the uncomfortable fit of their underwear and shirts. One by one they were called to the area where they were fingerprinted. They were each asked to sit in a rickety chair next to the fingerprint machine. The guard picked up a dull electric razor and, without ceremony, ran it roughly over each person's head, shaving their hair down to the state-mandated height. I felt disturbed as I watched a pile of hair amass on the concrete floor, as one by one, each person was made as identical looking as possible. With the haircut done, the guard set down the clippers and gruffly told each man to stand in front of a blue screen, and a camera—out of sight—snapped the prisoner's picture. This image would be emblazoned on a badge that these prisoners would wear as their sole identification for years, or decades. When it was my turn to get my researcher badge, the guard told me to step over the pile of hair and smile for the camera.

From the moment the orange clothes are donned and the razor is lifted, people become prisoners, with their identities physically removed and replaced with something much smaller. The negative implications of this social categorization are not lost on incarcerated people themselves. In each of my formal interviews, I included two questions about this idea of 'restriction.' The first was, "Explain your first 6 months in prison, and how you adapted to being

in this space,” and the second was, “How do you think incarceration has shaped your identity, if at all?” Of the 31 interviews with crewmembers, 90% stated that prison negatively impacted their sense of self. One person stated, “When I was in the courtroom I was a father, I was a [construction worker], I was a basketball player, I was a son. And then as soon as I got my charge, and then especially...when I got to the yard, all of that was gone. And I had to start over.” Another stated, “On my first day in jail, I didn’t know that because I was from Mexico I *had* to be associated with *la raza*. Some old [prisoner] came up to me and told me I had to join them. I didn’t have a choice anymore, I learned right there. I had a role to play. I have played it for seven years.” This quote underscores how a self-concept as complex as one’s ethnicity is stripped down to the socially constructed and violently maintained categories of race on the prison yard (see Interlude One for further discussion). As such, for these two individuals, there was a clean break between pre-prison and during-prison identity. Both point to a loss of complex selfhood that incarceration directly engendered.

One crewmember refuted the idea that prison had any negative effect on his identity, stating, “I wasn’t gonna let being in prison change who I know I am deep down,” but even this response indicates that incarceration has the potential to shift a person’s relationship to oneself, in that it is solely up to the individual to resist this process. Although seemingly an empowering thought, this quote indicates that the modern prison has successfully constructed the pains of imprisonment as an individual fight, instead of prisoners being thought of a social responsibility by the state and the community at large. This individuated approach to punishment is a particularly American one. This is unlike other countries’ penal philosophies, notably Scandinavian and northern European ones, which attempt to approach incarceration as another form of social welfare designed to help prisoners address the reasons for incarceration (Pratt

2008). The individuation that a 'prison identity' engenders is a common critique of the U.S. penal system. Scholars argue that without access to strong social support networks and identities shaped by affective relationships of kin and community, individuals in punitive prison systems show higher rates of violence, self-harm, and despair (De Viggiani 2007).

Beyond haircuts and clothing, individuals are categorized through the language of the prison as well. As was discussed at the beginning of this chapter, the word 'inmate' is used to distinguish incarcerated people as other, and in most cases, as *less than*. The word inmate is used strategically by guards and by other prisoners. Even the most well-meaning guards on the IWP who grew close to the crewmembers they worked with each day chose to refer to those crewmembers as 'inmate' when they were all on the yard. One guard volunteered a reason for why he did this, stating, "If I act friendly with any of these guys on the yard, if I...[he reaches to the crewmember who was sitting next to him as we spoke and shakes his hand, and then hugs him]...guess who is gonna be in trouble? I will, with the other COs. But him, oh man. They [the other prisoners] are gonna start asking, 'what, you're friendly with the pigs now?' He's fucked." The crewmember sitting next to him emphatically agreed.

Some prisoners explained to me that they would form cordial, and even occasionally a respectful relationship with select guards over the course of their incarceration. But there was always a very clear divide between prisoners and every other category of person on the yard. With this divide comes a cementing of who is a criminal and who is not. Jose-Kampfner (1990) describes this recurring loop of categorization and identity. He argues that prisoners' emotional responses such as anger and depression tend to be defined by prison staff as essential characteristics, which were then used as proof as 'natural' behaviors of prisoners that meant they were supposed to be behind bars. The process of such criminal naturalization by guards and by

the prison institution more broadly is “an effect of power and [something that] can marginalize an individual, resulting in that person being disqualified from full societal acceptance” (Toyoki and Brown 2013, 715-16). As such, the daily ramifications of social categorization that occur on the prison yard reverberate not just through the bodies and identities of prisoners, but outward, to reify broader social processes of power and control.

Continued restriction, even in the open space of the IWP

In the introduction, I described how Sammy felt both frustration and anger at Appendix 28 of the Incident Response Pocket Guide, and the ways that wildfire-fighting culture compartmentalized prisoners into a bullet point list of do’s and don’ts. This compartmentalization is an example of social categorization, the process that all individuals to some extent go through (Oakes 2003), but prisoners experience sharply and deleteriously. So far I have described a few examples of the prison yard as a site of restriction, both of space and selfhood. Although participation in the IWP challenges some of these spatial and identity constraints, it does not fully eliminate them. Even on the fireline, IWP members are systematically reminded of their carceral identities. As Simmons (2011) describes with his theory of cauterization, certain social categories like ‘criminals’ are systematically cut off from larger society in key material and psychological ways. The process of cauterization results in the branding of individuals in these marginalized groups as morally Other. Once Othered, cauterized people are thus inherently deadened, and considered apart from the rest of society. This process of cauterization has real effects, as seen in Sammy’s anger at the IRPG. His rejection of the bullet-point list was a larger rejection of being categorized as a criminal subject, who must be managed and dealt with at arms-length.

Simmons' theory of cauterization was manifested in multiple ways throughout my fieldwork. But to continue the example of the prison firefighter in the midst of wildland firefighting culture as a whole, it was sometimes displayed overtly at the basecamps where crews stayed on large wildfires. These basecamps were often set up in primitive campgrounds near the fireline, where all crews dispatched to a fire slept, ate, and rested in between shifts. On one of the biggest fires I fought, basecamp was swarming with firefighters. There were two prison crews, three Forest Service hot shot crews, and at least 3 or 4 engine crews all sharing the same space. If a random passerby were to quickly glance at the approximately 70 wildland firefighters grouped together at this basecamp, they might not be able to make a distinction between prison and non-prison crews, as Arizona's IWP crews don't wear orange. Yet upon closer inspection there were distinct lines drawn between prisoner crews and all the others. When it came time to eat, the two IWP crews were last in the long, snaking line towards the tables full of hot food, although on this fire the IWP crews had arrived to the fire earlier and worked longer than all others. The officers carved out the far area of the campsite as the prison area by parking their buggies strategically to create a perimeter, leaving the two picnic tables on site to be used exclusively by the Forest Service crews. There was only one interaction between prison and non-prison crews on this particular fire, and it was when the port-o-potty overflowed and the few individuals who waiting in two separate (prisoner and non-prisoner) lines laughed together at the predicament. I expected prisoners to be angry by what felt to me like a sort of quarantine, but no one mentioned anything about their placement. These crews had become accustomed to their spatial restriction, and to being barred from the social inclusion of basecamp as a whole.

There were several instances over the course of my fieldwork in which non-prison crews chose to defy the IRPG and communicate freely with IWP members, and indeed, the IWP

provided opportunities for incarcerated people to reject the cauterization of imprisonment in ways I will describe at length in the next chapters. However, in the policies of the Forest Service, other firefighting agencies, and the ADC, there was a clear labeling process that was meant to restrict the prisoners' movement and their sense of belonging to the broader culture of wildfire fighting as a whole. On another fire, I sat down to eat at a table next to a Forest Service engine crew made up of two men and a woman. The woman—young, white, wearing dreadlocks and smoking a cigarette—seemed particularly troubled by her inability to get to know the prison crews. “I feel bad that they’re over there, and I’m over here. We’re all smoking cigarettes! That’s usually the time to hang out,” she said, nodding towards a group of prison firefighters rolling tobacco in the designated IWP area. “I wonder if they know that *we* know we aren’t all that different from them...”, and then she trailed off. One of the men on her crew scoffed at this, either in agreement or rejection of her statement, I couldn’t tell. Their conversation quickly turned to the hangovers they were nursing from the night before, that they had obtained before they were called out to today’s fire. Although her sentiment held a sense of camaraderie, the realities of her firefighting experience—the partying, the freewheeling culture of the federal crew—are fundamentally different than those of the IWP crews.

On another small brush fire, I stood next to a newbie volunteer wildland firefighter from the local town who was working for the first time with the prison crews. He didn’t approve of the program as a whole. In a single spoken sentence, he wrote off the work he was actively witnessing IWP crewmembers achieving—it was a perilous task of using chainsaws to delicately saw trees that had grown up around a wire cattle fence, with the continual risk of the saw hitting metal and causing injury—as well as their potential for *being* anything other than prisoners. “So what,” he sneered as he stood watching them work. “They’re just gonna go back to where they

came from and get high after this.” I had just met this person, and he knew of my project, as I had asked if he’d like to be informally interviewed. He had no problem with the assertion being written down, albeit without a name attached. Importantly, his comment was the only derisive one I heard over 15 months of speaking with non-prison crews and the public. But his comment was a reminder that IWP members are continually faced with a series of restrictions—both physically, like where to stand in line, as well as in regards to their identity as a firefighter who exists beyond a criminal classification.

Violent masculinity on the prison yard

What it means to be a man

Prison deleteriously impacts a person’s sense of self through the social categorization that occurs at every stage, and through every process, of incarceration. A critical, more specific, facet of a person’s identity is their gender, and there is ample evidence that society’s institutions, including prisons are key sites for shaping gendered norms, discourses, and performances (see: Butler 1993). In prison, the normative gender performance against which all behaviors and actions are measured is masculinity. Even the bureaucratic structure of the prison system, based on the patriarchal hierarchy of the military, sets the tone for the way prison is mostly experienced on the ground: a more powerful person speaks, a less powerful person listens, or else there’s trouble. Patriarchal social systems, like American society writ large and the prison yard as a hyper-focused example, rely on key tenets associated with normative masculinity to maintain existing power dynamics. These include physical strength, emotional constraint, ‘rugged individualism,’ and strategic violence (Chesney-Lind 2006). All of these tenets are deeply entrenched in the daily life of Arizona’s prison system.

I could speak with a few prison fire crewmembers quite frankly about masculinity. It quickly became apparent that the type of masculinity performed by crewmembers on the IWP was distinct from the normative masculinity on the prison yard, and this became a key aspect of my analysis (see chapter 5). To track the differences between on-complex and IWP masculinity I discussed with crewmembers what ‘being a man’ meant to them while incarcerated. In one interview, a crewmember brought up the effects of imprisonment on men. He laughed and said slyly, “It makes us bigger monsters than we are on the street.” I asked him what he meant, and he replied, “Prison brings out the worst in men. We are cornered, trapped. If you want to compare us to animals, then that’s what it is...we are animals in a cage, what do you expect?” Another crewmember, Paul, described the negative implications that this type of hyper-masculine environment had for making any sort of meaningful connections while he was incarcerated for ten years for an aggravated DUI. He said,

Well, because when you’re on the yard, your head’s always on a swivel, at least mine is. You got guys in prison who are gonna act tough and fuck you over. So I didn’t waste my time knowing you. You’re gonna get high. You’re gonna steal. You’re gonna lie. You’re just gonna be that guy. I didn’t have any time for that. And I try to migrate to people that are nice...so that means I’m alone.

Loneliness is one of the most insidiously harmful parts of being in prison, especially in the way Paul described: a sense of isolation from any meaningful connection, even with other men who were incarcerated alongside him. This type of loneliness is a result of normative masculine performances in modern prisons, described as a “hard, silent stoicism” (Messerschmidt 1993) that has its roots in “a vision of manhood...that transcends the prison: self-restraint, reserve, toughness, and emotional balance” (Sykes and Cullen 1992: 457). Across all of my interviews, the most common key words that emerged—collectively mentioned over sixty times—when discussing prison yard masculinity was “tough” or “hard,” and “alone.” As Paul states above,

these normatively masculine behaviors are considered a sort of survival strategy on the yard, which might be considered logical given the daily forms of violence that are enacted there.

Acting tough or becoming a lone wolf in prison echoes the characteristics of hegemonic masculinity in broader American culture. Connell describes hegemonic masculinity as a gendered performance built on two legs, the domination of women and a hierarchy of intermale dominance (Connell 1987, Jennings & Murphy 2000). Hegemonic masculinity in the United States includes a high degree of ruthless competition, an inability to express emotions other than anger, an unwillingness to admit weakness or dependency, devaluation of women and all feminine attributes in men, and homophobia (Connell 1987). Although most men veer far from these strict hegemonic norms in their actual daily lives, Connell argues, they tend to worry if others will view them as unmanly for their deviations from the hegemonic ideal of the ‘real man.’ Although there was no singular definition of ‘real’ manhood that emerged during my research, IWP members’ descriptions of performing masculinity on the yard upheld Connell’s hegemonic theory of masculinity. There was a clear male hierarchy on all three prison complexes I spent time on, dependent largely on physical strength, social capital in groups (like gangs), and race.

Some scholars who study masculinity in prison have found that there are a large number of men, just as in broader society, who never fully internalize the ‘code’ of hegemonic masculinity, and other scholars argue that markers of hyper- or hegemonic masculinity may abate over a person’s life-course (Evans and Wallace 2008). Others (see: Crewe et al. 2014) urge that the scholarship on prison masculinity should not lapse into a reification of gender performance, with the assumption that hegemonic masculinity is the only available model to understand the complexity of men’s lives in prison. I align myself with Crewe et al.’s approach

on the whole, using the IWP as an example of a penal space where alternative masculine identity can be explored and performed. Researchers have indicated that there are several penal spaces where alternative, non-violent masculinity emerges, like writing workshops, classrooms, or therapy and support groups (Costelloe and Warner 2014, Breiman and Bonner 2001). What these studies underscore, however, is that the vast majority of prison experience offers little opportunity for non-hegemonic gendered expression. Based on the reflections of IWP crewmembers, this is true. The areas of the prison yard where prisoners dwell daily—their sleeping quarters, their chow halls, the rec yard—are overwhelmingly hegemonically masculine.

The term toxic masculinity is used by Kupers (2005) to describe certain behaviors in prison, in order to make a distinction between “aspects of hegemonic masculinity that are socially destructive, such as misogyny, homophobia, greed, and violent domination; and those that are culturally accepted and valued” (716). Kupers applies these generalized traits of toxic masculinity to the prison yard, describing certain characteristics warped by the prison regime. For example, the notion of ‘respect,’ and wanting respect, is a hegemonic masculine trait according to Connell and other scholars, but does not inherently imply violence or overt domination. However, the most common means to achieve respect on the yard—violence, greed, homophobia—veer into toxic territory. Kupers describes the prison as a prime example of a social setting in which toxic masculinity is the key performance used to maintain embedded gendered hierarchies.

Toxic masculinity has long-term consequences for those on the inside. One crewmember, J, who went to a level-4 yard upon entering the system at the age of 19, recalled standing in the chow line his first day in prison. While waiting “to get my mashed potatoes,” he recalled, another prisoner approached the man in front of him and slit his throat. Blood pooled around the

man's crumpled body, creeping towards J's white shoes, until the guards came a few minutes later and pushed everyone out of the way. The man died, and J went back to his small restrictive cell, the yard on lockdown. He was alone for the rest of the week. He told me this story in pieces over a month. Over a decade later, he still could not tell the whole story. Other crewmembers said this incident fundamentally changed J, because he witnessed such violence so young, and so early in his prison tenure. He was known on the crew to act childish, to the occasional annoyance of correctional officers or his crewmates. In one instant he would be working on moving a massive downed tree out of the way of an escape route, and in the next he would be off chasing a butterfly, giggling. The flipside to this behavior was his quickness to anger; the crew would openly joke that if they had to place bets, J would be the one to wake up and decide to kill them all out in the woods. His child-like moods were a common topic of discussion by his crewmates, serving as moments of armchair psychoanalysis. One crewmember said, "Seeing all that he's seen, and so young...it fucked him up. He isn't gonna be able to be a normal person after all that..." after a pause, this crewmember reflected more broadly, drawing not only J but the whole crew into his reflection. He continued, "We can't unsee what we see in here. So we just get messed up."

J's experience, and the analysis from J's fellow crewmember, points to the connection between violence, trauma, and masculinity inside prison. Researchers have examined the damaging psychological effects of such sustained exposure to violence in prison (see: Haney 2003). The continual experience of violence is often blamed, at least partially, on normative forms of prison masculinity. Stanko and Newburn (1994) describe violence as a natural outcome of the daily fear of prison life. He describes such fear as both a weapon and a wound, something that is used to intimidate others (through threats and intimidation, for example), and ultimately as

something that wears down all individuals who must live in a culture of emotional and physical danger based on toxic forms of masculinity. Skogstad et al. (2009) explain that toxic masculinity in prison, coupled with the gendered stigma against getting psychological help for experiencing such violence, has negative long-term effects on male prisoners' ability to heal from the continual trauma that occurs inside (203). This is of profound concern, given that prisons "contain a population in which the addicted, abused, mentally ill are vastly overrepresented" (Evans and Wallace 2008: 501). With lack of access to mental health resources, and with the oppressive social and physical nature of the prison yard, the negative effects of masculine performance are made clear. But on a day-to-day basis on the yard, these performances become so naturalized as to seem like the only obvious solution to problems that arise. When I asked J why the man had been murdered in full view of others standing in the chow line, J didn't have an answer. He didn't know their specific beef, probably something political, a code word for racial. But a few minutes later, after we had moved on to another topic, he said, "About that one day...you know. A guy is gonna do what he has to, to survive."

The imbrication of masculinity and race in prison

As was evident in the ethnographic interlude before this chapter, Arizona prisons are fully segregated by race. The violence that J witnessed on his first day on a level four-yard was the result of 'prison politics', which is the term for race-based machinations on all prison yards across the state. On these higher-level yards, race-based gangs are active, with certain races aligned with specific gangs like white/Aryan brotherhood or Mexican national/Mexican Mafia. On lower level yards, like the ones the fire crews live on, these nationwide gangs are not explicitly active, but all races act in accordance with the rules set by higher-security yards. According to those I interviewed, a large part of the violence that occurs in prison—like the near

riot over unpaid heroin debts that occurred when I visited the minimum-security unit—has racial undertones. Yet even though gangs are based primarily around various races, and even as a stereotypically ‘masculine’ type of violence occurs in and around this racialized gang activity, it is important not to naturalize the racial segregation that occurs on the prison yard. For example, most prison riots do not center around race, but around systemic, institutional issues, like poor food or medical treatment (Spiegel 2007). It is necessary to understand the ways that masculinity and race are distinct but related social structures, with long histories of unequal access to power.

Scholars have shown how, in any social system, gender and race are inextricable from one another (Blake and Darling 1994, Nandi 2002). It is necessary to understand how incarcerated individuals enact social categories from broader U.S. society, and how these systems are heightened and uniquely shaped by incarceration itself. As such, several sets of literatures on masculinity and prison, or masculinity and crime/violence more broadly, help delineate how race and masculinity are intertwined. Nandi (2002), for example, examines this connection, writing, “Incarcerated Black males create specific versions of masculinity, perhaps because of their individual personalities or particular stages of development, but more likely because they live within communities that are marked by striking contrasts of power and powerlessness” (102). Nandi points to the connection between race and criminality, a connection that U.S. society has made painfully inextricable over the course of several centuries.

Scholars have laid bare the fact that black and Latino people, are statistically more targeted for arrests and are given harsher sentences than white people in the U.S. (Alexander 2010). As Gordon (2009) writes, for a person of color prison has become a “constitutive condition of one’s social and juridical being” (178). He explains the historical roots of this constitution, saying, “Racism explains not just who becomes a prisoner but also what the

prisoner becomes...the fundamental racial ontology of permanent slavery was transferred, after the formal abolition of slavery, to the prisoner who became...an inferior race in and of themselves” (Gordon 2009: 178). Masculinity is woven into this narrative of punishment and identity over the life course. Masculinity, and in particular the performance of hegemonic masculinity, can be a response to the dehumanizing experiences not just of prison but of broader racial injustice (Franklin and Boyd-Franklin, 2000). Blake and Darling (1994) contend that Black males are often unable to exercise or experience their full potential as “real” men because of limited education, economic disadvantages, and racial discrimination.

On the three prison wildfire crews that I conducted fieldwork with, race played a complex role in the construction and maintenance of masculinity. Although the IWP tried to enforce a hard break from the racial politics on the prison yard, the crews were not entirely immune from racial segregation or bias. Although there was a large number of Mexican nationals, Mexican Americans, and Native Americans on the fire crews, there was only one black person on the crews over the course of the 15 months I was conducting fieldwork. When I asked various crewmembers why this was, the prevailing logic was that black people “didn’t like to camp” or “didn’t want to be in nature.” For the men on the crews who understood the grossly simplistic, and flat-out wrong assumption of these statements, they offered little push back, shrugging or remaining silent. This silence may be described as ‘complicity’ in relation to hegemonic masculinity. What it means to be a man in prison is directly tied to racial hierarchies and loyalties. On the prison yards where I conducted fieldwork, black men were subjugated in the hegemonic racial structure of the yard. As such, even on the IWP, men in prison upheld these racial stereotypes in order to maintain the same structures of racial power that existed in prison more broadly.

Complicity or silent acceptance of the rules of both race and masculinity seemed to be the most common attitude of the men in prison with whom I worked. At the beginning of this chapter I quoted Fernando, who described how he felt about not having a choice affiliating himself with the Mexican national race and joining the activities and politics of that race as soon as he was detained in jail. As he moved through pre-trial detention, and then a very long prison sentence for violent charges of kidnapping and robbery, he chose not to actively participate in gang activity or any economic transactions with the Mexican Mafia. He was threatened with violence for not participating in these activities. Stevie, who similarly spent time on maximum-security yards due to his charge, was violently beaten for his outright rejection of white nationalism, and having a Mexican girlfriend when he went inside. Although these two men, along with other crewmembers, were critical of the racial politics of the yard, they still complied with the more benign, silent rules of racial segregation that made up daily prison life. Before joining the IWP, they never fraternized with members of other races, they never ate with them, they followed the 'invisible lines' of the chow hall and only walked where other members of their races did.

Both Fernando and Stevie described their decision to follow the rules of racial segregation and hierarchy on the yard as survival. The term 'survival' echoes the arguments of scholars who study the imbrication of race and masculinity both in broader society and in prison. As Kimmel writes, "The great secret of American manhood [is that] we are afraid of other men" (2012, 35). Nandi (2002) connects this broader concept to masculine performance in prison, writing, "Some expressions of prison masculinities also stem from fear and powerlessness such that males must, for their own survival, appear to be 'men' in the company of other males. Their outward expressions might exist in tandem with beliefs about themselves as considerate,

respectful, and loving” (96). According to Nandi and others, survival both in American society and the prison system means performing in accordance with hegemonic norms, which draws on both implicit and explicit racial biases. In an already explosive environment of toxic masculinity, the added racial dimensions of gendered performance results in a sedimentation of hierarchies, biases, and occasional acts of outright violence. Both in regards to race and masculinity, the prison offers very little space to perform non-normative identities, with serious repercussions.

Prison labor, boredom, and routineness in daily life

The implications of monotony on the prison yard

Of all the ways that incarceration diminishes a person’s sense of self, perhaps the most insidious is the sheer boredom of daily prison life. In the interlude prior to this chapter, which describes a day I spent on a minimum-security unit working with the deputy warden to tamp down the possibility of racial violence, I was told halfway through the day that the guys on the yard were convinced I was from the CIA. Apparently, the guards on the unit had picked up the considerable buzz my presence had caused, and relayed the message to the DW, who then mockingly called me ‘agent.’ I laughed, and then asked him why they’d pick my identity as something so outlandish as CIA officer. He said, “You have to try to get in their shoes. If I had to look back and guess, you’re the first outsider this yard has seen in...” he paused, counting on his hands. “I’m gonna go with at least eight months. And the last one was a *reporter*. They’re sitting around doing nothing, all day every day. Of course they’re gonna start guessing some crazy shit!” The statement struck me. It had been eight months since many of these men had seen a person they did not at least passingly recognize. On that yard of over seven hundred men, no one was released to work off the prison complex, and only a few were allowed to do menial labor on

other parts of the complex. Their world was devastatingly small, and from this emerged an absurd but momentarily exciting conspiracy theory of my presence on the yard.

Working each day in the IWP was a fundamental shift in activity for people serving time in prison. For many crewmembers, the first few weeks and sometimes months on the IWP were overwhelming, because of the shock of the rapidly changing social and environmental conditions inherent in the job of wildland firefighting. Compared to daily life on the yard, as Fernando described it, “It feels like I’m alive again.” IWP members isolated two different arenas in which boredom took hold during the course of incarceration: the daily life of prison itself, and in the mundane labor of their previous jobs. Within prison walls, almost every moment of a person’s life is meticulously dictated, as opposed to chosen freely. This is more extreme on higher level yards, as opposed to the minimum-security units where IWP crews lived during their time on the crew. However, even the minimum-security units are designed to control the daily decision-making of incarcerated people. One of my interview questions was broad, asking “What is daily life like on the prison yard?” Several crewmembers took this opportunity to describe the scrutiny that prison engenders. One crewmember, Naco, thoroughly described the non-stop tracking of prisoners’ whereabouts and activities,

Everything we do is not our decision. I mean, I guess that’s not true...we can watch what channels we want on the TV. But there’s only certain channels! So that’s decided in some way. But there are counts [a period of time three times a day that prisoners must return to their sleeping quarters to be counted as present] that are always keeping track. There’s no question where we are, *ever*. Even when we’re shitting they know, because there’s a guard right around the corner, probably listening [laughs]. They tell us when to eat. We know there’s only certain places *where* we can eat [based on racial segregation in the chow hall]. Our rec time is monitored. Everything, every second, is watched.

I asked Naco how he felt about this continual monitoring of his actions and behaviors. As he was thinking, another crewmember who walked by the picnic table where I was conducting the interview, and who had apparently been slyly listening to the conversation, jumped in.

Do you know the term institutionalization? That's what they call it when we get used to this. So when you don't have any say in what you're doing, you come to count on it. You stop thinking for yourself. That's why it's so dangerous to have these young kids in prison now [referring to the influx of millennials in ADC being incarcerated for long sentences], because if they're on the street before prison then they've never had a routine. They don't know anything about life and then they're in here, being told how to live. They get used to it! They end up liking it. And then you're screwed because life on the outside isn't as regular and honestly, easy. It's boring as fuck in here but you can turn your brain off, so it's easy. So they keep coming back.

Naco agreed with him, shaking his head vigorously in agreement at the idea that one of the most insidious parts of this process is the potential for familiarization with the prison routine, to the point that it becomes almost desirable or at least easy. Haney (2001) describes the psychological effects of this institutionalization, stating, "Prisonization renders some people so dependent on external constraints that they gradually lose the capacity to rely on internal organization and self-imposed personal limits to guide their actions and restrain their conduct" (Haney 2001: online). In another interview, Stevie described the effects of institutionalization in another way. He said, "You can become basically brain dead. There's nothing up here [tapping the side of his head] anymore."

About three quarters of the way through my fieldwork, ADC decided to ban all books written by Stephen King. The decision was made in line with a broader, national push to restrict prisoner access to reading material that does not "enhance the safety and security of correctional facilities" (Mzezewa 2018, online). According to J, who protested the ban loudly to the correctional officers on complex, Stephen King books were banned because they could possibly endorse racial violence, although neither I, nor J, nor any of the crewmembers I spoke with could

point to any particular book of King's that would do this. J is an avid reader, and considers access to books on the yard a critical aspect of his survival. He spent several years in solitary confinement at the beginning of his sentence, and apparently, a Stephen King book was one of his most-read texts to escape the torturous years in the hole. There is no carceral space more psychologically damaging than solitary confinement; scholars have isolated boredom and lack of mental/emotional stimulation as a primary cause of this damage (Kaba et al. 2014). His anger about the book ban got close to boiling over, to the point where crewmembers felt slightly cagey about interacting with him for a few days. It was a trigger point of trauma for J, and for other crewmembers the ban was just one more example of the ways the penal institution restricted every aspect of their lives.

This ban comes after a litany of other policies enacted across the prison complexes of ADC that restrict prisoners' access to education or any other brain-stimulating activity. Within the last ten years, ADC has begun charging \$100 dollars to conduct a high school equivalency examination (when previously there used to be no cost to take this test). In rural prisons like the Desierto complex, local community colleges have withdrawn from teaching all classes in an in-person setting, so prisoners have to send away for their course material and complete it on their own time. The lack of formal educational opportunities coincides with the lack of any sort of critical thinking opportunities on the yard. As crewmembers described in the previous paragraph, there is almost no situation in daily life where decisions aren't at least half-made, and often completely pre-determined, by the institutional setting. One prisoner isolated the game tables, where prisoners played craps, poker, or dominoes, as the only space where any type of creative thought occurred.

Of course, not all prisons are devoid of external programs. The large urban complex where the Badger crew was based had some educational or other classroom-based opportunities, but these occurred at the whim of volunteers' schedules or security concerns imposed by the unit. Overall, access to any sustained higher executive cognitive function was severely limited. Higher executive functions, described by Meijers et al. (2015), include "planning, working memory, taking initiatives, set-shifting, attention, and impulse control" (1). These authors, as well as other scholars who have conducted similar psychological studies, isolated certain cognitive functions that are impaired by imprisonment. These include prisoners' abilities for set-shifting (the ability to change perspectives), working memory, inhibition, and problem solving (Meijers et al. 2015, Hoaken et al. 2007). These psychological studies are supported by my data, as many IWP crewmembers described that they felt that they had suffered from some of these specific deficiencies while incarcerated, particularly the lack of problem-solving and set shifting. This latter one was brought up in relation to their seeming inability to break free from prison's determinants of race and masculinity. My research adds ethnographic support to the call that Meijers et al. make, for more scholars to examine the specific deleterious impacts that boredom, routineness, and the mundanity of prison life have on a person's cognitive and emotional health.

Cheap bodies: the IWP and the 13th amendment

Before crewmembers joined the IWP, they worked in a broad array of other prison jobs. A few moved from one of the other few skilled programs—like the auto mechanic program, or the structural firefighting program—to the IWP. But most crewmembers arrived having spent years sewing orange clothes, cooking food, or picking up trash from the highways near their prison complexes. Unsurprisingly, the prisoners who had spent most of their incarceration in skilled programs had a different outlook on the effects of prison labor on their sense of self-

worth than those who spent the majority of their incarceration conducting menial tasks. This first group of prisoners, though, was decidedly small. Of the 31 prisoners I interviewed, only 15% had participated in a labor program that could be considered ‘skilled.’ Although the actual number of labor programs has risen over the last two decades across Arizona and the U.S. more broadly, the number of skilled labor programs—which teach marketable, hard skills that may be useful upon release—has decreased over the same period (Lebaron 2012). The increase in labor programs comes with an increased relationship between the private sector and states’ correctional systems; familiar companies like Walmart, Victoria’s Secret, and Allstate Insurance utilize non-skilled prison labor across the country (Benms 2015).

Companies who contract with the state to outsource manufacturing, customer service, or other jobs to the prison system receive straightforward benefits: they get the work done cheaply, and with less money spent on training and oversight. The state, on the other hand, has to weave a more complex story to justify this relationship, even though it is legally supported through the 13th amendment of the U.S. constitution which states in part, “Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted.” This amendment lays bare the ways that prison labor has its roots in the era of slavery. The 13th amendment was written after the abolition of slavery, and according to scholars who studied the immediate effects of its enactment—primarily the use of convict leasing—it supports the continued use of indentured servitude through means of punishment (Blackmon 2008, Smith and Hattery 2008).

Although there was a short period of time in the late 1960’s and 1970’s where U.S. prison labor policies were broadly focused on rehabilitation, the increased use of prison labor for private sector endeavors beginning in the 1990’s disabused scholars of any possibility that prison

labor could be separated from economically exploitative practices (O'Malley 1992). With this trend came a body of literature that examined neoliberalism as the hegemonic ideological and economic regime in the west, and described how the rise of neoliberal politics was associated with revised penal policies and practices. O'Malley (2014) depicts this era as one with "The promotion of 'responsibilized' individuals, a hostility to [welfare], and an economic framework of governance that preferred market solutions and deployed cost-benefit analysis as a tool of policy evaluation" (90). As such,

"Sanctions became more punitive, correctional programmes were put under pressure, probation officers and social workers were required to become more policing-oriented...In the same process, social welfare services generally were retracted or transformed to promote more 'self-reliant' and 'independent' subjects. In the name of freeing individuals from the crippling effects of the welfare interventionist state, they were to be rendered entrepreneurs of their own lives—and the state would function to provide 'training' as this process required" (O'Malley 2014:90-1).

As this quote implies, changes in prison systems across the United States—particularly changes to prison labor policies that opened doors to private corporations, corresponded with broader shifts towards neoliberal rationalities. In this way, as Wacquant (2001, 2009) argues, the prison system has become an integral apparatus of the neoliberal state. Although some scholars warn against totalizing the effects of neoliberalism and its relationship to prison both theoretically and politically (O'Malley 2014), the increase in private corporations using prison labor, let alone the increase in private prisons generally, is evidence that trends towards market-oriented, welfare-opposed policies impact the carceral system (See Chapter 2 for statistics on the rise of prison privatization).

The effects of an increasingly neoliberal approach to prison labor—with an emphasis on creating 'responsible' and 'productive' people, even if they are not considered full citizens in all other respects—are overwhelmingly negative for those incarcerated on the ground. Returning to

the literature I discussed in the previous section that described the cognitive effects of incarceration, there are studies which conclude that being forced to perform menial labor has deleterious effects on a person's mental acuity and psychological wellness (Lipsey and Cullen 2007, Meijers et al. 2015). This was borne out in my data. Matias, who had received a prison sentence for nine years although he had no prior convictions, and who had held a highly-skilled and well-paid job prior to being incarcerated, described his various prison jobs before the IWP. The last one was, technically speaking, a 'good' prison job: the prison had contracted with a private tomato-growing operation in a rural town near the prison, and the company paid prisoners \$5 dollars an hour for their labor. This hourly rate was nearly unheard of, and as such many prisoners tried to get a position there. However, once they started, they quickly realized how profoundly monotonous and difficult the job was. Matias said,

Oh it was bad, *bad*. Every day, eight hours a day, in a greenhouse, no breaks. You are picking little cherry tomatoes. There is the [supervisor working for the company] breathing down your neck. It felt like, I hate to say this but like I was on a plantation. Back breaking. My back is fucked up still, from bending over all day like that. Was \$5 dollars an hour worth that? Nope, not for me. I got out of there. It was dulling my brain....my brain turned to mush.

He attempted to stay at the tomato-picking plant for as long as he could, because his charges (he had been caught in a steroid-manufacturing and selling scheme) had resulted in tens of thousands of dollars' worth of fines he would have to pay before he was able to be 'off paper,' or free of the correctional system once released. He thought the nearly-living wage would get those fines paid faster, but he ultimately decided his sanity was not worth it. The word on the yard about this job is that it paid well, but at a cost. Several other crewmembers had flatly chosen not to work there because of its psychological toll.

Of course, other prison jobs were just as monotonous and tedious, but with much less pay. The average pay for typical jobs on the yard ranged from \$0.10-\$0.40 an hour (see Figure 3.2.).

Work Assignment Codes, Descriptions, and Criteria – continued
WIPP Work Assignments (sorted by code number) continued

Code	Description	DOT Code & Description	IR	Skill Level	Min Qual
222B	Motor Pool Parts Clerk	222.367-042 PARTS CLERK (clerical) alternate	3	2	N
222F	Warehouse-Stock Clerk	222.367-058 STOCK CLERK (clerical) storekeeper, storeroom clerk, supply clerk;	3	2	N
222L	Porter – Laundry	222.387-030 LINEN-ROOM ATTENDANT linen	4	1	N
3133	Kitchen-Baker		4	3	M
3152	Kitchen-Butcher		4	3	M
3153	Kitchen-Cook	315.361-010 COOK (any industry)	4	3	M
3154	Culinary – Cook	315.361-010 COOK (any industry) alternate titles: cook, mess	4	3	M
3176	Kitchen-Cook Helper	317.687-010 COOK HELPER (hotel & rest.)	4	2	M
3186	Kitchen-Helper	318.687-010 KITCHEN HELPER (hotel & rest.) alternate titles: cook helper; kitchen hand; kitchen porter; kitchen runner	4	1	M
330A	Barber	330.371-010 BARBER (personal ser.) alternate titles: haircutter; tonsorial artist	3	3	N
330B	Other Barber Labor	330.371-314 BARBER APPRENTICE	3	2	N
330C	Barber- Staff	330.371-010 BARBER	3	3	N
3556	Wheelchair Assistant	355.677-014 TRANSPORTER, PATIENTS (medical ser.) alternate titles: escort, patients	3	1	N
3595	Wheelchair/Other Aide	359.573-010 BLIND AIDE (personal ser.) alternate titles: clerk guide; escort, blind	4	2	N
3616	Laundry-Laborer	361.687-018 LAUNDRY LABORER	3	2	N
3733	Firefighter	373.364-010 FIRE FIGHTER (any industry)	2	3	N
381A	Porter-Admin		3	2	N
381B	Porter-Building				N
381C	Porter-State Issue	381.687-014 CLEANER, COMMERCIAL OR INSTITUTIONAL (any industry) alternate titles: clean-up worker; housekeeper; janitor; laborer, building maintenance; mopper; porter; scrubber; sweeper	4	1	N
381D	Porter-Library				N
381E	Porter-Education				N
381G	Porter-Programs				N
381H	Porter-Health Unit				C
381V	Porter-Visitation				N
381Z	Porter- Other Labor				N
381F	Floor Crew	381.687-034 WAXER, FLOOR (any industry)	4	2	N
3816	Trash Collector	381.687-018 CLEANER, INDUSTRIAL (any industry)alternate titles: clean-up worker; janitor; sanitor; scrubber; sweeper; trash collector; vacuum cleaner; waste collector	3	1	N
404B	Farm worker	404.663-010 FARMWORKER, FIELD CROP I (agriculture)	3	1	N
404C	Harvest Worker	404.687-014 HARVEST WORKER, FIELD CROP (agriculture)	3	1	N

Figure 3.2. Work assignments available to prisoners in the ADC.

There were some on-complex jobs that paid more, the most common being the skilled automotive program, where prisoners learn automotive skills and work on the fleet of state-owned ADC vehicles at their complex. They were paid between \$0.25-\$0.50 per hour. In some rural prison complexes, there was a program not just for wildland but structural—i.e. ‘regular’—firefighters, who were trained to respond to fires both on the complex and in extreme cases in the

rural communities surrounding the prison complex. This job was incredibly rare and perhaps the most highly-skilled of all ADC jobs, but paid less per hour than the IWP, at \$1.00 per hour.

As I will describe in Chapter 6, certain skills gained by the IWP were highly valuable, and many extended far beyond ‘marketable’ skills that are, in the neoliberal ideology, imagined to help craft productive citizens. However, there were certain ways that IWP participation underscored the intrinsic exploitation of any prison labor program. There are examples I’ve already mentioned, like the restriction of crewmembers to their own (physical and symbolic) space on fires, or the low pay for the highly risky work. Another is the lack of career support for IWP participants once released from prison. Although certain agencies will hire individuals with felonies to fight wildfires, like the U.S. Forest Service or certain private wildfire contracting companies across the country, there are some federal agencies (like the Bureau of Land Management), nearly all city, and many county fire departments that will not hire previously incarcerated individuals. Arizona has begun to address this issue; ADFFM established its first post-release type-2 hand crew in December 2017. It is comprised of former IWP participants, and will provide full-time work to newly released individuals each fire season for those who come with recommendations from their COs and crew bosses. However, given that all IWP members will be released within 5 years, and that many of these individuals will primarily be trained in firefighting-specific skills, one post-release crew is not an adequate solution to the broader issue of lack of post-release support to the approximately 200 prisoners fighting fires across the state.

A key critique of prison labor in the literature is not simply the fact that prisoners are required to work, but that their labor value is considered inherently less than non-incarcerated people. The food provided to prisoners working on the IWP reveals this devaluation all too

painfully. Arizona's prison food is notorious, and during my tours of various prison complexes, I was witness to kitchens where quivering, gelatinous masses of animal byproduct waited to be shaved and dyed to resemble deli meat. The quality of each meal was atrocious, and the quantity was not much better. All prisoners in Arizona are given 2,300 calories a day, with much of these calories coming from cheaply produced carbohydrates and hydrogenated fats. In contrast, the federal guidelines for all wildland firefighters suggest in-season firefighters eat a minimum of 3,500 high-protein, healthy-fat calories per day. Given that IWP members are 'in season' nearly 365 days a year because wildfires occur during all 12 months and prison crews are most commonly the only ones available to fight them, the severe and continual lack of healthy calories for prisoners is astonishing.



Figure 3.3. An IWP crewmember eating lunch.

A daily lunch for members of the IWP is pictured in Figure 3.3. They receive four pieces of bread, two pieces of American cheese, two slices of meat (here it was turkey, although over the course of the hot summer day, the color of the meat changed from light beige to a shimmering

pink), a packet of mayonnaise and mustard, and four cookies. This was the sum total of sustenance that would hold them over from their breakfast at 5:30 am to their dinner at 5:30 pm. On the day I took the above picture, their work assignment was to cut down and drag full-sized mesquite trees from a rural homeowner's property for six hours in 115-degree heat. Across ADC, any open discussion of food is frowned upon, and many guards on the yard will stop negative conversations about food as soon as they hear them. That is because food is the most common cause of prison unrest, and has historically been the cause of wide-scale protests and riots across the nation. As such, prisoners in the IWP grumbled about their lunches quietly, and all individuals I spoke with—guards included—mostly kept their comments about the lack of food for IWP members to informal conversations. One guard, watching his crew sit down to eat, confessed, "Listen, I'm not an activist OK? I work for [ADC] so I'm not a prisoner activist. But I have to say that this is the one thing that gets me. This just seems wrong, don't you think? It's...I'll say it, it's inhumane."

No one I spoke with—incarcerated or working in the prison—attempted to justify the lack of food for IWP crewmembers, and the food for all prisoners more broadly. It was simply the policy that existed, and as one crewmember pointed out, was not going to change. "I've been in here long enough to know they don't care about us," he said when I asked him about his lunch. "They don't see us as people who deserve anything, so they follow the rules and don't bother to change a thing." Another crewmember stated a similar sentiment, saying, "You want to know what slavery is? Us eating this shit every day. They know what work we do. But we're cheap bodies. That's what this [he lifted his arms and opened them, indicating the worksite] is. They give us the least amount, and they get the most." These quotes demonstrate that IWP members were acutely aware not just of the bad food, but of their positionality in the prison

regime. It is critical for prison scholars to remember, as we hold debates in academic realms about the ethics and politics of prison labor, that there is a keen sense of awareness of the material and symbolic conditions of imprisonment for people who are actively incarcerated. Each neoliberal prison policy that is enacted—be it a cut program or a decrease in calorie count—is understood and embodied directly by individuals like those in the IWP.

The implications this has for a person's sense of self-worth, and identity more broadly, is severe. IWP crewmembers experienced many other things that offered them great meaning and a chance to reverse some of the dehumanization of incarceration. However, they were reminded of what their actual value was each time they ate, or went back to the yard to sleep. As such, IWP crewmembers held within themselves a contradiction between exploitation and meaning, which will be further explained in the following chapters.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I isolated three distinct ways that imprisonment deleteriously impacts a person's identity or sense of self. They are: 1) restriction (of physical and psychological space); 2) violent masculinity; and 3) boredom (in work, educational, and other capacities). These realities comprise nearly every moment of incarceration. The effects of these processes have been shown, both through qualitative and quantitative research studies, to have negative psychological and emotional effects. My research with three IWP crews supports these studies, and shows how the restriction of space, the social cauterization that prison engenders, the violent expression of masculinity, and the daily boredom of prison life has negative psychological as well as emotional effects. This dissertation emphasizes the loss of complex identity as a key 'pain' of incarceration. Identity is often used as a catchall in the anthropological literature, but in this dissertation, I use it to describe a co-constitutive process: the way a person comes to know

his- or herself, and how society comes to categorize that person. Over these pages, I have described how prison is an assault on both of these processes. In the next three chapters, now with a strong foundational understanding that the IWP is deeply tied to the normative strategies of the prison regime, I will take an alternative look at the restriction, violence, and boredom described in this chapter and explain how participation in the IWP helps its participants reject some of the most dehumanizing effects of incarceration.

Interlude 2: A day on a wildfire

Below is a fieldwork reflection I wrote after a particularly risky fire, the first one of my second season out with the IWP crews. In the previous chapter, I described the tedious work of clearing brush from a patch of state-owned land next to a Walmart. After several dry, hard weeks there, as we sat eating our lunch, one crewmember pointed out a long dark tendril of smoke extending from the mountain range near the town. A fire had started. Radio communications immediately began; the crew started packing up quickly, all while whooping and hollering in excitement as the tedium of the last several weeks melted into the anticipation of the moment. The adrenaline rush right when you realize you'll be fighting a fire is intense and exhilarating, and does not diminish in time. One crewmember described the moments leading up to the fire as the most addictive part of the whole thing, and then laughed, given that he was active in his Narcotics Anonymous recovery on the yard.

This interlude serves a few purposes. The previous chapter detailed the extent to which prison harms an incarcerated person's identity. I now move to the space of the IWP, where certain aspects of prison's dehumanization is challenged and subverted. The physical space of wildfire work is fundamentally different from that of the prison yard, and the breakneck action on fires requires a huge amount of mental, physical, and emotional engagement. The fire described below offers a prime example of this other space, and provides a jumping off point into the extraordinary experience of the IWP.

Secondly, this set of fieldnotes is written in an unorthodox style, a bullet-pointed list of the experience of the wildfire on each of my senses. After the crew fell asleep in the firehouse we slept in, I wanted to write a full account of the day's events, and as I tried to expand on my thoughts, I recognized that this fire—along with all others—was an exceedingly sensuous

experience. That is, wildfires touch every facet of your perception, and this lingers far beyond the hours on the fireline. My body ached, my ears rung, my eyes stung, my mouth was black with soot. Moreover, there was a haunting, persistent recollection of the fear I felt, the exhilaration, the exhaustion. I therefore broke down my fieldnotes not into a timeline but into senses, with the last being ‘body,’ which I used to describe the visceral impact of wildfires on one’s corporeal self, and on one’s very being. Wildfires, to lean into the metaphor, sear themselves into you. In this interlude and then in the following chapters, I will elaborate on the impacts of this indelible process.

Field reflection. Late May, 2016. I was just on the Bullet Fire³, which ballooned from 80 to 2,000 acres right in front of us, running up and down the hills straight towards the center of a military base and its residents. It was a fire that some compared to disastrous ones, where firefighters lost their lives, because of how quickly it went from textbook containment to out-of-control. Upon arrival to the fire, when it was small but moving fast, we got out in front of the blaze, which was started on one of the base's gun ranges with a .50 caliber bullet. We saw it moving towards us fast, and we worked even faster with drip torches and water to burn backwards towards it so that when the fire got to us it would have nothing left in its reach to burn. We wrapped around it, burning the fuel on the ground and running multiple miles to put out spot fires. After about 6 hours, just when we thought we had boxed out the fire and its

³ Every fire is given a name, most often determined by the location of the fire’s origin. Some of the most notorious fires go down in the annals of firefighting history, and a person need only reference the first name to spark a multi-hour recollection between crewmembers of the fire’s danger, its strategies, its failures and successes. All fire names have been changed in this dissertation for purposes of anonymity.

movement⁴, a tiny ember from a torching mesquite tree jumped the line⁵ we had created through burning, because the winds had kicked up to 45 mph, at the hottest and driest part of the day. It happened right at the witching hour. When demons come out to play. The ember lit two blades of dry grass, then 10, then exponentially grew. It jumped the line and we watched it explode. There was a moment of shaky calm, standing on a hilltop watching the fire move swiftly towards the town, when we convened with Incident Command, laughed at how useless the last 6 hours were,



Figure 3.4. The Bullet Fire Plume.

and got our new orders.

The crew was tasked to run straight towards the fire, to chase it like you'd chase a dog with a propensity to run, who you watched wiggle free from its collar right before your eyes. The crew battled the fire's right flank, another crew got its left⁶.

For an hour the crew of 23 men toiled, steady but swiftly, spaced evenly at the edge of the black, digging line, spraying hoses, beating the lapping flames with their tools. To no avail. They got

⁴ Once Incident Command determines the general direction of the main fire, and if the conditions are favorable, crews will be sent to create a 'box' around it. This means they hike several miles in front of where the fire is headed, and using drip torches, burn a box shape back towards the head of the flames. Eventually the fire will reach the burned area, run out of fuel, and slowly extinguish itself.

⁵ The most common job a wildland firefighter does is dig lines. Over the length of any fire's edge, between the burned and not-burned area, crews dig a shallow, wide line into the ground (removing fuels, exposing bare soil), so the fire will have a less likely chance to cross to the green vegetation.

⁶ A fire, like a human being, has an anatomical chart, replete with a head, heels, flanks, and fingers, to name a few. In this case, the flanks are the sides of the fire, which have to be contained so the fire doesn't get wider and pick up more fuel and heat.

called off the direct attack—it was failing, and moving faster towards civilization. They got the order to run. Each crewmember had logged seven hours already, with 10 miles of furious paced hiking on their feet, 90 pounds each on their backs, smoky ash coating their mouths and eyes and ears. They were ordered to run further than the fire had reached, and to make one last attempt to burn backwards into the wall of flames. And they did. They burned with abandon. Before the fire had jumped the line, the back-burn was methodical. Now it was all guns blazing. Drip torches met dry earth, the winds whipped up, and flames were carried back towards the main fire. The smoke plume quadrupled in size, as trees and brush and grass and animals unable to run went up in flames. This time the wind favored Man. You could hear the demon shrieking its goodbye. The intentional burn met the runaway one, and the fire ceased. Nine hours later, within hundreds of feet of the backyards of the community that relied on these crews to save their homes, it was done.

I had never seen a wildfire event like this up close. Every fire is different, and this fire was not even close to the most intense thing these crewmembers have seen. This was manageable, if not risky and exhausting. At all times, the experienced guys knew exactly what was happening. They could see it coming, could see where the fire would go, and knew what to do. For me, clearly inexperienced, it was like watching a movie where everyone else had been privy to a pre-screening, and throughout the day I relied on them repeating the dialogue they had already heard. I relied on them indeed. I mirrored their bodies and their attitude and their wisdom and strength. What I saw and heard and felt was both my own and not my own. I was fighting a wildfire, but not alone. Fieldwork remolds you; you are plastic, you become enmeshed with others. On the fireline, when your fieldwork becomes a battle, this is especially true.

Sight:

- The wall of flame. It was moving north, towards us. We were burning back towards it. I kept thinking "shouldn't we get out of its way?" I kept looking at other people's reactions to judge if I should panic. No one looked concerned. It was dark orange, unlike the flame we were putting down which was light orange. The flame wall was dark because trees were torching in its march forward, creating black smoke.
- A family of four deer darted past us. 3 adults, one young buck. Their fur was slightly smoking, but they didn't look burnt. Maybe singed. Rabbits ran past us. A skunk was hauling ass. Faster than I ever knew a skunk could move. We all wished them luck.
- The air show. One command plane (who was looking down, telling us what the big fire was doing), 2 smaller helicopters dragging orange buckets of water, another plane dumping slurry (the red gashes that land on the ground, fire retardant), and then the big mama, the Chinook copter, carrying 2100 gallons of water. They were hovering over us constantly, zooming in and out. Now you see them, now you don't.
- Smoke. Everything looks epic. A person walking towards you is normal, a person walking towards you with a giant blaze and an acre of black smoke behind them looks like an action movie poster. You lose your sight every 20 or so seconds, and you blink furiously to bring things back to focus. Everyone is trading tips on how to make it sting less. You just have to wait for your eyes to go numb.
- The shimmer. You know when it gets really hot outside, and you see the heat mirages rising off the pavement? That's what wildfire looks like, everywhere. Everything is a heat mirage, if you stare at one thing too long you start to feel queasy. It's like you're moving through a funhouse-mirrored room, made out of flames.

Sound:

- A fire sounds like ten thousand things at once. The sound is the most overwhelming part. Every time a tree torches (meaning it goes up like a candle), it sounds like 10 million pieces of Velcro being ripped at the same exact time. And then you add 2 trees, 3, 4...It gets loud. There are hums of the engine supplying you water to put out flames, the crackling of grass burning, the air show. Your ears hurt.
- Bullets and bombs. Yes, actually. Some of the crewmembers and correctional officers are veterans, and they were yelling at me above the roar of the flames and the engines and the Chinook above that this wasn't too far from a war zone. They would know. The fire was racing across 10 different military ranges, all of which had various explosive devices on the ground from previous training sessions. Bullets were popping every few minutes, and training bombs would explode (their blasts much less dangerous than actual bombs, but the sound was similar) every so often. Most of the time our backs were turned away from the fire, because we were looking for spot fires on the unburned grass ahead of us, so we would just hear bullets and bombs go off without seeing them. It was hard not to duck.
- Communication. MOVING. HOLDING. WIND SHIFT! SPOT FIRE! WATER! WE NEED WATER HERE! NOW! Laughter, a lot of it, somewhat maniacal, coming from all of us. Nervous laughter. Everyone saying "Oh shit," "Holy Shit," "It's getting INTENSE NOW." The radio is in a state of constant chatter, we are hearing what every crew, every engine, every helicopter is doing. Moments of calm, when we just hear the gurgle of the engine's hoses and the slow steady crackling of dry grass igniting. Everyone asking if everyone is OK.

Smell:

- Wildfire smells good. It smells wrong, it triggers something deep within your lizard brain that says This Isn't Right, but it also smells like raw power. Like a campfire, but mixed with gasoline and sweat.
- Slurry rains down from airplanes and it smells acrid and bitter. You pray it doesn't land on you, because it's not good for your skin. Some guys love the smell of it, it means things got REAL. Most people say the smell makes them choke.
- The guys with drip torches get singed. Their hair burns, they have little patches missing where their clothes didn't cover them. They smell their own burned hair the rest of the day.

Taste:

- At a certain point, your mouth is covered in ash. You swallow it. The shroud is wrapped around your mouth, the piece of fabric that attaches to your helmet and protects your neck and mouth and nose, which is a lifesaver but also doesn't let you blow your nose. Your nose is running like you're on a crazy ayahuasca trip, and you start inhaling the salt from your skin and the snot from your nose and the ash from the fire and the only reason it doesn't make you sick is because you aren't even paying attention to it.
- Your water, your sweet water slung to your hips, has started to boil. It's worse when it's hotter outside, but the intense heat from the fire nullifies any fancy water storage unit you have. You drink your boiling water, because you have to. It tastes faintly like smoke.

Touch:

- Your whole body is aching but you have no idea yet. You'll feel it later. Your skin has a flash burn, it looks like you fell asleep in the sun. Everyone is operating at probably 100 degrees, your blood feels hot and slightly sludgy. You keep drinking water. Your feet are starting to ache but you don't let yourself think that yet. You still have so many more miles to go. When you're done for the day, you take off your shoes and boots and compare blisters and burns. It's a game no one wants to win.
- The Chinook misdirected his water bucket and we got slammed with 2100 gallons of water. It was disgusting water, from some holding pond full of shit I don't even want to think of, but oh god, it felt so good. We all high-fived.
- Reassurances. The guys are constantly physically checking in with each other. They adjust each others packs. They high five or chest bump when they do something cool. They make each other look them in the eyes, to see that they are focused and hydrated. They make each other drink water. They check in with me too.

Body:

- My stomach flipped when I saw the wall of flames move towards us for the first time. One of the guys asked, "Are you OK?" And I said I was scared, a little. He said it was OK to be scared. I definitely felt a wave of nausea like I was going to puke, but I didn't. He stuck by me the whole time after that, and asked how I was doing every 10 minutes.
- Tired. I can't sleep tonight. I am in a fire department full of 23 dudes and they are all passed out and snoring. They are full, they ate at Golden Corral which is the most

amazing thing to watch. I think they pretty much demolish their food supply. But I can't sleep. I'm too amped. I need to sleep. But I keep seeing fire when I close my eyes.

- The demon. I had heard vaguely about this phenomenon, but this time I saw it. In each wildfire, a demon resides. You can never see it while you're fighting it. Only when you look back at your pictures do you see a shape in a flame. A head, like Edvard Munch's *The Scream*, reaching out towards the camera. We were flipping through my pictures after dinner, all nestled in our sleeping bags, and I saw it. Someone else noticed it. "She got the demon!" I did, I had captured it. Now I know that this is real.

Chapter 4: The physical and symbolic movement away from social cauterization

Fighting the fire demons

There are demons on every fire. As described in the previous interlude, they emerge only in retrospect, through photographs. When you are neck deep in ash and flames, when you are watching trees torch around you, and when you are being deafened by helicopters dumping fire retardant overhead, you don't have much time to look for them. But lore is that they lurk everywhere as latent omens. For example, when the surviving crews on the 2013 Yarnell fire looked back at their camera phones and helmet-mounted GoPros on the day the Granite Mountain Hot Shot crew perished, many claimed they saw shadowy apparitions in the flames.

Across wildfire fighting culture, spotting the fire demons in pictures might mean trouble,



but it also might mean luck. On the prison crews I worked with, many crewmembers saw them not as negative portents but as symbols of cleansing. When Chase saw the photograph (at left) and confirmed that he had been standing right by a demon on the Bullet fire, he took the opportunity to use it as an allegory for his life's trials. He had been incarcerated for nearly a decade for drug use, and spent his entire life in and out of the prison system. Shortly before the Bullet Fire, his mother—with

Figure 4.1. Chase staring down the fire demon.

whom he was incredibly close—died suddenly in a car accident. His guilt at missing his mother's funeral wracked him. Over time and with the support of his crew, he was able to move forward in incremental ways. But when he saw this image, he took it as a clear sign that some of his guilt

must have been expelled, and that the emotional work he had put in to move past this trauma was paying off. As Chase described to me the night after the fire, other crewmembers around us nodding in agreement from their cots, this picture looked like he was staring down the bright yellow heat of the demon's figure. And in so doing, he was staring down his haunted past. He wanted to move forward, and he thought that being pictured next to the fire demon was a sign that he was moving in the right direction. He explained, "Each day [on the crew] be a little bit better....I just need a few more demons gone."

What I found over the course of 15 months of fieldwork, and what I came to understand as a key element of the IWP being the exceptional carceral space that it is, is just how easily fire lends itself to allegory. The fire demon is a prime example of this. For Chase, his presence near the demon held echoes of Dante's inferno. It operated as a symbolic crucible: a space to move through pain and guilt. Wildfires lent themselves to such symbolism for many IWP crewmembers, and moreover, participation on the fire crew overall served the same symbolic purpose. The physical space of fighting fire—the un-built environment, the searing heat of flames—was mapped onto the social and affective space of the crew, and both became representative of a shift in identity, in selfhood.

The connection between fire and humans is cross-culturally powerful. Indeed, when children first learn of their ancient hominid ancestors in primary school, they are shown pictures of cavemen being lured towards progress by the shadowy licks of flames. From Leviticus to Shakespeare, fire has served to portray human acts of sin, rebirth, or redemption. Stephen Pyne, a historian and fire ecologist, has written extensively about the profound connection between humans and fire. In describing fire's cultural significance, he writes,

"Fire is power. Fire is not invented, it was discovered. Fire had to be assimilated, regulated. It was fire that presented man with his greatest agency for the management

of the world around him and, until recent times, with the great instrument for the comprehension of that cosmos. In his allegory of the cave, Plato imagines humanity in the bonds of dark ignorance, guided by the treacherous illumination of fire. Yet, however uncertain the ultimate effects, his pact with fire has guided man as perhaps nothing else could through the inevitable darkness that surrounds him. For both fire and mankind the history of one will largely decide the history of the other.” (Pyne 1997: 532-33)

Pyne’s quote frames this chapter because he underscores the very premise of what makes the IWP unique, and its effects on crewmembers so profound. Wildfires are fundamentally different than the hyper-regulated, dehumanizing space of the prison. At their core, wildfires are full of *movement*. The fires themselves move unpredictably, quickly, in ever-shifting ways that require mental and physical acuity. The firefighters who confront them are able to move through typically closed off spaces (like private or military property) with ease, lauded as heroes as they do. The physical movement of prison wildland firefighters parallels a symbolic movement away from the social categorization of criminality, and these effects are profound. Pyne writes that fire is power and agency; this is especially true in the prison context.

In this chapter, I will use the concept of ‘movement’ to describe how IWP crewmembers move away from the physical space of the prison, and simultaneously, move symbolically away from the dehumanizing cauterization of identity that takes place in the prison system. The destabilization of criminal categorization begins in the prison yard’s sallyport and deepens throughout the workdays and sometimes the workweeks that the crew is away from the prison. The crewmembers itch to make this transition. One Cocopah crewmember reflected on this experience in the sallyport, saying, “I’m standing, waiting to get in the buggy, and I start picturing myself without orange on...I start thinking of how I’ll act out there, be out there.” I trace this potentiality throughout this chapter. Participation in the IWP not only offers the possibility of new identities, but for some it is an actualization of it. This chapter charts the types

of self-relational transitions that wildfire crewmembers move through, as they physically move from the walled and isolated prison yard to the open, public spaces of wildland fire.

Into the wild(fire): the physical and symbolic movement of the IWP

The effects of emplacement in the world of wildland fire

Sammy, the crewmember who in Chapter 3 spoke at length about the negative impacts of being classified as an ‘inmate’ on wildfires, was in a much different mood when we sat down for our formal interview. It was late summer and we had been embedded deep in the heart of a rugged mountain range in southeast Arizona for a week, with at least three more weeks ahead of us. The mountain range is considered one of Arizona’s greenest and wettest ‘sky islands,’ or high-altitude forested landscapes that hold much of the state’s dynamic biodiversity. This was without a doubt everyone’s favorite work assignment, and the mood of even the most ornery crewmembers was light. Several years back, a wildfire had ripped through a large swath of ponderosa pines in the upper altitudes of these mountains, and the hollowed remnants of the trees created hazards for campers and day hikers visiting the area. Thus, the Forest Service had contracted the Desierto crew for at least a month to cut these down, along with trees infested with fatal pine beetles, to create space in the forest for new growth.

Because of the remoteness of the location, the crew stayed at the campsite at the top of the mountain range for five days at a time, driving back to the prison each weekend. Rooster, the Crew Boss, went grocery shopping at the start of each week, buying enough meals and snacks for all five days, the menu of which the crew and COs decided on together the week before. The monsoon rains had arrived and saturated most of the state, which meant the risk of wildfires starting from lightning or other causes were minimal. So every Monday, the crew comfortably settled into the routines of work, play, and camping that this jobsite offered. The thunderstorms

would stop the crew's ability to operate chainsaws safely around 1 or 2 pm most days, and sometimes the COs decided that the stoppage would last for the rest of the afternoon. On these days, the crewmembers would spend their afternoons playing cards, hiking to find bears or blackberries, or having chair- and table-building competitions using their chainsaws to carve out furniture from the felled trees. On one of these slow-moving afternoons, Sammy and I sat to do our interview in one of the forest clearings created by the fire a few years back. He and I looked around us at the carpet of yellow and red wildflowers, signaling the new growth that emerges from the ash-rich soil and abundance of sunlight after a wildfire.

As we settled in for the interview and after I had gone through my initial set of background questions like those about his charges, and how long he'd been on the crew, he abruptly changed the subject. "This," he stated as he stretched his arms out to his sides, sweeping them across the vista in front of us, "This is bliss."

"I've heard you say bliss to describe where we are over the last few days," I said, intending to use this as an opportunity to move to a particular set of questions I asked every crewmember, regarding the way they experienced spending large amounts of time working and camping in physical environments like the one Sammy and I sat in. My goal was to understand how prisoners experienced a space so categorically different than the prison yard. "What do you mean by that word, exactly?"

Sammy, in his typically sardonic way, laughed and said, “You always ask the tough



Figure 4.2. The location of my interview with Sammy.

questions, huh?” Then he sat quietly for a bit to formulate an answer, as the tape recorder rolled.

When I played back the audio to transcribe the interview, the moment sounded like this: first, a crow cawed from a pine tree above us, and then the ambient sound of forest noise filled the air.

After about 20 seconds, this silence was punctured with Stevie, fiddling with his chainsaw blade 30 yards away, yelling to Matias, “Hey, get me a cigarette, fucker!” And Matias, from somewhere a little further away, yelling back, “Man, *hell no!*

You aren’t supposed to pick up smoking again,

I’m not getting you shit!” Then Stevie, laughing while standing up to walk to the buggies, shouted back, “Alright *fine*. I’ll steal from Fernando then!” Fernando, from somewhere else nearby, laughed and yelled OK. Their chatter tapered off. Summer ambience once again filled the tape. A languid buzz of a bee wanting some of Sammy’s Gatorade slipped in and out of the recorder’s range. Silence, I noted when transcribing this moment, was relative. Finally, Sammy spoke, saying, “You know, I can’t think of a better word than bliss. I mean, it’s the peace of it all, you know. Every once in a while the saws aren’t running, or you don’t have to listen to people run their yap or anything like that...” He tossed his head towards Stevie’s direction and smiled broadly. “I love those loud motherfuckers, but they kind of ruined the moment, didn’t they? But even with them. Just being here. Actually, no, I’ll say it: being here *with them*. It’s

peaceful.” I nodded my head at his answer, but he stopped and stared intently at me, making me realize how important that word really was. He repeated it, slowly. “P E A C E. It’s hard to describe what peace means for a guy doing 10 years in prison.”

Sammy’s sentiment was echoed almost universally across all three crews I worked with. In the aggregate of all 31 interviews I conducted, the crewmembers isolated the category ‘nature’/‘the outdoors’ as one of the top three benefits of working on the IWP (the other two categories were ‘friendship’/‘brotherhood’ and ‘skills’/‘work experience’). Moreover, beyond being a simple perk of the job, crewmembers drew a strong correlation between the experience of ‘nature’/‘the outdoors’ with changes in ‘identity’ and ‘self worth.’ For example, a crewmember named Dove stated, “Just getting away from the yard changes everything. You get to think about what you want. [pointing to the view] See out there? That’s freedom. That’s what I am working towards. I am experiencing these trees, this green, this smell, and I think about how I never did this before. I never took my sons here. I never did, but now I can. I’m figuring out that this is who I am. I wouldn’t get to do that type of thinking if I never left the yard.”

Sixty-five percent of crewmembers that I interviewed started their prison sentences on higher-level yards comprised of people with violent or lengthy charges. Therefore, most crewmembers experienced some combination of solitary confinement, 23-hour-a-day lockdowns, or being shackled to-and-from various locations for at least a certain period of their incarceration. Even on the low-security yards where all IWP participants lived while on the crew, their movement was dictated both by prison regulations and the complex racial lines invisibly drawn across the yard. To reiterate what I said in Chapter 3, prison’s physical confinement is a specific institutional attribute that limits a person’s ability to craft emergent, positive identities (DeVeaux 2013, Jones and Schmid 2000). Yet on the IWP, individuals were fully immersed in

non-restrictive spaces. The openness and relative freedom of the physical space of fighting fires, therefore, was almost always discussed when prisoners described what they thought was so jarring when they first joined the crew, and so meaningful as they continued to spend weeks and months on the line. In experiencing a relative sort of freedom, like Dove described, many IWP crewmembers explained that their very sense of self, their identity, was transformed. These statements were so abundant, and were explored so deeply by crewmembers during our interviews, that I began to ask myself to what extent should my anthropological analysis deconstruct them.

In the past few decades, the field of anthropology has taken to interrogating the power structures embedded within the relationship between humans and nature (Agrawal 2005, Braun 2002), and underscoring the ideological and socio-political foundations of the concept of ‘nature’ itself (Cronon 1996). Both of these lines of thinking are necessary so as to not assume a naïve stance on the role of nature on identity formation for IWP participants. A critical lens can be applied to the experience of the ‘wilderness’ for prison firefighters, in particular the relationship between the immersion into nature and the expression of ‘better,’ more regulated selves. Scholars have traced the way The Environment is constructed and delineated in various cultural contexts, and through this process, how subjects are produced and managed (Foucault 2004). For example, in an ethnographic study of a wilderness adventure program for at-risk youth, Dent (2006) explores the production of ‘proper’ subjects who learn the benefits of physical and mental discipline through forays into nature, and the construction of an unsullied, better version of oneself far away from the ‘dirty’ urban spaces from which participants come.

If one considers the IWP as similar to wilderness programs that Dent describes, it can be read as another example of how nature is used to fashion individual subjects who adopt

normalized notions of hard work and discipline. It can also be seen as sedimenting the distinction between urban:dirty and wild:clean (Millikan 2006), which is a common trope in the American mythos rife with racist and classist undertones (Harvey 2005). In my study there were certainly data that supported this frame of analysis. One crewmember, describing his childhood growing up in central Phoenix with little access to any environment except an urban, gritty one, stated, “Out here you feel clean, sort of, even though I haven’t showered in *days* [laughs]. But like, my soul...is clean out here...it’s so different than the dirtiness of the city. And definitely the [prison] yard.” Other crewmembers echoed this quote, drawing on the persistent American trope of nature being a sort of purifying religious experience. Bud, who acted as the de facto pastor of the crew, told me one day after he held an AA meeting under a massive stand of pine trees, “If this ain’t what church is REALLY supposed to look like, then I don’t know what is.” And of course, in addition to nature being constructed by crewmembers as a space of cleansing, or a space of near-religiosity, it was also imbued with the hard physical work of wildfire fighting, which supports the argument that self-disciplined subjects are productively ‘made’ in these spaces.

Beyond the recognition, though, that the space of the IWP might support subject-producing effects on IWP crewmembers, is there room for an analysis of peace, or of healing, described by prisoners like Sammy on the fireline? And is it possible to describe how being away from the physical restriction of the prison yard positively shapes a person’s selfhood without ultimately concluding this process is normalizing or disciplinary? As I argue in the dissertation more broadly, it is possible to make both of these arguments concurrently. To do so, understanding the role of nature in the reformulation of identities of IWP members from an embodied, phenomenological approach is most useful. By this, I mean to take the sentiments of crewmembers who described the positive effect of nature on their personhood as empirical

measures of their own experience (knowing ‘experience’ is always a mediated event), and moreover, to recognize the unspoken shifts in bodies—in posture and comfort and relation—as the crew moved to these open, relatively un-surveilled spaces, and analyze what this embodied shift means at a symbolic level.

In order to engage in this approach, it is useful to consider the mountain ranges, wildfires, and open skies of the IWP as *places* rather than spaces (Casey 1993). The prison, in this formulation, is a space—a physical location, sure, but also an abstracted regime, an institutional and ideological drive towards dehumanization. In contrast, IWP members treat nature less as a space but as a place, a “complex living interplay” (Casey 1993: 12) between crewmembers and their surroundings, which leads to more affective considerations about how different environments made them feel differently about themselves and others (Ingold 2000). Ingold describes this phenomenological relationship between person and nature as the “dwelling body,” stating, “The landscape, in short, is not a totality that you or anyone else can look *at*, it is rather the world *in* which we stand in taking up a point of view on our surroundings. And it is within the context of this attentive involvement in the landscape that the human imagination gets to work in fashioning ideas about it” (207, emphasis in the original).

In agreement with anthropologists who approach the relationship between self and nature as a co-constitutive one, I argue that there is a continual act of *emplacement* that occurs in the physical environment of the IWP. The concept of emplacement is often used in anthropology to describe a “restorative place-making,” or a reclamation of the physical and social environment, for groups of people—often indigenous—who are at risk of displacement through political and environmental threats (Tsing 2008). Here, the ‘group’ is incarcerated people, and the effects of emplacement are equally empowering. It allows crewmembers to form new, more emergent

relationships between themselves, nature, and others. These new modes of being are inherently intersubjective and agential (Jackson 1998), meaning that the identities that form through acts of emplacement are simultaneously strengthening a person's own agency as well as their relationships to others. I argue that this results in a type of identity work that holds more possibility for healing and reclamation of dignity than could occur within the confines of the prison yard.

The stars, the self: an ethnographic encounter of identity re-orientation

A clear example of emplacement and its effects came halfway through my fieldwork, at the beginning of the second fire season with the IWP crews. We had been called to a fire that ended up lasting nearly a week, sleeping each night at a primitive campground tucked behind a rocky outcrop on the eastern edge of a mountain range bordering Arizona and New Mexico. This area was exceptionally remote, with the closest town at least sixty miles away. This remoteness made the area a world-renowned astronomical center for stargazers and scientists alike. The wildfire itself wasn't particularly intense, but was on U.S. Forest Service land, which meant that resources were abundant and the crews could expect to stay on the fire for quite a while longer than if it were on state or private property. The days were hot, long, and relatively boring; the fire itself extinguished after just a day, so the crew spent the remaining days 'mopping up,' meaning walking each inch of the hundreds of acres of charred earth checking to ensure the burned trees, agaves, and other vegetation wouldn't re-ignite and cause a new flare up.

The tedium of mop-ups was counteracted, however, by the staggering beauty of the location, and the profoundness of what lay above us. Even though the moon was nearly full when we camped there, the Milky Way emerged each evening as a swath of whiteness painted across the black of the desert sky. Looking up, one could easily spot the dozens of satellites whirring

past, along with the planets whose light remained still amidst the twinkling of the surrounding stars. It was breathtaking. After dinner and debriefing each night, the crew spent the last of their waking moments lying in their cots looking up together finding constellations, or staring quietly in awe. Stevie, the crewmember whom I first encountered during my initial months of fieldwork in a moment of utter self-loathing after killing his best friend in a DUI crash, sauntered up to me as I sat writing fieldnotes. At this point he had been made one of the crew's squad leaders and had begun to emerge from his trauma, but still had trouble falling asleep on occasion.

He asked if he could sit by me and I agreed, and we both stayed silent for a while. Then he said, "I feel small, looking at this, you know?"

There was no question what he meant, given that I had the same exact feeling while looking at the utter enormity of the galaxies in view. But I asked him to explain.

"There's something about the sky when you see it just like this...it's feeling small that gets you thinking. I'm small in comparison to [he gestured above us], but not insignificant. I feel...this is the first time I can sort of see what people mean when they talk about being part of something."

I asked him to continue, and he said, "On the yard we act big. Like...[he puffed his chest up and grimaced]...but I think we get sick of *acting big* but *feeling small*. Playing politics. Guards fucking with us. It all makes you feel small, so you act big. But here...right now, I feel small but significant. Do you get the difference? I understand now how things fit together, maybe...being out here makes you rethink every single thing. I guess I feel different because you look up, and you can say, I may be tiny, but I'm a part of something bigger..."

Our conversation continued in this manner for a few more minutes, and I was struck by Stevie's introspective assessment of what stargazing meant to him, and how effectively the stars

could shift a person's perspective not only on their own place in the world, but their relationship with others. The next morning, he was in a much more jocular mood. As he and Rex, the CO, stood over the hood of my truck eating breakfast alongside me, Stevie approached the subject in a different way.

“Those *stars last night*,” he said to Rex, shoveling freshly made eggs and sausage into his mouth, part of the large catered breakfast that is served to crews on federal fires each morning. “I told Lindsey they made me feel significant, and you know why? It's ‘cause...”, and then he stopped and put his hands on his hips, and made his stance wide, posing like superman perched on the edge of the world, “It's because I am a Very. Significant. Dude!”

Then he brayed in laughter, finding his new superhero moniker quite funny. “I know! Call your book that, Lindsey! Call us...significant!” And with this pronouncement he walked off with his unfinished plate of breakfast to joke around with his fellow crewmembers.

Rex looked at him sideways but laughed hard also, shaking his head at the whole exchange. He may not have fully understood the context of Stevie's and my conversation the previous night, but he understood the subtext. After a few more chuckles he said, “What a weird motherfucker! But let me tell you something, it makes me feel good to hear him say that. When I met him he hated himself so much he wouldn't even joke, let alone...to call himself significant? Shit, that just...” He took a second, and then finished, “That just means we're doing something right out here, that he's just a little bit better, feels a little better. I'm proud of him.” He too, then, took his plate and walked away, yelling at a few crewmembers who hadn't done their morning chores, preparing to fight the fire again that day. Rex and Stevie's days had begun anew.

It was *this* encounter that made me begin to analyze the IWP less as a jobsite and more as a continual act of emplacement. Crewmembers described their experience on the IWP as

simultaneously being in a physical place, while also experiencing an existential reformulation of belonging. In the carceral context, belonging to any one thing (a social status, a family, e.g.) is inherently stripped away by the nature of imprisonment (Sykes 1958), and thus the act of emplacement on the IWP gains importance in reformulating one's sense of self in the world. What Stevie described and what crewmembers of the IWP alluded to as the intimate 'culture' of wildland fire is comparable to what the ethnographer Michael Jackson (1989) might call a 'life-world,' or a world "whose horizons are open, where we adjust our needs to the needs of others, test our ideas against the exigencies of life" (1). What Stevie isolated as most meaningful in his stargazing—the call to something bigger, while feeling his perspective on his own self shift—is what I will broadly call a *re-orientation of the self*, which is an existential shift in a person's understanding of themselves that both incorporates and extends beyond subjectivity. This is, in essence, a reformulation of identity on its broadest, and I argue most profound, scale.

Putting such philosophical weight on the landscapes of the IWP is not a stretch; the life-world of wildland fire offers itself to this analysis. Below, two images represent the possibility of re-orientation.



Figure 4.3. On the fireline.

In the above image, taken on the same fire where Stevie and I stargazed, only a partial view of the mountain face under which the crew worked was captured in frame. The picture offers a broad view of various parts of any given wildfire: starting from the bottom, the black indicates where the flames torched the earth; the green indicates non-burned land (from this far vantage it looks like shrubs, but is in fact a stand of tall mesquite trees); the streak of red is where a helicopter dropped fire retardant to create an artificial break so if the fire had reached that far it would be stopped; a sheer rock face dominates the top half of the image, extending far above the frame. In this picture, right at intersection of the black and green, you see the Desierto crew mopping up the fire. This shows that feeling small, just as Stevie described when looking at the stars, is not uncommon on the fireline. Below is an image of a different fire on the opposite side

of the state, in a rugged set of foothills notorious for its perilous rockslides and punishing hikes. In this picture the crew has disappeared from view completely, as they are miniscule in comparison to the hundreds of acres of burning landscape that surround them. Even the Chinook, the biggest of all helicopters to operate on wildfires with the capacity to hold tens of thousands of gallons of water, looks small in this picture.



Figure 4.4. A Chinook dropping water on a fire.

The sense of smallness was only one of several ways that the landscapes of the IWP offered a re-orientation of the self for IWP crewmembers. This came by other means, like working and sleeping under the vast openness of the rural Arizona sky, which seemed especially transformative for those who had spent time in solitary confinement. Another re-orientation was through the physical changes their bodies underwent after months of conditioning. This was a common topic of conversation between prisoners as they carved paths on rugged mountains to reach a fire, describing to each other the shock at their own stamina and strength. Yet another re-orientation occurred with the ease of movement through space afforded by being a wildland firefighter. Many new crewmembers described feeling overwhelmed to the point of physical

illness the first few times away from the prison yard, because of how quickly landscapes seemed to pass, and how accessible these spaces seemed to be to incarcerated people. COs would sometimes chide new crewmembers for continually looking back at them for approval when walking to another part of camp or to the chow line, reminding them that they weren't on the yard anymore, and didn't have to act like children testing the boundaries of a parent.

One crewmember described this relative freedom by saying, "This is crazy, isn't it? A few months ago I was being told when I could [use the bathroom.] And now I can scramble up to the highest peak I can find, just to see what I can see." Another stated, "When you can hike to take care of whatever is happening on a fire, you're trusted. It feels good to be trusted, like I'm worth that." Just as Stevie connected his view of the stars with his shifting perspective on his own positionality, the daily embodiment of working on the IWP offered prisoners the ability to re-orient their identity away from the confines of the prison yard. Importantly, nearly all of the data that I collected on this correlation between open space and a shift in identity to being more reflective, open to possibility, and fully trusted as a person came during our hikes, forays into the more rugged parts of fires, or at night while camping. This is indicative of the potential of unstructured space to speak freely, not just to an ethnographer but to oneself, about the possibilities in sight.

From physical to symbolic: moving away from criminality and cauterization on the IWP

Participants in the IWP move, both literally and symbolically, away from the dehumanizing and restrictive classificatory processes of imprisonment. It is important to distinguish Arizona's prison wildfire program from other states' programs at this point, because the sense of movement—and therefore the possibility of a re-orientation of self—seems to be an anomaly compared to most other programs across the country. In particular, Arizona's program

is quite distinct from California's prison fire program, which is the biggest and most well known program in the nation. Goodman (2010, 2014), who has conducted the only other comprehensive qualitative study on the phenomenon of prison wildland firefighting, conducted interviews with California's crews. On Arizona's IWP, crewmembers live their day-to-day lives on the main prison yards among non-IWP crewmembers. Conversely, California segregates their program participants in permanent 'fire camps,' which are distinct prison units often set in remote and forested landscapes across the state. Crewmembers spend the entirety of their prison sentence in these camps once assigned to the job.

The sheer number of prison firefighters that California uses—upwards of 4,000 in any given year—justifies their own carceral spaces, unlike the much smaller numbers (around 200) in Arizona. Goodman describes that prisoners who participate in California's program do not experience a similar sense of 'transformation' or 're-orientation' that I found in my research. He explains that nearly all of the social structures on regular prison yards end up being replicated in these fire camps (racial divisions, hypermasculine domination, negative relationships with guards). The experience for California prison firefighters, therefore, is much more tempered, with crewmembers seeing some experiential benefits (the camps are smaller and nicer, and the actual firefighting work remains fulfilling), but little affective, identity-level shifts.

For Goodman the general ambiguity that California prison firefighters feel about the program—that they can be treated both as slaves and as heroes, and that this experience isn't particularly life altering—is an example of what he calls "the variegated nature of prisons and punishment, which vary across time and place, and according to the many nested and overlapping fields in which people and institutions are embedded" (Goodman 2014: 388). In essence, he describes the fire camps as partially exceptional, but also beholden to the institutional

ideologies of the broader prison regime. Interestingly, even though Arizona's IWP is far more exceptional than California's program in ways I describe throughout this dissertation, I believe that it too offers further proof of the variegation of the modern prison. Although all prison fire programs could be lumped together under the same general category of prison labor—every state pays prisoners \$1.50 or less an hour to fight wildfires—the sociocultural, historical, and ideological differences of these programs result in utterly different phenomena. In Arizona's IWP, the emphasis on symbolic movement and emplacement allows prisoners to craft this space as one of empowerment, as we will see in the following pages.

So far, I have argued that the physical movement into natural landscapes offers prison wildland firefighters an opportunity to re-conceptualize their identities on several levels, like in their perspectives on their own place in the world, or how they might *be* in the world with others. This re-orientation was noted across many interviews, with prisoners using concepts like freedom, trust, and healing as descriptors of their experience in the open spaces of the IWP. A key aspect of this re-orientation of the self on the IWP is that it is an embodied process rather than a discursive one. As such, understanding a shift in identity for IWP participants must be understood at the level of the body as much as anything else. Fighting wildfires is an immensely physical act, and fire crews intimately embody the places of the IWP. Not only do fire crews work in forests and scrublands and gnarled slot canyons in remote corners of the state each day, they sleep in them, eat in them, engage each other in meaningful conversations in them and about them. IWP crewmembers, in short, dwell in these places. This emplacement has profound effects on their senses of self.

Yet, in line with Goodman's variegated comment, crewmembers must return to the prison yard at the end of the workday (or week, or weeks). This movement between two spaces, one

punitive and restrictive and the other quite the opposite, is challenging for crewmembers. Over one third (34%) of prisoners that I interviewed were upfront about the challenges of this continual transition, and at least three crewmembers even quit the IWP—often when they only had a few months left of their sentences—to stay on the yard and focus on their upcoming release. One crewmember, whom I interviewed just as he was about to quit the wildland crew and stay on the yard for the remaining six months of his sentence described this choice,

Going out [off the yard with the fire crew] saved my life for these few years. But it was hard to go back and forth, I'll be honest. You deal with completely different stuff out here. Here you are acting like a normal person with a job. You're treated like a normal person, and then you go back in and have to deal with politics, guards....It can mess your mind up a little to have to go back and forth like that. I decided to stay [on the yard] 'til I leave so I can just focus on one life. It's the worse one but then I'll be out for good.

Many crewmembers, even those who were overwhelmingly positive about their time on the crew and stayed as a crewmember until the last day of their sentence, understood the mental challenges with transitioning from the life-world of the IWP to the bare-life-world of the prison yard. The same was true for the COs, whose complex roles will be further discussed in Chapter 6. As much as IWP participants were given the space, literally and figuratively, to re-shape identities on the crew, the space of the prison yard and its inherent racial, gendered, and punitive norms always loomed in the background.

Yet, although crewmembers openly acknowledged the challenges in shifting between these two spaces, the majority agreed that their time outside of the prison yard was ultimately more beneficial than challenging. From an analytical perspective, this might be because the IWP became a much more exceptional space than the replicate carceral experience of fire camps. The effects of such movement into non-penal space, though sometimes fraught, had measurable effects on prisoners' social categorization. Earlier in the dissertation, I described the concept of

‘cauterization’ as a damaging consequence of incarceration. As Simmons (2011) describes, there are three usages of the word: “The first comes from its roots in the Greek verb *kauteriazerein*, which means to burn with a branding iron.... Second, cauterization refers to a medical procedure in which burning is used to seal off or remove part of the body... Finally, in its most metaphorical meaning, cauterization means to deaden feelings or make one callous to the suffering of another” (10). Although the metaphorical meaning of cauterization is apt in describing the deadening effects of imprisonment on both society’s view of prisoners, and prisoners’ views of themselves, the word is doubly useful in that it implies a physical branding, an embodiment of moral Othering. As such, cauterization serves as a useful addendum to the concept of social categorization, or the Foucaultian concept of subject formation, that I established takes place on the yard in Chapter 3. Here, I argue that the movement from the walled, deadened space of the prison yard to the open life-world of the IWP can act as a process, however temporary, of reverse cauterization.

What does reverse cauterization mean for prisoners in the IWP? If we argue that imprisonment constructs and maintains the social category ‘criminal,’ and that incarcerated people are beholden to this morally and legally ‘othered’ social category (and might come to enact it) through various carceral processes, how is this process reversed? Simmons writes that it is possible to achieve reverse cauterization if the Other (in this case an incarcerated person) “reclaims a voice...once the Other has a voice, the deconstruction of cauterization must continue by overturning the branding of the Other. The Other is categorized, placed into an essentialized synecdoche where he or she is labeled as a permanent part of a group...[reverse cauterization occurs with the] deconstruction of identities that are imposed on the marginalized Other” (160). Simmons grapples with the challenge of fully deconstructing social categories and identities,

drawing on Butler's work (1993, 2005) to state, "the Other is not beyond the system...but is entangled in a normative web of hegemonic discourse" (169). In essence, reverse cauterization is always tempered by the hegemonic structures at work in society. Butler describes this inherent restriction, stating, "Our capacity to respond to a face as a human face is conditioned and mediated by frames of reference that are variably humanizing and dehumanizing" (Butler 2005: 29).

Therefore, it is necessary to approach any discussion of 'reverse' cauterization with the caveat that the Other, and all those who gaze upon the Other, are beholden to conditioned social norms that may result in categories not being challenged in any complete way. Both Butler and Foucault's theories remind us of the pervasiveness of the social structures within which we reside, and how a social category of 'criminal,' for example, is enmeshed so deeply in society's normative processes that it cannot be fully reversed. However, Butler herself describes certain "re-significations" that might occur across the hegemonic discourse (1993), and Simmons concludes that "The hegemonic discourse has fault lines, spaces, and states of exception where the self can perform subversive acts to rebel against the cauterization process" (Simmons 2011: 162). I argue that on the IWP, prisoners and COs alike confront these fault lines with intentionality, actively creating a space that rejects some of the cauterization that occurs on the yard. This process occurs in tandem with what I have described so far in this chapter, which is the physical environment of the IWP itself creating opportunities for re-orientation, or re-inscription, of identity.

A final ethnographic vignette illustrates this point. I had joined the Badger crew on a fire that was started by a rancher burning trash too close to a stand of salt cedar trees, which caught on fire and turned into a conflagration in the large wash next to his rural property in the flat, arid

middle part of the state. The crew worked the fire alongside several other non-prison crews, including a few volunteer firefighters from the nearby town who brought their engines to provide water for the crew to hose down the smoldering salt cedars. The Badger crew had just come from another fire, so they had been away from prison for over a week. Having last seen them on the yard a few weeks prior, I was jarred by the difference in demeanor of the same men in such different surroundings. The crew had adopted a ‘wildland posture,’ which I use as a term to describe the embodiment of wildfire fighting culture that all crews, prison or non-, share. This posture is aesthetic, corporeal, and symbolic. Most wildland firefighters are careful to change their socks and underwear frequently to avoid any nasty infections or unpleasant fungi, but most choose to let their PPE—their personal protective equipment, notably the bright yellow shirts all firefighters wear on the line—get as filthy as possible to indicate how long they’ve been out on the line. Some shirts might get so stiffened by sweat and ash over the course of weeks that firefighters can stand them upright, teetering as makeshift and smelly statues to their own labor. The Badger crew had fully leaned into the ritual, relishing the salt cedars for making their shirts even dirtier than before.

In addition to blackened shirts, a wildland posture is also a physical stance, and not one that is solely individually embodied. That is because the boundaries of the wildland body become porous, enmeshing into other crewmembers around it. Crewmembers become deeply in sync with each other after multiple days or weeks spent on wildfires. Digging line, which is the most common activity any wildland firefighter will do on any given fire, is a steadily rhythmic motion, and is almost hypnotically so when each crewmember matches their movements to the person working next to them. The synchronicity of the work, in addition to the sheer amount of time these individuals spend in close proximity to each other, results in crews walking in step

around the fire camps, stretching their muscles in tandem. Wildland firefighting culture is decidedly a space of collectivism rather than individualism.

For the IWP crews, a wildland posture was also symbolic. A CO on another fire described it to me, “You see [a veteran crewmember] standing over there? See his shoulders back, looking tall, looking lean? He looks proud, huh? That’s what we build towards out here, not just learning to dig in the dirt [laughs]. We’re building that confidence, that...we’re all standing straighter, me, him, you. That’s what this place does. It can remake us.” Relating to the discussion in this chapter’s introduction, where I described fire as symbolic of rebirth, this CO and other crewmembers who shared similar sentiments throughout my fieldwork remarked on the ‘wildland posture’ as a mark of personal transformation—physically, emotionally, categorically.

Back on the salt cedar fire, the crew worked hard to save the rancher’s property that was



Figure 4.5. A blue helmet hoses off the edge of the salt cedar fire.

at risk for being lost to the flames. The rancher and his family, including several small kids, couldn’t help but hover, keeping an eye on the crews as they herded their animals and pets and possessions, just in case. After the crews successfully abated the flames, the rancher’s wife emerged from the

homestead with sodas and Gatorade in order to thank them. The IWP crews had to decline the gift due to ADC policies, as happened each time rural homesteaders and strangers alike gave out small tokens of gratitude (for a more detailed discussion on the public perception of the crews,

see chapter 6). When the rancher's wife and children approached the blue helmets of the Badger crew to chat with them, I was standing next to a prisoner whom I had initially interviewed a few months back on his second day off the yard. At the time, Eduardo confided in me that he had gotten a migraine headache the first day on the crew because of how fast the landscape moved past him in the buggies, having not been in a vehicle for over seven years prior to that moment. Quickly, however, he adopted the wildland posture and spoke at length about the healing effects of being off the yard. As we watched the rancher's family walk back to their house that was kept safe by the crew, I asked him what it was like to have an interaction like that.

“At first it felt like [the public] were staring at me. I was paranoid. It felt like all eyes were on me,” he said.

“How did you deal with that?” I asked.

“I basically stuck with D [one of the crew's blue helmets, who served as a mentor to him over the first few months]. I would hang back behind him, watching him and how he'd interact, kinda slinking in the background you know? I didn't want anyone to look at me 'cause I was worried what they would think. But then I realized it wasn't bad, when they wanted to make eye contact with me or talk to me. It was just that they were seeing me. I was being *seen* like a *human being* again.”

It was true that Eduardo had both physically and metaphorically emerged from behind D over the past few months, taking on more duties and becoming more talkative, standing towards the front of the crowds instead of nestling his way to the back, trying to disappear. I noted this change in behavior in several crewmembers as they spent more time on the crew, and several expressed similar sentiments to Eduardo. One crewmember on the Desierto crew, Dewey,

explained, “When I’m out here, I’m not a piece of trash anymore. I’m me, I’m a *person*. Have I fucked up? Yeah. I’m in prison! [laughs] But I’m not something to just throw away.”

Both of these quotes underscore the link between identity and social categorization. I have defined identity throughout this dissertation as the way a person relates to himself or herself, but also as the way he or she interacts with the world. Indeed, Eduardo aptly summarizes one of the most common impacts on identity that IWP participants identified, which is being regarded—and slowly learning to accept being regarded—as a human again, after having survived years of incarceration in a subhuman status. Returning to a phenomenological analysis, one might call the crewmembers’ shift in self-relation, based in part on others’ perception, as the *potentia* to the prison system’s *potesta* (Ruddick 2010).

Drawing on Spinozan concepts, Ruddick explains *potentia* (Latin for potential) as an affective and co-constitutive process, wherein individuals collaborate to find a “capacity to act” against the procedures “of alienation or domination” (25) of *potesta* (Latin for power). Anthropologists like James Igoe (2013) are beginning to theorize the ways in which individuals and groups are resisting forms of *potesta* like authoritarian regimes, neoliberal marketplaces, or in this case the prison industrial complex, by exploring these groups’ processes of empowerment and ways of *becoming* more than their subjectified identities on the prison yard. *Potentia*, as Igoe (2013) articulates, can be used to describe how people use their collective agency to “bend, circumvent, and even recraft the terms” (6) of normative regimes of power. I argue that this occurs through the emplacement of the IWP, and the reverse cauterization that such an experience engenders.

Potentia, as both Igoe and Ruddick argue, requires not simply a person’s inner ability to formulate new ways of thinking about themselves, but is dependent on others’ perspectives

shifting and becoming more open as well. Identity again here is positioned as inherently relational, based both on the inner self and the social system. The wildfire program is foundationally a public-facing program. Nearly every workday, prisoners communicated with non-prisoners, whether they were homeowners, non-prison wildfire crews, or the occasional starry-eyed child in a restaurant. The impact of this public interaction goes beyond a simple ‘feel good’ story, but acted as a fundamental reinscription of social cauterization for both prisoners and the broader public (see Chapter 6 for further discussion). This differentiates the IWP from other labor programs, like service dog training, or even social programs like creative writing workshops, where prisoners conduct personally meaningful work still hidden in the confines of the prison yard. The IWP allows everyone involved to re-consider what being a prisoner means. The lack of any identifying clothing or linguistic markers provides a symbolic fluidity for those who participate. This, in turn, provides emotional and psychological room for crewmembers to question who they are, or who they can choose to be, questions not often posed in the prison context (Jones and Schmid 2000).

Indeed, the modern form of incarceration has naturalized the social cauterization of criminality to the extent that it seems inconsequential that prisoners refer to themselves as sub-human. What is interesting in both Eduardo and Dewey’s quotes is the extent to which prisoners themselves recognize their own cauterization as prisoners. Yet as discussed in Chapter 3, this social category is anything but natural; it is crafted through policies, language, and embodied procedures each day for people in prison. Therefore, the conscious refusal of this cauterization time and time again on the crew serves an important process in the opening of new senses of self and self-relation. It was between crewmembers, as well as COs who served on the fire crews, that the reversal of the social cauterization of criminality occurred each day on the IWP.

Crewmembers would chide each other for describing themselves disparagingly or accepting their fate as ‘inmates.’ On one fire, a group of Badger crewmembers huddled under a broad mesquite tree scarfing down their lunch, and as they ate one of them said, “Man, I love it out here. I don’t even want to get out!” He was slated to be released from prison within the month, and was anxious about finding work and a place to stay, as he had been homeless for most of his adult life prior to prison. A crewmember next to him forcefully put down his food and grabbed his forearm, initiating eye contact. “Do. Not. *Ever*. Say that you want to stay inside, buddy. You are *better* than that.” The soon-to-be-released crewmember laughed, but shook his head in agreement.

In another example, following protocol for all wildland fire crews across the country, at the end of each workday every crew held a ten-minute debriefing. Correctional officers would point out situations that could be improved, and then highlighted the ways in which crewmembers had grown or had achieved something positive. In one of these debriefings, on a particularly hot, exhausting day, a correctional officer stated to the Desierto crew, “You were chosen to do this job not based on your past but on your potential. Every moment that you work together, and that you make hard choices, and that you keep fighting, is when you are showing yourself—not us, but yourself—what it means to succeed.” Pep-talks like these abounded, and although they served a more momentary purpose for egging each other on when the going got tough, they also served as markers of intentional self-making. The symbolic re-orientation of personhood that occurred on the IWP was fostered by the physical environment of wildland fire, and engendered by the daily discourses and embodiment of IWP participants. Both the crewmembers and the COs on the fire crews chose to use the IWP as a place where pasts and futures were delineated, and where new identities could be forged.

Conclusion

The aims of this chapter have been threefold. The first was to argue that the IWP offered crewmembers the chance for emplacement in natural, de-carceral environments, which is an affective and restorative place-making categorically opposed to the prison context. In the rugged, open landscapes of Arizona where wildland fire dwells, IWP crewmembers are given the opportunity to re-orient their identities away from the restrictive, dehumanizing ‘inmate’ identities of the yard, and towards more emergent and transformative ones. The second aim of this chapter was to offer an explanation of how, once emplaced, this process of reverse cauterization occurs for IWP participants. In this chapter I approached identity at its broadest, most existential level, positioning an IWP identity as an affirmative and embodied one, which rejects the discursive and moral cauterization of imprisonment. The third, overall aim of this chapter was to lay the groundwork for the upcoming two chapters, where I discuss identity in more specific terms. In chapters 5 and 6, I describe how ‘masculine identity’ and ‘working identity’ are re-oriented through participation on the IWP. These chapters will further elucidate the discussion on identity and social categorization that took place within this chapter, as I explore how identities are specifically reformulated and prison’s dehumanization is at least partially rejected through participation on the IWP.

Chapter 5: The expression of alternative prison masculinities

A summer tableau

I begin this chapter with a direct excerpt from my fieldnotes. Over the course of my fieldwork I noted examples of masculine performance that I observed when working with the crew. While many of these observations were brief, perhaps only a sentence or two, occasionally a vignette presented itself in its full form. One such moment occurred near the end of my research period, captured here in this fieldnote excerpt:

Fieldnotes. Late July, 2016. Sometimes when I want to write about masculinity all I can do is describe what I see. Like now. We are on the mountain for a week, it's night two. It's late July, which means monsoons every day and no chance of a wildfire so we've settled in for the night. It is pouring rain and I am observing the crew from a distance from the back of my 4Runner, so from here they are a bit blurry. It almost looks like a tableau, like a Renaissance painting, the way these male bodies are arranged and because of the downpour. If I had to title this painting it would be 'Untitled' because it is beyond definition to me. Why? Because from here, what I see is much more complex than any sort of masculinity I've ever seen written about men in prison. I see a lush green mountainside speckled with burned-out trees, the undergrowth threatening to take over everything in sight. It looks tropical. Nestled in the greenery, I see a ramada with a low concrete table and two matching benches. Half the crew is huddled under it. Four are straddled on one bench, in a row, giving each other back rubs. Two more are trying to figure out how to make chai tea for the rest of the crew with a campfire that's rapidly dwindling from the rain. They are guarding the tea and mugs with their bodies to protect their precious cargo for their brothers. Three more have abandoned dryness altogether, and are out in the deluge holding giant axes, finding the biggest logs to try and hack apart, screaming like Tarzan with each successive thwack, and then laughing together, comparing hits. They are all making dick jokes. The size of the axe is the size of the...yadda yadda. One of them starts singing a Fleetwood mac song, playing air guitar, for lack of a real one. Several start humming along. In this one scene I see machismo and normative masculinity, yes, but I also see laughter and care and tenderness and humor. I see full men.

After 15 months of working, sweating, and sleeping next to the male participants of the IWP, I still found it challenging to adequately analyze the performance of masculinity present on any given day on the fire crew. When I got to the end of this set of fieldnotes, my pen hovered over the word 'full,' because I wasn't sure if that word encapsulated the type of masculine identity I had borne witness to during this research. Did I mean full, or maybe complex, or multifaceted? I chose 'full' because there was a sense of richness to the array of the moment, but I still wavered

in my choice. These uncertainties were, interestingly, already present in another set of notes from one of my first fires during the first two weeks of my fieldwork. We were conducting a prescribed burn at night, when fire conditions were safest. I had stayed up with the Badger Crew because they were assigned the graveyard shift, tasked with watching the creeping field of flames throughout the night to ensure no embers leapt the dirt road causing an unintentional wildfire. Around 4 a.m., the crew was tired of standing, and tired in general. They were momentarily relieved to go back to their buggies and refill their supplies.

One crewmember, who had climbed up the back steps of the buggy, called out to another to ask if he needed any food or chew. The other crew member walked up to him and placed his hand on his crewmate's thigh, which was eyelevel because he was standing on the back of the buggy, and gave it a quick squeeze, and said, "I'm good bro, thanks for thinking of me." The crewmember on the buggy gently tapped the other's helmet and said, "Of course, man." It was the briefest of interactions between two tired men that, if I were not analyzing masculine performance, would've passed unnoticed. But, when the crewmember on the ground reached up to squeeze the thigh of the other man as a gesture of thanks, like he would his shoulder or arm, I found myself waiting for the homophobic remark, the "Ew, that's gay." But it never came. In my notes, after describing this interaction, I wrote,

I wonder if it's because I'm fresh off teaching 18-year-old fraternity brothers at a college campus that I am so surprised by the intimate (physical and emotional) homosocial relationships between these crewmembers, which exist without any 'no homo' stipulations. Or maybe I'm surprised because my assumptions about the type of masculinity I would see performed by men in prison, who also exist within the realm of the über-masculine profession of wildland firefighting, have so far been entirely wrong.

Taken together, these two ethnographic moments—which bookend my fieldwork experience—offer a strong justification for an in-depth analysis of the complex masculinity present in the Inmate Wildfire Program (IWP).

The goal of this chapter is not to question the existing literature, detailed in Chapters 1 and 3, that posits prison masculinity as almost always hegemonic, and very often violent. My data uphold the argument that the prison yard is a space lacking in meaningful friendships and non-hierarchical expressions of manhood. This fact, coupled with constructions of wildfire fighting itself as equally normatively masculine, make the IWP stand out as an anomalously gendered penal space. An analysis of gender performance on the IWP, in which these normative modes of masculine expression are given more depth and nuance, achieves a few aims. First, it sheds light on the positive effects that more vulnerable, intimate, and non-violent forms of gender performance can have. More broadly, and in keeping with the aims of this dissertation writ large, understanding the complexity of masculinity on the IWP helps to challenge the totalizing effect that institutions—the prison being key among them—have in the production of gendered identities.

I argue that the performance of both physical and emotional intimacy by crewmembers and fostered by program officials constructs a space of *alternative masculinity* on the IWP. This resists the incursion of more violent ‘state intimacies’—the imperative of the state to inject itself, along with its violent predispositions towards hegemonic masculinity—in the lives of incarcerated men, which further enforces this type of violence in the prison space. I operate under the premise that there are normative modes of masculine performance in the U.S. broadly, which dictate the way relationships form, intimacy and vulnerability are negotiated (or avoided), and power is expressed (Bonta and Gendreau 1990, Connell 1987). This normative masculinity becomes hyper-amplified by every process of modern incarceration. Yet, as Crewe et al. (2014) state, there is a tendency in the scholarship on masculinity to overlook any type of emotional, homosocial, or alternative form of masculine identity expression that is disruptive to the violent

hegemony of prison. They write, “It is surprising how little attention has been given either to the interior emotional worlds of male prisoners and to the underlying affective dynamics between them” (63). They continue, “Certainly, masculinity flows in all kinds of ways in prison, and it is incumbent on researchers to look beyond its surface expressions if they are to understand the prison experience, prison masculinities and the prisoner social world” (63). These masculine flows on the Inmate Wildfire Program are the central point of analysis for this chapter.

Towards the possibility of alternative prison masculinities

As discussed in Chapter 3, research on normative performances of manhood in prison provides ample evidence to suggest that prison masculinity is as close to a monolith as any social system can be. To be an incarcerated man is to be compelled towards violence and hierarchy. In the broader dissertation, I use the term violence to describe the physical, emotional, and mental harm that incarceration engenders, through a variety of institutional processes. As it relates to masculinity, I describe violence as the forms of patriarchal hegemonic domination that have deleterious effects emotionally, psychologically, and physically on all of those who are incarcerated. However, the masculine ‘masks’ that men wear in prison, wielded as a survival strategy against the deprivation of security in prison (Sykes 1958), do not tell the whole story of masculinity in prison.

Jewkes (2005) calls on researchers to examine this whole story of gendered performance, stating, “Whatever their circumstances, individuals are not mere bearers of structure; they are complex amalgams of several influences, responding to their life experiences with greater or lesser degrees of compliance and confrontation, defining their own individuality in terms of both cultural conformity and resistance” (Jewkes 2005: 61). Similarly, Crewe et al. call for a “challenge to depictions of prisons as environments that are unwaveringly sterile, unfailingly

aggressive, or emotionally undifferentiated” (2014: 1). This chapter takes on this challenge. I attempt to define the IWP as a particular penal space where hegemonic masculinity is not abandoned, but is also not fully and blindly accepted. Instead, it is a space of complex and inclusive masculinity, shaped by the risky and vulnerable work of wildfire fighting itself, by the inclusive racialized composition of the crews, and by the emotional intimacy between the men, who take advantage of the space away from prison yard masculinity to redefine it—at least partially—for themselves.

Masculinity, like any other social construct, is not simply ‘as it is,’ but is continually made and shaped. As I have discussed throughout this dissertation, one of the central goals in conducting a study on an anomalous prison program like the IWP is to underscore that prisons are not immovable objects, but are made up of people, and as such the institutional structures can live and breathe and hold room for contradictions and subversions to hegemonic standards. As Rubin (2017) writes in her article on understanding the role of structure in addition to agency in studies of prisoner resistance, the “prison regime is not only the force against which prisoners react but also the source material that assists or makes prisoners’ actions possible” (650). The same can be said for gendered performance inside prison. Both the people inside prison, and the structure of the prison itself, shapes the way hegemonic masculinity is performed, upheld, and subverted. It is critical to understand masculinity in its complexity as opposed to in its most obvious forms.

Scholars have begun to examine alternate forms of masculinity that attempt to counteract hegemonic masculinity’s deterministic tendencies. The downfall of the concept ‘hegemonic masculinity’ is that it is underpinned by the notion of a fixed male structure, thus failing to theorize the role of the subject in daily acts of resistance or subversion (Whitehead 2002). But, in

rejecting determinism, it is also important not to veer too far towards agency and argue that masculinity can simply be constructed anew, and that men expressing intimacy or vulnerability on the wildfire crew are somehow outside of society's patriarchal structure. Any discussion of an 'alternate' or non-hegemonic masculinity also has to come with a stipulation that masculinity is continually performed in the Butlerian sense, inseparable from the regulatory ideals that performers are compelled to achieve (Butler 1993). Therefore, alternative masculinity is not a reversal of normative gender, but instead is iterative—alternative expressions and embodiments both inform and are informed by dominant structures of power.

This chapter, then, looks for the agentic masculine subject behind prison walls. The correctional institution, its staff, and its occupants hold room for subversion, and this allows a type of friction (Rubin 2015) of gendered norms that may be overlooked at first glance. Prison is not simply a tool with which to sharpen the edges of hegemonic masculinity in U.S. society, though in many cases and through many processes it acts as such. This chapter isolates the ways that incarcerated men are not simply dominating, or simply violent, or simply *surviving*. Instead, it highlights the need to understand masculinity beyond violence, in order to understand the alternatives for normative gendered social structures in prison and beyond.

Redefining manhood on the IWP

Work, fire, and vulnerability

During my second week of fieldwork, I sat in Doug's office against the backdrop of several scribbled-on maps of Arizona's state-owned lands. Doug is the Arizona Forestry official most often coined the 'founder' of the IWP, and as such, I wanted to get my bearings from him on the program itself, as well as the culture of wildland firefighting more broadly. At one point in our conversation he spoke to me about the allure of wildland firefighting. He described it as a

battle, saying, “See, you’ve got Mother Nature, and she’s a fiery bi—I won’t say it, but you know. So you gotta win that fight. You’ve gotta tame her.” At this early point in my research, I assumed that this quote would typify the kind of gendered language I’d hear throughout my 15 months with the prison fire crews. Describing wildfire as a woman who will burn you, and who needs to be controlled, is indicative of the normative performance of rural working masculinity, hegemonic insofar as men are ultimately in control of women, as they are with the land (Liepins 2001). What he stated later on in the same interview, however, challenged this assumption, and allowed me to question the absolutism of machismo present in such an overtly masculine working space. He stated,

Here’s the thing about [wildfire] though, let me tell you. I joke about it, sure, but you have to be humble about it. Fires are *some scary shit*, and we stay safe because we know that it’s all about respecting what’s around us. You get a big head, and you end up dead...on any given fire, we are stayin’ humble and trying to save what we can.

As my work with the fire crews unfolded, I came to understand that Doug’s dual statements are a useful microcosm for the social world of wildland firefighting, which is complex in its gendered expression. I argue that this complexity, seen here as comprised of both machismo *and* humility, ultimately results in an alternative masculinity that incorporates performances of vulnerability and intimacy not often witnessed in the carceral milieu.

Understanding alternative masculinity on the IWP must be situated in the context of labor and masculinity in the prison system more broadly. Prison acts as a site of loss for ‘traditional’ working masculinity for incarcerated people. Key social markers of what makes a man, like a full-time job providing for his family, disintegrates as soon as that man is incarcerated (Jiang and Winfree 2006). Even though all able-bodied prisoners are required to work in the state of Arizona, the labor is primarily low-skilled, and the money that an imprisoned person earns is

small, in most instances with much of a person's income going to fines and restitution for the crime they committed. Thus, with the loss of normative conceptualizations of masculine working identity, one might imagine the IWP as a godsend: nothing could be more stereotypically rugged and manly than fighting fires. One prisoner who had just joined the crew the week prior described this sense of masculine reclamation to me, "Before I was sewing clothes. Now I'm holding a chainsaw. Guess which one my wife likes more?" This quote indicates how the IWP is readily taken up by program participants to respond to the loss of masculine social capital in prison. And yet, the IWP isn't just about revving chainsaws and gaining muscle, however alluring these initial assumptions made by new crewmembers might be.

I found that the types of masculine identity engaged with on the IWP shifted over time for participants, becoming less concerned with machismo and more with the humility and care inherent in the job of wildland firefighting. Although livelihoods centered on risky physical work are historically, socially, and politically masculine spaces (Catano 2001, Pacholok 2013), this does not imply all gendered expression in this space upholds a standard hegemonic narrative. As suggested by Doug in the second quote above, risky work is inherently humbling, and the masculinity it engenders is not straightforward (Catano 2001). In an article about masculinities and farming, Peter et al. (2000) observe that livelihoods which require some form of interaction with the natural world can bring about alternative ways for men to engage with narratives of masculinity. They propose the theory of dialogic masculinity, a type of gendered expression that includes certain iterations of hegemonic masculinity, but also adds non-hegemonic forms, based on the challenging and humbling work one performs, along with the inherent care one cultivates with the environment and other living things (Peter et al. 2000). Building on this work, I argue that the vulnerability Doug described as inherent in the job of wildland firefighting, and the

humility a firefighter must develop in the face of risk, allows IWP crewmembers to express alternative masculine identities that are emotionally vulnerable, incorporating aspects like “fear” or “trust.” In response to the emasculation that occurs in prison (Hunter and Davis 1994), men on the yard might be compelled to respond by forming a carceral identity based on stoicism, individualism, and domination. But on the IWP, alternative masculine expressions emerge that are not beholden to this process.

Scholars like Pacholok and Yarnal et al. have begun explore the way wildfire work may reveal emergent forms of masculinity. In her 2013 book, Pacholok describes the ‘crises of masculinity’ that occur for wildland firefighters in the physically dangerous and emotionally exhausting task of battling a wildfire. She argues that standard discourses of ‘winning’ a battle against wildfire may break down in disastrous fire events, which “troubles the link between masculinity and firefighting” (15). In the context of the IWP, these links become even more meaningful. Men in prison, for the most part, are already considered ‘subpar’ in relation to men in free society (Hunter and Davis 1994). But, when confronted with the task of wildland firefighting, which as Pacholok suggests is not easily ‘won’ or ‘conquered,’ crewmembers of the IWP aren’t simply ditching their failed prison masculinity for a hegemonically sound firefighting masculinity. Instead, they are faced with continual hard choices, moments of fear, episodes of loss, physical pain, and humility in the face of fire itself. What results is the possibility of a more complex expression of masculinity to emerge over time on the IWP.

Fear offers us a good example of this phenomenon, as it operates in interesting ways on the fireline. On the one hand, fire crews cannot let fear ‘win.’ That is, the job of wildland firefighting requires them to face down a harrowing wall of flames, not panic and run away at the sight. (It should be noted that, at least for one anthropologist interloping as a firefighter, this

often felt like the appropriate response.) On the other hand, however, fear was confronted directly, and considered by program participants to be a healthy expression of ‘manliness’ both in the act of firefighting and beyond. The crews I worked with had a heightened awareness of the risks they were taking with their lives, continually conducting safety briefings and discussing with each other the ways they could protect one another. One crew boss reminded the crew each day before they set off to work, “Don’t get a big head, don’t think you’re immortal, stay safe and look out for one another.” In this way, it’s possible to differentiate the potential for alternative masculinity in the work of wildland firefighting from other rural, physical professions (like ranching or farming) because of the extraordinarily high risk of the job. Even the closest corollary to wildland firefighting culture, the military, cannot provide a parallel of alternative masculine identity expression, because the premise of the work is different (wildfire lacks the undertones of hyper-nationalism, for example) and because, at least in the three crews I worked with, vulnerability and fear was not shameful but openly discussed.

Pacholok suggests that the emotional toll on firefighters who are in the process of battling a wildfire allows for normative gender formulations to be ‘redone.’ She points out that ‘redoing’ gender is not ‘undoing’ it, but modifying or resisting certain normative aspects while upholding others. She argues that alternate masculinities can arise at “the micro-level in the gender regimes of fire-fighters’ workplaces...in a social milieu with entrenched patterns of social relations, change may only be possible incrementally and through everyday resistance” (114). This occurred, she described, because “The crises created by the fire shook loose some of the tenacious ties that bind sex category to normative expectations for gender practices. Gender was done differently; the boundaries of firefighting masculinity were expanded to include a more egalitarian and flexible discourse by men” (2012, 109). Pacholok concludes that during any

given wildfire crisis, men had to think critically about what roles they played, what roles women played (both on the line and in communities affected by natural disasters), as well as about the instability and vulnerability inherent in the risks of fighting fires. These daily challenges to entrenched gender roles and expectations instigated a slow, incremental process of change.

Yarnal et al. (2004) also emphasize the effect of firefighting on dominant conceptions of masculinity. Specifically, they describe how firefighters are often on the frontlines of crises (natural disasters, terrorist attacks, violent acts and community emergencies), and therefore must at some point confront the emotional toll these crises take. They write, “Public images of heroism, strength, and rigid masculinity are heavy burdens for male firefighters to bear. These public images stand in contrast to the private realities of life in the firehouse. We see this space differently from other spaces where men have the opportunity to form attachments, nurture, and care for one another” (686). The authors contend that because the public does not afford them affective space to be vulnerable and address the fraught emotional aspects of the job, firefighters use space of the firehouse as a “space for the exploration of alternative masculinities based on intimacy, friendship, and domesticity” (687). Yarnal et al. thus conclude that firefighters create and maintain intimate, care-based masculinities with other firefighters as a way to fully explore, and sometimes heal from, the emotionally challenging experiences of fighting fires.

Yarnal et al. and Pacholok describe two ways in which the world of firefighting provides men alternatives to normative conceptualizations of manhood. In their analyses there is no doubt that hegemonic masculinity exists. But they also point out that the work of firefighting brings with it possibilities to ‘re-do’ masculinity, or to perform manhood in not just violent or hegemonic ways. Pacholok’s theory of ‘redoing’ gender implies that alternate masculinities depend on the embodied, practical performances of masculine subjects in everyday life. This

emphasis on the daily manifestations, both embodied and discursive, of masculinity is particularly compelling in the prison context. As depicted in earlier chapters, the prison operates on sameness and routine. This allows certain social structures to settle into a rhythm of continual (re)performance, with masculine identities continually demanding to be re-affirmed and ascribed (Butler 1993). But when crewmembers leave the yard and enter the IWP, all daily routines are altered and critical thinking is required, and as such, alternative expressions of masculine selves can be deployed.

Against the initial impressions of wildfire fighting work as hegemonically masculine, participation on the IWP allows for more deeply affective experiences for those on the crew, which in turn lead to alternative expressions of masculine identity. As suggested by my fieldnote excerpts that open this chapter, these experiences were frequent between crewmembers, on and off the line. On one fire, I was pacing nervously looking at the encroaching wall of flames. A crewmember named Jorge, who was standing next to me, asked, “Are you scared?” I responded in the affirmative and he said, “Don’t worry, I am too.” Next to him, Sammy heard our exchange and said to Jorge, “Fear is healthy, brother.” Later, in my formal interview with Jorge, I asked him one of my more open-ended questions, which was to describe some of the major differences between the yard and the IWP. His answer was wide ranging, but one portion touched on the role that fear played in these different spaces. He stated,

Inside [the prison] fear keeps you alive ‘cause you are constantly vigilant and alert. Out here it’s basically the same. The difference is...inside the fear is all about fear of another person. Here it’s about fear of a lot more big stuff. And you’re counting on others to help you through [fear] out here. In there you have to keep quiet, act tough. So it [fear] is sorta...a lot worse in there.

I observed that the fear and vulnerability of wildland firefighting indeed operated in the way Jorge described, as a sort of embodied vulnerability that required trust and closeness with other

crewmembers to encounter. As flames roiled before them each day on the fireline, and the heat and exhaustion and dehydration became real threats, crewmembers would check in physically—getting close, looking in each others' eyes. They would need each other to catch their footing on rocky outcrops, reaching out unconsciously to one another for stability. These unspoken, physical manifestations of caring were a direct response to the threat of firefighting itself.

I found that the confrontation of fear extended far beyond the actual threat of fighting wildfires for IWP crewmembers. As Sammy intoned to Jorge on the fire, being afraid—and opening oneself to the vulnerability of talking about fear—was not frowned upon in general on the crew. I argue that the vulnerability displayed in discussions of fears, anxieties, and doubts between crewmembers is key site of alternative masculinity expression on the crew. Once it was established that discussing one's fears was acceptable in the context of fire, these conversations began to emerge more broadly. In particular, there were heightened anxieties about being released from prison, as crewmembers began grappling with the realities (job searches, housing issues, family reunification) they would face once released. These anxieties were not assuaged through any institutional processes; there is a brief course on 'what to expect during re-entry' offered to all incarcerated people in Arizona, but it is nearly universally panned as useless, taught by disaffected COs with little information that realistically helps people upon release.

As such, crewmembers who were nearing their release date would turn to others on the crew for emotional support, including COs, to discuss their fears surrounding re-entry. One crewmember, Cristo, was a young father incarcerated for selling drugs across the U.S./Mexico Border. Prior to going to prison and joining the crew, he had never held a job. I interviewed him when he was two weeks away from his release date, and I asked him how he felt. He described,

I'm excited, but I'm nervous. The biggest thing for me out here was learning how to work a normal job. I just spent every day with [the crew], hearing how they talked

about being proud of themselves and their work. That changed me. At first I thought it would suck to work! But then I started caring...about work and about everything. Sometimes I'm scared that I'll throw everything away. Doing things the right way is hard...walking away from all the money...I have dreams right now about being home with my daughter, and the feds knocking down the doors again and getting sent back to prison. I wake up thanking God I'm still in here, because it means I haven't messed up again. But I talk to the guys about being nervous. It helps! Oh my god it helps to just talk about it. It makes me feel better. I am not alone going through this, and they give me strength. When people care about you, that fear goes away, you know?

Cristo expressed common sentiments on the IWP about the prison re-entry process, particularly how support from other crewmembers allowed him to work through his fears. This quote indicates the potential for alternative approaches to dealing with common anxieties on the yard. In the space of the IWP, Cristo knew he did not have to confront these anxieties alone, and thus developed a more open, communal approach to the re-entry process based on the vulnerability he showed by sharing such fears with his crewmembers. While Cristo relied on the strength gained from his fellow crewmembers, others were reminded that their jobs as wildland firefighters would help them during the re-entry process. Another day, I stood next to Rex, a CO, while he said goodbye to Goggles, one of the Desierto crew's beloved crewmembers, a goofy man with 1970's style glasses who was always happy to be the butt of the joke. He had been homeless for over a decade prior to going to prison, and the COs were particularly concerned about his chances on the outside. On his last day, Rex pulled him aside to give him a pep talk.

Rex: How are you feeling?

Goggles: A little nervous. A lot actually.

Rex: Just remember dude. Nothing is worth coming back to this stupid ass place.

Goggles: I know, I know.

Rex: And when you're out there and you're about to make a bad decision, just picture me standing right behind you. Think of my voice in your head telling you no [laughs]. I'm telling you you're better than that.

Goggles: [laughs] Yeah, you'll be right there with me out there. No doubt.

Rex: And remember! You can always say, "I fought fires." *You did that*. Nobody can take that from you, so be proud of it. Hold on to that out there.

Chief [another CO, listening in]: Yeah, and getting a fucking haircut, *güey*. You look like an idiot. [all laugh]

Goggles: Alright, alright!

Chief: Seriously. Be proud of yourself out there. ‘Cause we are.

More than once, I heard COs or others use the job of wildland firefighting in conversation as a way to address fear—either in this circumstance, as an absolute fact that could not be taken away from prisoners, when everything else might be—or in other ways, like confronting the fear of the fire as an allegory for confronting the fears of everyday life. In all of the above examples, IWP participants approached one another with a distinct openness about deep-seated insecurities and doubts, as well as the fears engendered by the processes of incarceration. Moreover, they provided each other with stalwart emotional support, which IWP members came to rely on and which shaped participants’ perceptions surrounding the role of male-to-male relationships and the access to emotional security and wellbeing these friendships could bring. I argue that this vulnerability stems from the inherent risk of fighting wildfires, and morphs into a more generalized vulnerability and affective sincerity between men.

Over the course of 15 months, my data came to support Pacholok and Yarnell’s arguments regarding the possibilities of alternative masculinity due to the vulnerability inherent in the job of wildland firefighting, especially so for IWP crewmembers. In the process of confronting fears, both of fire and of life’s bigger challenges, the IWP offered an opening for the re-doing of masculine performativity that, as we will see in the following sections, resulted in an intimacy that is decidedly anomalous in the modern prison.

Brotherhood, crew kinship, and caring through trauma

In the prison context, stories of masculinity are often stories of trauma (Burstow 2003). Given the staggering rates of men in prison who have suffered some sort of traumatic experience in their childhoods, teenage years, and/or in prison itself (Fox and Pease 2012, Mathews et al. 2011), this may not be surprising. For example, people of color, who are incarcerated at much

higher rates than white people across the U.S., hold the weight of intergenerational racial and class-based trauma as they enter the criminal justice system (Franklin et al 2006). Once inside, all men are faced with a hyper-precarious patriarchical prison system. Given that masculinity is enlisted in the service of defending normatively violent and hierarchical expressions, the negotiation of masculinity each day in prison becomes more deleterious, as prisoners must continue to perform such normative expressions at the expense of their psychological wellbeing. It would be appropriate to use any metaphor for explosive—tinderbox, powder keg—to define how trauma continually heightens the inherent tension of masculinity inside of a prison yard.

The concept of trauma was not initially part of my analysis of masculinity on the fire crew. Then, I spent time with the men whose life choices as well as their life histories led to their incarceration, many of which were infused with traumatic experiences. Further, over the months spent with the IWP, I came to realize that the off-loading of personal trauma, the sharing of the continual burden of incarceration, was a key site of interaction between crewmembers that defied the normative masculine performances of the prison yard. My fieldwork offers an alternative to the literature that finds a lack of close friendships or care in prison. Scholars note that the prison yard is a lonely place for those dealing with pain or trauma, notably because ‘prison masculinity’ does not allow for genuine emotional pain to be expressed without the fear of being labeled “feminine” or “gay” (Crewe 2009). This stunts the ability for any sort of psychic healing or emotional wellbeing. This is ironic, because of the nearly constant barrage of trauma in prison—not just between prisoners, but for those whom prisoners know in the outside world. Life moves forward beyond prison walls; babies are born, family members die, and both sides of the incarcerated equation—the person incarcerated, and their families, most often women (Wakefield and Wildeman 2013)—feel trauma acutely in these moments.

One example of this happened halfway through my fieldwork. Chase, who has been in prison for the last several years for a drug-related offense, had the type of mom anybody would be thrilled to have as a Girl Scout troop leader. She would send ADC-approved snacks to the entire crew, she would wish everyone luck over the phone when Chase called to tell her he would be heading to a fire for a few weeks and therefore wouldn't be in communication. All the crewmembers knew her by name, which wasn't typical for other crewmembers' family members. While on a fire that had already lasted a few days, one of the officers got a phone call; something had happened to Chase's mom. Officers dread these calls. They are few and far between, but always terrible. Chase was driven a few hours back to the yard, and there, the crew's sergeant told him his mom had died suddenly in a head-on collision, several states away.

When I asked him to describe this experience, he stated, "Well, when my mom passed away they brought me back to the yard. In the worst moment I had [the correctional officers] there and they kept me upright and said nothing, just stood there with their arms around me. When I needed it more than any other moment of my life. That hit me later, what that meant....then the next day, they brought these guys back, these guys all lined up, gave me hugs, were crying with me. I never felt anything like that before from people that aren't my family- like friends, real friends. It's amazing. It's crazy. Before, on the streets and in the yard, all my friends were...what can I get from you? What can I get out of you? How is it gonna benefit them to be around me, not genuinely caring how my day's going, how I'm doing, how my family's doing. The people that I was around on the streets, if it didn't benefit them then there was no reason to be around."

I asked, "How does it make you feel when somebody just asks how you're doing or how you're feeling?"

“It makes me want to be that person. I care about all these guys. I care how their day’s going, how they’re feeling, if they’re upset, what’s going on in their life. Never experienced real friendship like that before.”

I recalled other conversations with IWP crewmembers who had described a similar experience of closeness after time on the crew. I explained to Chase, “That’s one of the things I’ve noticed. I’m writing about this program as kind of a – obviously it’s part of prison, and you guys are in prison, but there are things that are different than on the yard, right? Is the way you interact with other guys different out here?”

He chuckled. “Way different. You don’t get love on the yard. You wouldn’t have real friends. For me, I look forward to coming out here and being with my brothers. I keep going back to when my mom passed away, but that was the first thing I wanted to do, was come back out here, be with my friends, my – this is like my other family. I think this job has shown me that there’s more to life and that’s loving each other. I finally realized that there are people out there who care and don’t just want to use you. I think this job saved me from going down even a more dark path than I had before. I don’t know what would of happened if I would of been using and on the mix and everything, and then found out that my mom passed away versus being on this crew, being clean, and knowing that I had all this support and friends and people who cared to help me through the hardest time in my life, pretty much. It sounds weird, but I’m almost glad that I was in here when I found out because if I was out there I know what I would of been doing, and it could of went a whole different way. Even talking to my family, ‘we’re so worried about you. We know how you are...’ and I’m like, ‘I’m ok. I got my – this is like my second family. I’ve got support. I’m good.’”

Here, Chase aptly describes the deeply meaningful kinship crewmembers felt with one another. There is no doubt that people in prison can console one another on the prison yard, and indeed, one crewmember explained that “you can be friends with someone on the yard, it just takes time...after a few months, you can trust that they are legit. I’ve shared lots of hard moments with guys on the yard.” Indeed, Crewe et al. make the point that to assume the prison yard is devoid of any form of moral and emotional support or friendship between prisoners is a limited view of the complex relationships that form between individuals who are incarcerated (2014). Yet, my data shows it is much less likely to make close friends on the yard than on the crew, and the distinguishing factor between relationships between these two spaces was the sense of kinship, or as Chase called it, “real friends” or a “second family.”

Chase’s continual reference to the crew as his family serves as an interesting addition to research that explores the formation of close relationships in precarious social spaces. For example, anthropologists have analyzed the critical access that fictive or voluntary kinship provides in communities with little access to formalized resources. Ebaugh and Curry (2000) examine the idea of ‘kinship’ as it relates to the “social institutions that might provide many of the same economic and integrative functions that kin once provided” but which are not fully accessible for reasons of race, class, or citizenship (Ebaugh and Curry 2000). Bourgois (2003) describes kinship relations where they are strained or absent, like in some gang networks. Earlier seminal works by both Carol Stack (1974) and Elliot Liebow (1967) offer rich ethnographic sketches of black communities in depressed economic areas, underscoring the ways friends, godfathers and mothers, cousins, business associates, neighbors, and even familiar faces seen every day on the street construct webs of both economic and social support for community members.

On the IWP, participants invoked kin-related concepts when they use the term brotherhood to describe the ‘real’ friendships on the crew as opposed to the potentially fraught ones on the prison yard. Calling someone brother, as opposed to friend, is significant. Liebow describes how utilizing *actual* kinship terms create deep discursive structures that bolster long-term affective relationships (1967: 133). The distinction between friend and brother was made time and again for IWP participants. When crewmembers would mention the concept of brotherhood, I would ask what that meant to them. Stevie’s response was typical, saying, “You might want to fight them sometimes, yell at them, you get annoyed with them...you know, like you would your brother. But when you need something, or when you have a bad day and need a person by you, you have that too.”

In contrast to my research, the concept of brotherhood in spaces like the prison yard or the gang network are not often analyzed in the literature as a way to understand the potential for alternative masculinity. Instead, many scholars aim to understand how fictive kinship patterns sediment patriarchal norms. For example, Bourgois (2003) argues that men in New York City’s Puerto Rican barrios form fictive kinship networks that are positioned within hegemonic power structures. He describes the existence of gang-based ‘brotherhoods’ as a response to systematic structural violence and racial discrimination. Within these brotherhoods, he argues, violence ends up being replicated as a further manifestation of such structural inequality (like in competing for scarce economic resources). In essence, Bourgois reaffirms Connell’s theory of hegemonic masculinity; even as he describes the close relationships between his informants, he concludes that the kin-like relationships that form are reflective of, and perpetuating, hegemonic and violent social structures as opposed to challenging them. A similar analysis occurs in Wadham’s 2013 ethnography of the military. He writes, “The practices and forms of fratriarchal bonding are

implicated in the desire to generate and sustain a totalising masculinist economy that seeks wholeness and certainty at the expense of difference and otherness” (Wadham 2013: 212). According to these scholars, each step in the formation of a brotherhood is a step in cementing ideal masculine goals—that of strength, endurance, and domination over others. I believe these analyses are limited, lacking any discussion on the potentials of brotherhood to operate as an emergent social space of intimacy or alternative masculine performance.

Another common analytic approach to fictive kinship in prison concludes that friendships are most often just attempts to shelter oneself from violence (Fleisher and Kreinart 2009). Joining prison gangs, for example, is routinely assessed as a form of self-protection or economic self-improvement, as opposed to a way to create meaningful homosocial bonds while locked up (Skarbek 2011). Crewe (2009) describes the tendency for men to engage in “sexual storytelling, bragging, and war stories” (9) as opposed to expressing any real emotional vulnerability typical in a close friendship, due to prisoners’ fear of ridicule and exploitation (2009: 10). Again, although these analyses help describe important and prevalent features of fictive kinship in the carceral setting, they are incomplete. I believe they fail to account for the possibilities for real, meaningful relationships between incarcerated men, and the implications of this intimacy for alternative expressions of masculine identity.

More and more research conducted in prisons casts new light on the ways that incarcerated men (as well as men in other institutions like the military) have always had the ability to, and have in practice formed relationships that move beyond those simply based on violence or quid pro quo. Crewe (2009), in the same article where he describes the tenuous expression of emotional closeness due to fears of being considered weak or dependent, also describes the myriad ways men in prison build close friendships and even fictive kinships with

one another. Most commonly in prison, this occurs in religious meetings and recovery programs, where men support one another within the context of these structured groups (Ubah and Robinson 2003). However, these alternative carceral spaces are still bounded by the physical space of the prison yard, and intimate relationships form within a very specific context (recovery or religion, e.g.).

On the IWP, however, there were ample opportunities for men to express such intimacy between one another, and the physical space of the outdoors led to more flexible masculine performances that included notions of nurture, care, and vulnerability. There was no place where the fictive kinship on the crew was as evident as around the campfire, cooking. On jobsites where crewmembers spent weeks camping, they were tasked with making each other three meals a day. Crewmembers who had never had a parent teach them how to season taco meat or dice tomatoes would get help from their fellow crewmates or COs. Praise would emanate to those who learned such cooking techniques, with scattered applause breaking out when one would make an exceptionally good burger or successfully toss an omelet for the first time. There would be fights for who was first in line, but assurance from all that each person received the same share. Sandwiches were meticulously assembled, and the crewmembers making them would sneak extra Ho-Hos to their closest friends for an extra treat.

There is ample literature on the way food, and cooking, helps to formulate the symbolic connections between people, and often, men (see: Atherton 2009, Meah 2014). The making of, and sharing of, food was a site of extra-familial bonding each day on the IWP. The daily acts of care, seen in the preparation and communal eating of food on the IWP, challenged the carceral pressure for relationships based largely on ‘prison politics’—and the attendant hegemonically masculine behaviors this engenders—of the yard. Even as the prison institution, and societal

pressure for stoic masculinity, informed the closeness men could express with one another, crewmembers on the IWP subverted these tendencies and formed deeply intimate relationships not just with each other but to an extent the prison staff. In the next section I detail some of these interactions in order to show how the ‘brotherhood’ of the IWP, and their non-economic, non-violent masculine relationships, leads to conceptualizations of homosocial intimacy that complicate standard narratives of prison masculinity.

Emotional intimacy and a rejection of masculine and racial violence

In Chapter 4, I described the effect of physical space on the construction of self for IWP participants. So too did the construction of intimate male friendships depend on space, and often on the veil of darkness. On a clear and warm night in early summer, the crew was camped out on a low-lying mountain range for a Forest Service tree-clearing project. There was a campfire going, but the whole crew had slowly trickled off to their cots, set up under a stand of mesquite a little ways away from the flames. They arranged themselves, as they often did, in two long rows, with close friends always setting up their cots side by side. All three correctional officers lingered by the campfire talking shop-talk, complaining about new forms for reporting overtime. The light of the fire reached only far enough to illuminate the officers; the crew’s cots were set up far enough away that they were encased in the mountain’s darkness. I was positioned at the edge of the campfire, between the COs and the crew. I could hear the conversation of the prisoners nearest to the fire.

Naco and Dove, two crewmembers whose relationship was among the closest on the crew, sat next to each other on their cots getting ready for sleep. In the midst of changing their socks and shirts, stretching, and laying out their sleeping bags, Naco asked Dove with a slight joking twinge to his voice, “Hey, tell me a bedtime story.” Dove, prone to shyness, first outright

rejected the request, saying, “You’re kidding, right?” Naco replied that in fact, he was serious, and wanted to hear his friend tell him a story, any story.

“I don’t have anything to say, really,” Dove replied.

Naco kept pushing him. “Tell me something about your childhood then, what was it like?”

Dove laughed. “That’s not a bedtime story you want to hear...” But after a few seconds, he started talking. He described his childhood in rough sketches; a few minutes spent talking about the rough urban neighborhood many of the crewmembers were from, then about his several siblings, and finally, about his parents. “And I guess if you want to know a sad bedtime story, my dad beat up my mom and he beat us up too,” he said.

At this point, a few other crewmembers on the cots closest to Naco and Dove were listening, and Naco responded to this admission of childhood abuse with a story of his own. “My dad was fine until he started drinking again,” he empathized, “but shit got bad when I was 12 or so....” With this, three other crewmembers across the dark rows of cots began chiming in with their own eerily similar stories. I looked back to the correctional officers sitting around the fire, whose conversation had faded to listen to the prisoners gently parlay their experiences of childhood abuse. One CO shifted uncomfortably in his fold-out camping chair. Another shook his head slowly. The conversation between the crewmembers about their childhoods kept unfolding, and for fifteen or so minutes, the darkness cradled their stories.

The conversation was discomfiting because of the sheer number of individuals on this one crew of 20 incarcerated men who had experienced some form of childhood abuse or abandonment. This was not the case for all of the men, though. The next day, Stevie and I were reflecting on the previous night’s conversation. He said,

Most people that come to prison, and who have that prison mentality—he [Dove] probably doesn't have a family out there, which makes sense because most people here didn't have much for family. We'd have less people in prison if dads would stick around. Or even moms, they leave. And so there's a lot of these guys that...I don't think I realized how much some of them actually look up to me until they get some—until they actually ask for help, and I give them some help and they're just like, wow, this guy actually is here for me. I guess you don't know how important being there for someone is until you get it and you've never gotten it. I guess these guys don't—there's no one showing 'em love, so how would he know what it means to be a man if he's never been shown?

Stevie's quote provides an interesting link between the relationships IWP crewmembers form, the vulnerability and intimacy woven into these relationships, and the type of manhood this might engender. Stevie suggests that being a man is in direct opposition to the behaviors that led many crewmembers to prison, and that 'real' masculinity draws on more relational, caring qualities. Across all 31 interviews I completed with IWP participants, when they described changes in their identity as it related to masculinity, over 60% drew on the affective relationships that they formed with other crewmembers to re-conceptualize masculinity to include words like "humility," "patience," and "love."



Figure 5.1. Naco and Dove lean on each other during a safety briefing.

Drawing from this data, I argue that emotional encounters between IWP crewmembers lead to alternative expressions of masculine identities based directly on such intimate concepts, challenging the normative 'categories' of manhood described in much of the literature on hegemonic masculinity in prison. Early in my research I interviewed Gerry, a Desierto crewmember who was just about to be released. He was in a deeply reflective mood, answering most of my questions by returning to the same topic: what his time on the crew did for his ability

to trust other people. For Gerry the dissolution of trust was a key marker of both his drug use and his incarceration, and negatively impacted his wellbeing along with his sense of self.

When describing how participation in the IWP shifted his view of trust, he stated, “I used to be really weird about calling people friends. That started when I was using....you don’t know who your friends are. I had real trust issues. I wouldn’t allow myself to be intimate with a woman or a man. You know what I mean, right? Not like sex, not that kind of intimate...like, emotions...”

I nodded and said, “Yeah, I know what you mean. So how did that change on the crew?”

He replied, “So, uh, coming here...the guys aren’t here for money. They are here for love. And we let ourselves be open that way. I got to learn how to be vulnerable again. Which you have to be...You are putting your life in someone’s hands! Trusting that the guys on the other side of the mountain are going to keep you alive? Making it so I don’t have to watch my back, finally, for the first time in years? That is trust. What I got back was trust.”

Gerry’s use of the words ‘vulnerable’ and ‘intimate’ underscore my analysis of masculinity on the IWP. His perspective provides a precedent for analyzing affective relationships between men in prison that reject the fraught, and often violent encounters that occur in this space. Gerry distinguished sexual from emotional intimacy in order to distinguish these two forms of closeness, one of which he felt was lacking in his life for many years. The emotional intimacy that Gerry describes is understudied in the prison context, particularly in comparison to sexual relationships behind bars. Many media-induced myths or half-truths swirl around the topic of sex in prison, and my informants never shared this aspect of their prison experience with me. Yet, several researchers who study the prevalence of sexual interactions between imprisoned men argue that sexual encounters rarely result in any meaningful emotional intimacy (Fleisher and

Kreinert 2009). Other researchers describe how intimate friendships in prison are highly policed, as they “threaten to spill into dependency or real desire, imperiling masculine gender roles” (Crewe 2009: 12). The consensus in much of the literature is that the prison system magnifies homophobic moral societal foundations, and thus any sort of close relationship is considered a threat as opposed to a potential boon for those needing emotional connection (Borchert 2016).

Therefore, there is little precedent to discuss the existence of non-violent emotional intimacy between incarcerated men, even if they might have profound effects on masculine identity formation. Conversations like those between Naco and Dove, or reflections like Gerry’s, indicate that there are opportunities for challenging hegemonic masculine norms within certain carceral settings. Key aspects of the IWP allow for such intimacy affective relationships to form. As mentioned at the outset of this section and in Chapter 4, the actual space of wildland firefighting is one that engenders expressions of male intimacy. The physical environment of IWP offers crewmembers a *choice* to be physically close. On the prison yard, crewmembers sleep in ‘dorms,’ which are large single-room low-slung buildings, which house hundreds of cubicle sized personal areas separated by waist high walls. Personal space is nearly impossible to achieve there, and the intimate acts of daily life—changing clothes, grooming, sleeping—are forcibly shared. So, crewmembers on the IWP relish the opportunity to take a small walk alone when they choose to, or eat their lunches quietly under the shade of their own tree. Interestingly, though, I noted that when given the choice, many crewmembers opted to spend time in close physical and personal proximity to each other.

More often than not they lounged together under trees, and some even chose to share tents at night. When presented with the choice to spend time alone, many chose to spend time with one another, continuing to form close relationships. It was in these moments that conversations like

Naco and Dove's unfolded. Another crewmember described what it meant to make this choice, stating, "I guess I just like being around him [his fellow crewmember and self-stated best friend], you know? I can walk away—we work separate, or eat with other guys, whatever. But I know he's gonna be right there. He's my *man*. [laughs] Yeah, I got a *man*. I know I've got someone there." These two friends, like Naco and Dove, also took time to share stories of their childhoods and of their future hopes for lives upon release. Although there were many crewmembers who did not make close emotional connections on the IWP, those who did made it clear that their newfound intimacy with other crewmembers shaped their perceptions not just on friendship, but of the care and compassion possible between men. Like the crewmember above stated, he 'has' a man, but in saying so he did not intone any kind of domination, but instead an expression of happiness about this emotional closeness. Intimacy, in this example, also offered emotional security, which has a much different effect on masculine identity expression than the 'security' afforded by prison gangs and other fraught relationships on the yard.

The intimacy that I witnessed over the course of 15 months of fieldwork, borne out of the physical challenges and opportunities presented by wildland firefighting, established a type of 'affective economy' that counteracted existing "economies of hate" (Ahmed 2004) that circulate inside of prison. Here, I define affect as the visceral and emotional process by which bodies (defined in their broadest sense) relate to one another, encounter one another, and shape each other towards particular emergent forms of self-expression (Gregg and Seigworth 2010). This process can be coopted by institutions and ideologies to help sediment hate and acts of Othering, as Ahmed (2004) describes in her analysis of the way white nationalist groups amplify the hate of those who do not look and think like them. Yet, like I witnessed on the IWP, affective relationships between crewmembers can also act to reject these punitive processes.

The breakdown of racial boundaries on the IWP offer a strong example of the ways affect offers potential, or a “perpetual *becoming* (always becoming otherwise, however subtly, than what it already is)” (Gregg and Seigworth 2010: 3) both for individual crewmembers and for the prison system writ large. In the highly regimented space of prison, gendered, racial, and class-based social structures are not just perpetuated but heightened, further sedimenting the conditioned *habitus* of these structures (Bourdieu 1977, McElhinny 1993). For example, on the yard, race-based gangs rely on the emotional call to ‘protect’ the supremacy of one’s race. One prisoner, who admitted that he had ‘run the yard’ (prison slang for serving as one of the leaders of his race on his particular unit) before joining the IWP, described his emotional ties to the Aryan Brotherhood, stating, “Before I joined the crew, that’s what I thought brothers were. They looked out for me, I looked out for them, and we had...a shared pride and love for who we were.”

This individual felt an emotional pull towards participation in the overtly racist social system of the Aryan Brotherhood, drawn to the shared mission of ‘love’ for one’s own kind, in addition to the protection that comes with belonging to such a group. But, as evidenced by the statistics that show prison gang activity as a key indicator of violence in prisons, ‘love’ here is a thinly veiled mask for the perpetuation of hate and deadly bias (Ahmed 2004). Further, it solidifies the link between prison’s racist social systems and its insistence on hegemonic masculinity, with domination and violence as the *modus operandi*. Interestingly, participation in the IWP offers some of the same types of affective draws as the gangs on the prison yard—like the connection to a shared mission, and the comfort in belonging to a group. However, the stark contrast between these two social systems is that the IWP directly rejects racial segregation, and opens up space for prisoners to form close relationships with individuals of other races. Members of the

IWP, therefore, enacted affective and emotional relationships that reject this institutionalized and interpersonal violence that has implications for both race and masculinity.

Certain IWP crews had shaky histories of race relations over the course of the 30 years of the program's existence. Up until about 10 years prior to when I conducted my fieldwork, one of the crews operated as an unofficial arm of the Aryan Brotherhood, only allowing white prisoners to join, and using the relative freedom of the IWP to conduct 'business' (e.g. moving drugs, planning violent acts). This changed when a non-white correctional officer was selected by prison officials to oversee the crew. This CO then brought on other non-white COs to join him, and within a few years, it was unofficially mandated that all IWP crews operate as a space of racial desegregation. By the time I arrived for my fieldwork period, the IWP was explicitly acknowledged by prisoners, COs, and state forestry officials as the only place in Arizona's prison system that individuals of various races co-existed, and in many cases, became emotionally close to one another. Indeed, on one prison yard where the IWP crewmembers lived, they had permanently added a 'new race'—simply titled "wildland"—to the established four races that are recognized by all incarcerated people in Arizona⁷. The crew was given, for lack of a better term, racial *carte blanche*. Against every established racial norm that exists in Arizona's prisons, IWP crewmembers continued their de-segregated relationships from the workplace to the yard, and were allowed to sit on each other's beds, share food and toiletries, and spend time

⁷ Throughout this particular discussion of race and racial categories, following other caveats throughout the dissertation, I underscore the inherent problems in discussing any given race with such delineated boundaries. When quoting incarcerated people or describing the social world of Arizona's prisons in my analysis, I do not overtly challenge the racial categories they use. This should not be mistaken for my acceptance of these racial categories as actual bounded entities, as the very notion of a particular 'race' existing as a definable thing has been discarded many years ago. Within these paragraphs, therefore, I describe relationships between and within races from the analytic vantage of my informants, who, even for those who had a clear grasp on critical race theory, abided by the racial segregation of the prison system in order to protect their own safety each day on the yard.

with one another in the rec space. Needless to say, these daily acts of intimacy between IWP crewmembers of different races on the prison complex were profoundly subversive to that particular prison yard's normative social structure; in any other scenario, these acts would at best frowned upon, and at worst a cause for violence. This particular crew reveled in such a social transgression. When I asked one prisoner what it felt like to defy the strict racial boundaries of the yard, he said, "What are the rest of those motherfuckers gonna do? They may have numbers [of people]. But we've got what's *right* on our side. Also, we just hiked 15 miles for *training*. I think they know to step off [laughs]."

It took new crewmembers time to adjust to the desegregated mandate of the IWP. For crewmembers who had spent decades in prison, adjusting to working and sharing space with members of other races felt risky, and crewmembers described being vulnerable in those initial months. One Desierto crewmember, who identified as a member of the Mexican national race, stated he "always kept my head on swivel" when he first got paired with a white crewmember on a chainsaw crew, for an imagined fear of retaliation by other crewmembers. Several described a process of uncomfortable realization about how unhealthy prison's racial segregation and violence really was, while others maintained a more pragmatic attitude about their past actions and beliefs, describing that they did what they needed to in order to survive. I isolated two major effects of racial desegregation on the IWP: 1) crewmembers felt a sense of relief about not having to use up mental energy to think about racial boundaries, rules, and politics, and 2) crewmembers experienced a transformation in their own understandings about *both* their racial *and* masculine identities.

In interviews, crewmembers frequently made a direct correlation between their shifting racial beliefs after spending time on the crew, and their beliefs about what it meant to be a man. This

was most frequently described when crewmembers explained how they learned to work through disagreements that often emerged between program participants. An older crewmember, Skunk, had been incarcerated for nearly thirty years (he had a week-long release seventeen years in, before being sent back on a parole violation) before joining the crew. He described how his approach to handling disagreements had changed after being on the IWP, stating,

So I guess being a man is learning to sit and talk with someone you're disagreeing with. [On the yard] you solve everything with your fists. Sometimes...alright, sometimes I think fists may still work pretty good, but listen. We are out here getting all our boundaries pushed. I'm working with every color and creed and that made me...[shivers dramatically, like he was repulsed]...but guess what? I figured out that prison *made me* push all these dudes away 'cause of politics. It made me turn quiet, mean, angry....I'm feeling more open now, I work through shit now.

Skunk's quote is representative of the link that crewmembers made between expressions of race-based and hegemonically masculine violence on the yard and how this relationship changed on the IWP. On one level of analysis, it seems somewhat simplistic to say that learning to work with people of different races created a major shift in identity for crewmembers as they adjusted their own reactive behaviors to become less violent. However, this simplicity belies the emotional work that IWP crewmembers put in through every daily interaction, disagreement, or recollection of a childhood memory, to reject the deeply degrading social processes of incarceration. This is another example of how normative performances of prison masculinity are emblematic of the structural violence of incarceration. Especially when we consider the intersectionality of racial segregation and bias with masculine domination or violence on the yard, the cross-racial intimacies and affects that unfold every day on the crew, however small, accumulate to become an intentional and profound rejection of carceral dehumanization.

Conclusion

Across the literature on prison masculinity, a common word to describe the performance of normative masculine behaviors is ‘coping’ (Jiang and Winfree 2006, Rocheleau 2015, Toch 1998). This word is especially prevalent in the psychological and psycho-sociological literature, where it is commonly defined as, “Constantly changing cognitive and behavioral efforts to manage specific external and/or internal demands that are appraised as taxing or exceeding the resources of a person” (Lazarus and Folkman 1984: 141). Researchers who examine the role that gender plays in coping strategies of incarcerated people often consider masculinity as a “contextual and personal factor” that influences “which coping strategies they choose to use, and how effective these prove to be” (Mohino et al. 2004: 41). In most studies of prison masculinity, hegemonic performances of violence and domination are described as coping strategies, simple acts of survival in a hyper-masculine social system.

I believe there are major issues that arise by analyzing gender, and specifically masculinity, through the lens of ‘coping’ in this way. Primarily, it leads us to assume that masculinity only implies violence and domination. The result of this is dangerous, both theoretically and ethically: what role does an analysis of gender play if room is not left for understanding the nuances of something as complex as masculine identity, and for acknowledging the potentials for men in such punitive settings to reject normative modes of being? I believe that the myriad ethnographic examples in this chapter offer strong precedent for continuing to examine such potential.

Over the course of this chapter, I argue that in exceptional spaces such as the IWP hegemonic masculinity is challenged, but certainly not replaced, by alternative forms of masculinity. One prison warden on the Desierto complex noted, when reflecting on the effects of the relationships IWP crewmembers formed on the broader prison complex, “The whole mood

on their yard changes when the guys show back up from a fire...things are calmer...there's less trouble. It just seems like what they're putting out is getting picked up by the other guys...it helps." In this way, it could be argued that certain markers associated with hegemonic masculinity (a more chaotic yard, in this case) might be changed at broader levels due to the IWP, but in reality, the intimate and vulnerable relationships that occurred on the crew cannot and should not be analyzed from the perspective of organized resistance or social change. As Butler (1993) states, gendered norms cannot be discarded, because, in "a regulated process of repetition" (Butler 1990: 145), they are continually enacted, through a "reiterative and citational practice by which discourse produces the effects that it names" (Butler 1993: 2). Indeed, drawing on Connell's original theory of hegemonic masculinity itself, it is important to avoid analyzing alternative masculinity on the IWP as a sort of 'weapon of the weak' (Scott 1994) that presents a real, structural threat to gendered hierarchy. Instead, what I argue here is that displays of care, of vulnerable conversation, of physical tenderness, of emotional connection on the IWP opens up masculinity, and prison masculinity, to include *more than* a blind acceptance of performative gendered hegemony.

In his analysis on masculinity in workplaces like the steel mills of the U.S. rust belt, Catano (2001) argues, "The maintenance of a gendered subject...requires cultural arguments that rely upon nonconscious assent to underwrite and validate their particular enactment of masculinity" (2). Catano borrows a Bourdieuan framework to understand gendered subjectivity as an internalization, incorporation, and embodiment of societal conditions (doxa) and the reconstitution of those external conditions (habitus) through "regulated improvisations" (Bourdieu 1977) of individual and collective practice. According to Catano, individuals embody a habitus of masculine subjectivity that imbues meaning to, and creates dynamic tension within,

the ongoing maintenance of discursive structures of power (2001, 32). Bourdieu himself recognizes the potential for a subject to “question the things that are self-evident and challenge the acceptance of commonplaces” (Bourdieu 1998: 8). I suggest that, recalling Pacholok’s theory of ‘redoing’ gender, it is possible to account for modes of resistance, subversion, and social change in the production of masculine subjectivities.

Pacholok’s work implies that alternate masculinities depend on the embodied, practical performances of masculine subjects through the practices of wildland firefighting. Patricia Martin (2003) argues that the embodiment of such practices—like those that happen on the IWP—can fundamentally shape the production of gendered norms, especially in the workplace. She writes, “Practicing is key to both reflecting and reconstituting the gender institution...Practices sustain gendered relationships and, in turn, reconstitute the gender institution. Over time, the saying and doing create what is said and done” (352). Expressions of alternative masculinity, in this sense, are bounded by performativity, and by the hegemonic social structures in both the prison institution and society more broadly. However, both discursively and at the embodied level, crewmembers on the IWP rejected certain normative aspects of these hegemonic structures. I observed this performative ‘re-doing’ time and again between crewmembers, in the grasp of a shoulder on the fireline, or in the quiet discussion of childhood trauma under the stars. These daily moments of intimacy and vulnerability accumulated into an “intensity of affect” (Gregg and Seigworth 2010: 3) that held profound importance for crewmembers, both in their personal senses of well-being, and in re-orienting masculine identities to move beyond the violent gendered structures of the prison yard.

Chapter 6: The construction of complex working identities

Beyond the paradox of the ‘hero/criminal’

The Desierto crew walked into a buffet restaurant that was jam-packed with patrons. It was a Friday, and payday for the employees of the military base that provided the majority of jobs in this rural southeast Arizona town. The crew had just finished two days on a wildfire in a remote area of the state, and they were happy to be back in the realm of air-conditioning and stable footing. Eating at restaurants like this one was one of the most sought-after parts of the job. After days on the fireline, there was nothing better than a calorie-rich meal, particularly in comparison to prison food. Rumors about the double-bacon cheeseburgers and all-you-can-eat prime rib buffets that the crewmembers indulged in circulated on the yard, and when IWP crews returned to the prison from fires, a few crewmembers reveled in describing the flavors in detail, much to the chagrin of non-crewmembers.

The crew totaled 25 this particular day, including correctional officers and the crew boss. The group cut a formidable figure. Their faces were sooty and burnt, their shoes covered in ash. They had changed out of their sweat-stained shirts into what they called their ‘dinner shirts,’ which were simply clean and neatly folded versions of the long-sleeve tops they wore on fires. Each IWP crew, following the trend of wildland firefighting culture broadly, had a crew color and hand-drawn logo, which adorned their shirts and hats and other related paraphernalia. They hopped out of their buggies and got in formation, a singular long, snaking line, and walked straight-backed through the doors of the restaurant. As the doors closed behind the last of the crewmembers, the restaurant-goers stood up and applauded.

The cheers weren’t a raucous affair but more of a warm, genuine greeting of thanks. The owner of this franchise’s location emerged from the back to shake hands with the crew, as he was familiar with them and other prison crews in the area, all of whom frequented his

establishment after a run on a fire. A few other patrons, waiting in line for their prime rib to be cut, walked over to the crewmembers to shake their hands as well. In rural communities of the western U.S., wildland firefighters are not abstract heroes, but in a directly personal way—landscapes bear the charcoal scars of fires past, and residents remember which crews saved their properties and open spaces. This was particularly true in this community; a wildfire had torn through the landscape just a few years prior, resulting in millions of dollars of damage and hundreds of lost homes. I had seen the crew lauded in such a public manner in many places, but it was always in this particular town—where community members knew intimately of the service these men provided—that they received such a generous welcome.

I stood at the back of the long line of men, watching the way the diners at the restaurant thanked the crew, and how the crew smiled back at them and to each other in response. As they moved through the entryway of the restaurant, grabbing trays and plates that would soon be piled high with the buffet's ample options, a young boy broke free from his parents' table and ambushed Sammy, the Blue Helmet. He was standing off to the side, ensuring that new crewmembers understood where to grab silverware and cups before he grabbed his own. The little boy hugged his leg and exclaimed, "I want to be like you when I grow up!" The crewmembers around Sammy laughed, and Sammy did too. The crew's laughter held multiple meanings; it was a genuine response to the boy's sweet nature, but it was also an ironic, inside joke: Sammy was currently serving 9 years in prison for possession of methamphetamines. In this moment, though, there was no indication of this fact, no symbolic marker to keep the child's adoration at bay. After ruffling the little boy's hair and sending him back to his parents, Sammy and the crew graciously accepted the slow unfolding of applause that echoed back into the restaurant, and made their way to the tables to eat. I sat down beside Sammy intending to ask

him about this encounter, but he preempted my question by looking at me with tears in his eyes, and saying simply, “That just healed me.”

This moment was not singular. Over the course of 15 months, the crew interacted with the public in a myriad of ways. In some instances community members were aware that the crew they applauded was comprised of incarcerated people. In other instances, like the one described above, most did not. Just like the copious amount of food that IWP crewmembers would consume at these restaurants, the amount of interaction with the public could be overwhelming. So too was the uncanny effect of moving through a restaurant just as a non-incarcerated person would. Some crewmembers would load up their plates one time and that was it, sitting towards the corner of the dining room, uncomfortable with the families, the kids, the doorways to the free world, that hovered just out of reach.

Interestingly, one thing that was never described to me as overwhelming by IWP crewmembers during many informal interviews in these public spaces was the paradoxical nature of being viewed as a hero. This perception, of course, is categorically opposed to the prisoner identity ascribed to them on the yard. Over the course of my time with the crew, very rarely did prisoners use the word ‘heroic’ to describe themselves or their wildfire work, but many members of the public did. So too do the multiple media outlets that report on the phenomenon of prison wildland firefighting (see: Lowe 2017, Gomez 2017). What is more intriguing than the paradox of the criminal and the hero, dwelling in the same person? Instead, like Goodman (2012) notes in his analysis of prison firefighters in California, I found that crewmembers could simultaneously hold multiple truths about themselves and their work—that they had committed crimes but were not ‘bad,’ and that the work was simultaneously transformative while also being exploitative. Indeed, I argue that the very nature of being an imprisoned firefighter, with its inherent

contradictions in public and self-perception, required program participants to think critically about their identities. In this sense, positioning ‘heroism’ and ‘criminality’ as two opposing categories, or even accepting them as bounded categories at all, do not pay credence to the multifaceted ways that IWP members construct their senses of self both as firefighters and beyond.

In keeping with the dissertation-wide goal to problematize social categorization writ large, I align myself with scholars who argue that the social category ‘hero’ is problematic in its own way. Desmond (2008) argues that the wholesale heroization of wildland firefighters belies the structural inequalities that impel many firefighters onto the line. He argues, “It is not ‘brave’ ‘thrill-lusting’ ‘heroic’ women and men who staff firecrews, it is mainly men from working class communities...Heroizing firefighters enables us to ignore the unsettling facts about precisely who is doing the protecting and who is being protected” (58). Heroism, like criminality, is a social category that should be approached critically. It may be tempting to see the archetype of the hero/criminal, or even ‘antihero’ of myth, on the IWP. But it is necessary to deconstruct such categories. As such, the goal of this chapter is to elucidate what role the working culture of wildland firefighting plays in the construction of non-carceral identities of IWP participants, approaching these working identities of IWP participants ethnographically, from the ground up.

What we find with this approach is another example of the social milieu of the IWP providing program participants the ability to express identities that reject certain aspects of prison’s subjectification. Being a wildland firefighter in prison is a site of radical potential to discover new forms of self-relation, and in so doing, is an act of resistance towards the total cauterization of modern incarceration. In this chapter, I describe how a *wildfire working identity* is constructed and maintained by program participants. This working identity, I argue, is far

more complex than any other working identity in Arizona's prison system, and thus offers specific ways to construct non-normative identities that reject prison's dehumanization. This occurs: 1) through the need for creative and critical thinking inherent in the job of wildland firefighting; 2) through the shift in perception of the public, and 3) through the destabilizing roles played by COs on the crews. Every work day, the crew left a space of rigid social categorization—a space where criminality is defined and maintained—into a more fluid psychosocial space, somewhere between the social categories 'criminal' and 'hero,' and somewhere in between the identities that arise from these categorizations. This space, profound in its contradiction, is the one explored in the following pages.

Defining a wildfire working identity

In the previous two chapters, I described the IWP as an anomalous prison space wherein program participants can re-orient identities away from carceral subjectivity. I explained this process using two analytical frameworks: the physical and symbolic movement away from criminal social categorization, and the expression of alternative masculinity. In this final chapter, I turn towards the concept of 'work' to further explain the identity transformations that occur on the IWP. Work and identity are inextricably linked concepts, particularly in the U.S., where one's sense of self is closely bound with one's profession (Harper and Lawson 2003). Here, I distinguish the concept of 'work' from that of 'labor.' Jobs like wildland firefighting cannot be captured by simply explaining the material conditions of the trade; the affective, social, and ideological effects of certain working cultures require a more multidimensional analytic concept. Thus, work is what Gamst (1995) would describe as "a way to achieve a 'total livelihood,'" or, "All the tasks and the social processes encompassing these tasks for supporting both life and the life way" (Gamst, 1995: 12). Gamst recognizes that work is not just a technical action but is

socially relational, woven into the collective symbolic work of a society. I argue that work is not solely a means to an end, nor is it simply derived from a larger system of material needs. Instead, work in and of itself provides both individuals and social groups with a sense of value and symbolic meaning.

This conceptualization of work is clearly seen in distinct working cultures like that of wildland firefighting. Within these working cultures, which are often clearly demarcated by shared practices and ideals, working identities for individuals are developed based on personal aesthetics and specialized skills (Fine 2003). Through the daily actions performed, and the broader *habitus* of the trade, a working identity is created at the group and individual level concurrently. The crux of the concept of *habitus* is that individuals form practical, embodied dispositions that are influenced by and imbue meaning to the social structure, or *doxa*, in which the individual resides (Bourdieu, 1977). Through the concept of *habitus*, Bourdieu advances a theory of action, one that considers individuals as actors who move through the world with all their senses – that is, not with the ‘logic of the logician’, but with their bodies and with the employment of a half-conscious, semi-tangible, practical logic (Bourdieu, 1977).

Bourdieu’s concept of *habitus* allows us to see how the collective conscious of a particular social system is embodied in – and given meaning by – individuals. This points us towards a dialectic relationship between self and society. I argue that a working identity, and identity more broadly, is the embodied expression of this dialectic relationship: it is a continual process of positioning oneself in relation to the physical and social world, of meaningful individual action that rests, even if uncomfortably, within the social structure. Considering self and society as co-constitutive, rather than diametrically opposed, provides rich theoretical ground for studying identity-making in groups like the IWP, where fighting fires is based on

one's individual techniques, but being a wildland firefighter means belonging and adhering to a distinct social system. In this case, the social system of wildfire work, and thus the identities that emerge from it, is set far apart from the restrictive carceral realities of the prison regime.

One of the ways in which individuals create and maintain identities within working groups is through the social status achieved by performing various working roles. An individual's social status conceived in a Weberian sense, as constituted by one's education, training, and the behavior produced by these actions (Weber 1978), provides a useful framework when discussing work as a marker for individual and group identity. A rural working social status—that which wildland firefighters generally, and IWP participants specifically, align themselves with—is performative, in that individuals within that community enact it at a daily level. Status in this sense is, to use another concept from Bourdieu, a form of embodied cultural capital, a sense of self-worth much greater than economic success, something which is acquired over time through daily bodily investment (Bourdieu, 1986). The delineation of statuses and the gain of social capital has direct impacts on incarcerated people, who lose such markers of complex identity when imprisoned (Hunter and Davis 1994).

What makes up a wildfire working identity? It is meritocratic, based on existing and improved skill rather than 'talking the talk.' Its *habitus* draws from broader rural culture, leaning on 'country boy' aesthetics and skillsets (Desmond 2007). Even on the IWP, where crewmembers may have grown up in urban areas, to embrace a wildfire working identity is to embrace rural working identity markers, like exalting dirty work, manual labor, and the joys of the natural world. It is both humble, with its inherent risks, but also full of machismo, resulting in a vulnerable masculinity discussed in Chapter 5. It is inherently fun and a bit raucous, often described as an adrenaline junkie's mecca, but it is also deadly serious with regimented

behaviors. It requires mental acuity, situational awareness, physical strength, and myriad skills. It holds within it multiplicities of meaning, which are sometimes at odds with one another, like a wild boy and a soldier, a hero and a common working man. It requires each wildland firefighter to live with these tensions each day. To embody the *habitus* of a wildland firefighter, therefore, requires navigating a complex working identity. I argue that, as IWP members acquire the dispositions for this work, they also enact a multifaceted identity, a nuanced sense of self.

The process of attaining a wildfire working identity occurs both at the level of the working culture and at the level of the individual simultaneously. For example, IWP members, like all wildland firefighters, are tasked with memorizing the “10 and 18s,” which are the 10 Standard Firefighting Orders and 18 Watchout Situations everyone must know to stay safe on the line. Orders include statements like “Know what your fire is doing at all times,” while Watchouts include threats like “Weather is getting hotter and drier.” On any particular day, Blue Helmets, COs, or Crew Bosses could bark, “Everyone! In Formation!” and the crew would line up, waiting for the pop quiz. Then, whomever called the crew to order would pick individuals at random to repeat all 10 orders, or go down the line of individuals, having them each pick a different Watchout to recite. Such exercises served several purposes. First, it required each individual to be responsible for the primary safety directives of the job. If a person failed at recalling an Order or a Watchout, they had to do push-ups, but more seriously, were reminded that they had put their lives and the lives of their brothers in danger. These exercises also operated to delineate the working culture of wildland firefighting as a serious, dangerous job.

Engaging in these drills served the purpose of creating a working identity where each person was responsible for upholding the norms of the working culture as a whole. However, these social norms aren’t solely comprised of threats and orders. Fighting wildfires, with its

attendant risks, was also *fun*, and engaging in the thrill of the work was one of the key status markers that crewmembers could enact. Social status on the crew was based on the ability of a crewmember to step quickly into whatever role was necessary to get the work done. The longer a person remained a wildland firefighter, the more ease they felt with this process, as well as the jargon, the chaos of wildfires, and the actual technical skills of the trade. Once a certain level of mastery was achieved, crewmembers could lean into the exhilaration of the job, like when veteran crewmembers took to setting drip-torches to dry brush, jumping out of the way just before the grass conflagrated and caught them on fire. A wildfire working identity was highly skilled, and the marker of a high-status wildfire fighter was to be adept enough at these skills to make it look, simply, like a rip-roarin' good time.

In the next several pages, a wildfire working identity will be further described, and the impacts of adopting this working identity for IWP crewmembers will be explored. Here, however, I aim to simply underscore the importance of analyzing *work*, and working cultures, as a space where identities can be crafted, expanded, or challenged. The components of a working identity—access to self worth, the formation of a working *habitus*, the acquisition of status and social capital—all have effects on a prisoner's broader identity. Moreover, I argue that the existence of a complex working identity is an anomaly in Arizona's modern prison system. Across the ADC, work is nearly synonymous with labor in the Marxist sense, a simple extraction of labor power from incarcerated people who hold little to no choice in this output. As such, concepts like 'working identity' or 'status' barely apply to the sewing factories and kitchens of the prison yard. On the IWP, in contrast, crewmembers were thrust into an incredibly rich and distinctive working culture, with over a century of cultural significations, aesthetic and embodied distinctions, and forms of social capital. In what follows, I describe how learning to embody this

wildfire working identity shifted individual perceptions of the self, as well as perceptions of what it meant to belong to a highly adaptable and outward-facing social group.

Engaging the skilled *habitus* of the IWP

A key attribute of the modern prison experience is sameness and routine. On a day that I spent with the crew on the prison yard, I was escorted by a shy crewmember who only wanted to speak with me informally. He was rather willing, though, to put on record what it was about the prison yard that he most loathed. We entered the sleeping area that the crew and about seventy-five other incarcerated people shared. Laid out in front of us was a sea of low-walled cubicles, each with a twin-sized bed and a small desk/dresser. It was after the workday, so most prisoners were back on complex and resting in their beds. Although there was some chatter it was more silent than I would have expected in an open room full of people. Many men had earphones in, watching one of the state-approved channels that they received on their small TVs. Of those not watching TV, a few were reading, but most were simply laying on their backs or sides, staring first at the ceiling or wall, and then at me, an obvious outsider in the space.

The crewmember giving me a tour of the sleeping area nodded around at what we saw. He then stated, with a bit of disgust in his voice, “On the yard you know exactly what to do. ‘Cause you’re told. Wake up, count, food, rec, count, food, sleep. You turn into a zombie. Your brain gets eaten, you know? It’s gone, gone.”

I asked him if that’s how he’d describe what we were seeing, and he nodded vigorously. I then asked how he would place himself within that classification.

He immediately distanced himself from what we saw around us. He described, “Oh, well, I’m not...I’ll talk about [how I am] on the crew. Out there you are using [your brain], hard. It’s always changing, everything is right on the *edge*. You have to be ready for anything. Compared

to here? Look around you. Does this look like anything except that one show, you know, *The Walking Dead*?” He raised his hands stiffly out in front of him like a child play-acting a zombie, and fake-monster stumbled to his bed. He laughed, and then took up the tour again, showing me his stash of tuna fish packets and wildfire manuals. Before we went much further, I scribbled down his metaphor, mostly to cross-reference it with the statements of numerous other IWP members who used the same terminology to define what the prison yard did to their mental acuties.

One hundred percent of all crewmembers I interviewed held other jobs prior to joining the IWP. This is because prisoners are given a work assignment as quickly as possible, once they are processed in the system and their security designations are clarified, and it takes time to be vetted for wildland firefighting. Between the three prisons where I conducted fieldwork, crewmembers’ prior jobs ranged in pay and skill-level. However, out of the 32 formal interviews I conducted, 80% of individuals only held jobs classified as ‘low’ or ‘moderately’ skilled prior to joining the IWP. These included work assignments like being a porter (a euphemism for bathroom cleaner), sewing the mandated orange prisoner clothing, or portioning and re-heating the food in the kitchen. These types of menial jobs, the most abundant across ADC, began at \$.10 per hour, and maxed out at \$.25. During one interview, an IWP crewmember described to me his vocational history in prison, and isolated a common thread between the many low-skilled positions he held. In a wildly sarcastic tone, he stated,

First I cleaned toilets. That’s where they put me [at the beginning of my prison sentence]. I was like, OK, I sold some steroids, but what did I do to deserve being up to my shoulders in *shit*? [laughs] Then I moved on to the cigarette butt clean up crew. Talk about glamorous. My back almost broke bending down for those things time...and time...and a hundred times a day. And then, guess what! I got to go into the kitchen. I washed dishes for a few months. [There] I really understood what prison means. You know? Torture. Skin peeling from the soap. From shit, to cigarettes, to slop. All of them pretty *important*, huh?

When I asked IWP participants about their past work experiences, and asked them to draw comparisons between those experiences and the IWP, the majority mentioned the *qualities* of their former jobs, like low skill and no mental exertion, rather than the obviously low pay. They then drew distinct comparisons between the mental and physical qualities they honed on the IWP, while noting that the pay was better, but not substantially. This falls in line with Goodman's (2012) analysis of California's prison fire crewmembers being ultimately very pragmatic about their role as prison laborers. Although IWP members openly acknowledged the low pay of the IWP, this co-existed with their descriptions of the IWP as a place to regain—or in some cases, build for the first time—a *habitus* based on physical and mental skill.

Fighting wildfires is categorically opposed to the 'zombie' inducing effects that were described to me on the prison yard. Many crewmembers distinguished themselves from "other inmates" and also from their former selves in regards to their current ability to adapt to continually shifting weather and fire conditions, changing roles and tasks on fires, and varying expectations from officers and non-prison firefighters. One officer described this process, saying, "Once they're out here, they have to make all the choices they'd make in the real world. They have to choose which direction to go, what to say, how to do whatever task they're given. It's like actual life, and they have to remember how to live that." I isolated three specific ways a wildfire working identity differs from a normative prison labor identity: 1) the hard skills learned and taught on the crew; 2) the requirement to adapt to continual change in setting, action, or expectation; and 3) the imperative to challenge or question authority in unsafe or confusing situations.



Figure 6.1. Reassembling a chainsaw after fixing its motor.



Figure 6.2. The sandbox.

IWP crewmembers brought with them a myriad of work experiences. Many program participants had decades of training as welders, machinists, or construction workers. In some instances, these skills could be applied on the prison yard—some prisoners would be hired on the complex’s maintenance crew based on their skill—but the IWP offered an opportunity for individuals to stretch the limits of their existing skills into new arenas. Wildfire work was replete with skilled daily tasks. For example, crewmembers who had some experience working on engines would dedicate themselves to learning the inner-workings of wildfire-related engines they had yet to master, ranging from those inside chainsaws to those of the wildfire buggies. Other crewmembers with a predilection towards numbers would be picked by the Crew Boss to help him with all the crew’s work contracts. These crewmembers would have the opportunity to use their existing interests to gain related skills, like those in accounting or project management, cataloging all the expenses associated with large multi-year contracts or wildfires.

Such wide-ranging skills were honed in addition to the actual skills of wildland firefighting and forestry. For nearly all crewmembers, these fire-related tasks were new, and as such required them to frequently engage in both book- and hands-on education. Study groups

were common, especially if a certification test was upcoming. Once on the crew, IWP participants could realistically achieve their Chainsaw Certification within a year, and within five years, could achieve their FF1 (Firefighter type-1, or Hot Shot) Certification, which would help them find work on the outside. In addition to these strategic skill acquisitions, crewmembers seemed to enjoy learning and honing skills for the sake of becoming better at their jobs, and to practice critically engaging their minds in new arenas.

The Desierto Crew had a work area adjacent to the prison complex. Each morning the COs would pick up the crew from their yard in the buggies, and would make the 1-minute drive down the service road to this space. Within that 1-minute drive, the crew would change out of their Oranges into their work clothes. If they didn't have a work project or fire, the crew would spend the full working day there. The space was a large, defunct airplane hangar, and served as a workout area, a place to hold meetings and classes, a hangout area, and a place to work on equipment and vehicles. One of the learning tools in the space was a pair of large, square elevated boxes full of sand and toy-sized fire engines and helicopters (see Image 6.2). These 'toy boxes' were designed to allow crewmembers to act out any given number of wildfire scenarios. The Crew Boss would shape the sand to look like a particular southwest mountainous landscape, describe a mental sketch of a hypothetical wildfire, then pair veteran crewmembers with rookies to have them run drills on how they would cut line, design safety and exit routes, and extinguish the flames. Running exercises in the toy box, like all the skills on the IWP, were opportunities for crewmembers to learn from one another. Crewmembers with specific skill-sets would often take on informal master/apprentice roles with other crewmembers who showed interest in learning their areas of expertise, thus allowing IWP participants to build close relationships with each other while building hard skills.

When particular technical issues arose out on wildfires or work projects, prisoners could potentially be more equipped to deal with the problem than the COs. This established a unique situation where prisoners considered themselves to hold more expertise than the guards institutionally designated to be in control. However, over my 15 months of fieldwork, I rarely saw a CO have an issue handing off complex tasks to prisoners when they showed more skill, furthering the notion that all IWP participants, prisoners and guards alike, bought into the wildfire working identity of meritocratic rule. On one fire, I watched a veteran crewmember—known for his uncanny ability to read weather conditions the best out of all those on the crew—parlay with, and ultimately convince, a CO on the merits of hiking over one mountain ridge instead of another. Observing this, it was almost easy to forget that before being on this crew, this particular man spent the last several years on a medium-security yard, his world of curiosity limited to 20 square feet, his innovation limited to whether he would read or sleep. The ability to question and offer alternatives not only shifted the relationship between prisoners and guards, but also allowed prisoners to access an aspect of their identities that had been tamped down on the yard. One crewmember summarized it aptly in an interview, saying, “It feels pretty good to think for myself again.”

The skills honed on the IWP, therefore, were not just useful in relation to the job, although the level of mastery that crewmembers gained was impressive. They also allowed incarcerated individuals to engage in challenging modes of self-expression, like critical thinking, self- and peer-guided learning, and creative problem-solving in moments of failure. All of this, I argue, results in a complex working identity that allows for individuals to see themselves as multifaceted humans capable of engaging with the world in ways that reject the subject formation inherent in the penal institution. Later in his career, Foucault—one of the key scholars

who first detailed the processes through which institutions produce subjects (like ‘criminals,’ for example)—began writing about the importance of an individual’s creative self-relation in resisting oppressive social institutions. He argued that “attending to the relation of the self” was an “urgent, fundamental, and politically indispensable task” (Foucault 2005, p.205). He further asserted, “the relationship one has to oneself” might be the only “point of resistance to political power” (Foucault 2005, p.205). His last works explored how individuals can discover themselves rather than merely being constituted by external forces (institutions and norms), and how this can allow individuals to begin experimenting with alternative modes of selfhood.

Foucault (2005) identified several ‘antinormalizing modes,’ or ways of being, that cultivate self-capacities to reject total subjectification. These include such modes as ‘refusal,’ or “an intentional unwillingness to uncritically accept what is presented us as natural and necessary,” ‘curiosity,’ or the “critical analysis of contemporary reality,” and ‘innovation,’ or “the cultivation of what has never been thought or imagined” (Taylor 2016: 109). These three modes of self-expression are cornerstones of the IWP. The actual work of wildfire fighting is categorically opposed to the mundane routines that deaden the curiosity, refusal, and innovation of the self in prison. This new way of being was repeatedly mentioned as one of the most meaningful aspects of the crew for prisoners. One crewmember stated, “So back [on the prison yard], I got told who I was. Now I’m out here and I’m like...who am I? I get to decide? I get...I am me, but I get to define what being me is. I’m a firefighter, but that also means I can be anything.” The difference between a wildfire working identity and a prison identity is most different in this way: prison requires docility, wildfire fighting requires a creative and critical expression of oneself.

Crewmembers are praised by correctional officers and incident command for asking why certain decisions are made, and for challenging decisions by higher-ups. On wildfires, tales are

told of firefighters who blindly obey their superiors, even with doubts about the safety of their commands, and pay for their silence with their lives. A year before I began my fieldwork, an entire federal hotshot crew burned to death on an Arizona mountain range because they hiked into a dangerous canyon at the wrong time of day. This tragedy quickly turned into a fable for other crews about the necessity to speak up if something seems unsafe. One correctional officer, during the morning briefing that is a standard daily practice for every wildfire crew, spoke directly to two prisoners who had just joined the crew a few days before. He said,

To the new guys, you are my greatest asset. You are out here now, and you are going to realize you get to speak your mind, and tell me if you think I'm wrong, or if we can do things in a better or safer way. You're gonna LOVE that you can do this! [crew laughter] But listen. This is what I want. You are gonna be new eyes for me, new ears. Tell me what you see. We want you to speak up. Speak your minds!

Even in other skilled labor programs across the Department of Corrections, it is hard to imagine a group of correctional officers deliberately asking prisoners to contradict them or challenge their commands. The lack of programmatic opportunities that engage critical thinking skills is one way that the prison becomes a site of 'criminal' categorization—prisons become mind-numbing warehouses, and the people inside must work doubly hard to find ways to engage these skills (Irwin 2005). But when it comes to fighting fires, this critical thinking was necessary. "Being a wildfire fighter means thinking, like actually thinking, not just obeying," said one crewmember in regards to the need for continual critical thought on the fireline.

Each day on the IWP, crewmembers honed hard skills in a variety of trades. But, compared to other jobs where hard skills are simply employed in a routine matter, what makes the IWP a unique working space is how adaptable crewmembers needed to be while using these skills. On wildfires, machine skills or chainsaw certifications were put to the test, but standard operating procedures often failed, requiring individuals and the group as a whole to think quickly

on their feet. Wildfires almost always acted in unpredictable ways, and on forestry projects, the way a 30-foot pine tree would fall after being cut could not always be predicted. This was exciting, scary, and ultimately, deeply rewarding at the level of a working identity. The ‘antinormalizing modes’ of self-expression that Foucault discussed, those of refusal, curiosity, and innovation, were omnipresent each day on the IWP. The creativity and complexity of the work of wildland firefighting directly challenged the obedience to prevailing norms on the prison yard, and allowed prisoners to constitute themselves, as opposed to being completely constituted by the prison institution.

Re-crafting narratives of public and family perception

There is a curious tradition in many Arizona towns: on a given hillside that is visible to that particular city’s downtown area, scores of large boulders are arranged in the shape of the first letter of the town’s name. These rock formations are massive and painted bright white, and are thus visible from over a mile away. These letter-adorned hills operate as a folksy point of



town pride, and are occasionally used for the town’s local celebrations. For instance, the town of Desierto had what residents call “D Hill,” and every fall during the high school’s football homecoming, hundreds of coffee cans stuffed with oil soaked rags would be placed around the white letter D on the hill. At a strategic moment in the

Figure 6.3. Listening to the crowd cheer from the top of D Hill. homecoming celebration, these cans would be lit on

fire. The hordes of people at the homecoming bonfire, which was staged at the high school stadium at the bottom of the hill, would look up, and see the letter D emblazoned against the night sky (see Image 6.3).

In 2015, the Desierto IWP crewmembers were the guests of honor at that yearly bonfire. For two weeks prior to the event their daily work project was firewising the hill, making sure no errantly tipped canister resulted in a wildfire. The night of the bonfire, they arrived several hours early, along with an all-age group of community volunteers and PTA members. Together, they chatted while ripping up donated t-shirts into rags, dousing them in gasoline. They then set up the rag-stuffed coffee cans along the white rocks of the letter D. Then the crew, along with the town's elected officials, the prison warden, and the volunteers, each stood at certain points along the letter. The sun set, and the word came via cell phone to the head volunteer of the event: everyone simultaneously took their lighters and set their allotted cans ablaze. From the high school stadium below, massive cheers echoed upward to reach the crew. As the fire cans flickered, the crew, a few city councilmembers, and the event volunteers sat together to eat pizza and drink soda, all reveling in playing such a big role in a longstanding local tradition.

The lighting of D Hill was one of many community-oriented projects that IWP crews took part in. If there were no active fires during July 4th fireworks celebrations, for example, many rural towns hired crews from the nearby prisons to monitor for spot fires and, while there, take part in the Independence Day celebrations. One group of COs got clearance for their prison crew to join in on the nearby town's 10k run for the Special Olympics, with crewmembers getting to hold the torch for a brief period of time. In the previous section, I described how the work of wildland firefighting presented IWP participants with opportunities to engage in highly skilled, mentally challenging experiences, which in turn presented opportunities to relate to

oneself more creatively and critically. Another aspect of a wildfire working identity that results in a multifaceted expression of identity is the shift in the public's perception of prisoners through their interactions with IWP participants. As described earlier, an individual's identity is constituted both at the level of the individual and society; as such, the effects of public perception on what it means to be in prison has direct impacts on the way an incarcerated person relates to him- or herself.

The outward-facing events in which the IWP crews participate are, in some part, attributed simply to the nature of prison labor in non-urban communities. As rural industries like farming and mining across the U.S. declined over the past few decades, prisons have moved into these areas, often touted as economic drivers and job creators (King et al. 2003). Yet the economic realities of prison ruralization are more complicated, and often less successful, than promised. They mostly result in a moderate increase in low-skilled jobs for local citizens and a deleterious separation from communities and support networks for incarcerated people (Bonds 2006, Duwe and Clark 2013). One of the unexpected side effects, however, of prisons moving to rural towns is the visibility of incarcerated workers within these communities. Most often, prison work crews look exactly like one would expect. Groups of men (and in certain parts of the state, women) wearing their Oranges can be seen pruning flowers in town squares, picking trash off the side of the rural highways or around city courthouses, or operating incinerators at the town dump. The COs watching these crews wear their official prison garb, and can often be seen keeping an eye on their crews while sitting in the driver seats of the white 15-passenger vans or transport busses. Thus, although prison crews are common sights in rural parts of Arizona, this does not imply that the public gains knowledge of the experiences of these prison workers. Nor does their simple presence result in shifts of social categorization for these individuals.

The IWP crews, on the other hand, are the only prison work crew in the state that do not wear Oranges, and have no other identifying markers of incarceration when they enter public spaces. Additionally, COs wear the same outfits as the crew, obscuring their role to the public. Visual markers—or lack thereof—of incarceration have a lasting impact on a person’s identity (Fox 2017), and therefore the aesthetic differences between the IWP crews and other prison labor crews hold importance for the identity transformations of IWP participants. Even without the Oranges, though, many community members were aware that IWP crews are currently incarcerated. In the town newspaper detailing the D Hill fete, for example, the headline plainly stated that it was the Desierto prison crew who served as guests of honor that year. Many IWP crews have firewised the same properties for decades, with COs forming friendly relationships with homeowners. As such, it is important to note that the lack of Orange clothing—the erasure of symbolic markers of incarceration—was not a way to deny the public the knowledge that the IWP crews are imprisoned. Instead, the institutional decision to make the IWP crews operate so ambiguously in the public sphere resulted in non-incarcerated individuals confronting, and then re-shaping, their understandings of what being incarcerated could mean.

I stood with a homeowner on a crew’s daily work project, watching crewmembers cut trees to ensure this homeowner’s property had less fuel to set aflame if a wildfire were to move through this canyon. He pointed to a particular crewmember and stated, “I honestly was afraid of 20 inmates showing up with



Figure 6.4. A blue helmet consults with a rural homeowner.

chainsaws on my property. Until that guy—I saw him, his first day, cutting down this massive tree, and then stopping to chase a butterfly through a field.” He stopped to shake his head, and then continued, “He chased it! And then brought it to his friend. They pulled out their field guide to insects and found what species it was. It was then I realized I was an idiot for being afraid.” Prison crews spend a majority of their non-fire workdays on the forested properties of rural homeowners, working off multi-year state-funded grants to adapt the landscapes of rural communities that are at risk of burning. All homeowners are made aware that the crews who spend months around their homes and families are made up of prisoners. Like this man, most people who directly interacted with the crews destabilized their perceptions of the *type*—the social category—of person who is in prison, seeing them instead as humanized individuals capable of more than just criminality.

Of the 12 homeowners that I informally interviewed over the course of my fieldwork, five referred to the concept of ‘rehabilitation’ in their description of the work the crews were conducting on their property. Several mentioned that they were happy to, as one woman phrased it, “watch rehabilitation actually work,” an interesting sentiment that indicates how widely known the lack of rehabilitative practices that occur in ADC really are. Other homeowners described the IWP as a chance for prisoners to ‘give back’ to society. This is also a prominent theme for public media accounts of prison wildland firefighting (see: Lurie 2015). IWP participants themselves echoed this sentiment of ‘giving back;’ many stated that a meaningful aspect of the job was the ability to participate in the community in a categorically different way than they did prior to being incarcerated.

On one jobsite, I sat with Dewey, a Badger crewmember who had just chatted with the homeowner of the property where we worked. This particular homeowner was incredibly open

with the IWP participants, and during the crew's lunch break, he had just taken Dewey and a few other crewmembers on a tour of his work shed behind his house, showing them intricate mesquite woodshop he built in his retirement. After the tour, Dewey and I sat under the shade of an alligator juniper and ate lunch. During our interview, I asked him one of my standard interview questions, which was to explain his experience interacting with the public.

Dewey chewed through his sandwich and thought about an answer. Eventually, he said, "It's like being free half your time, you know. You're getting to get out and...I don't know because I'm not out yet, but I imagine that I'm way better off than somebody that spent all their time being surrounded by a bunch of dudes that have no aspiration to be any better than they were when they came in, you know what I mean. I know for sure that's a quality that I was handed out here. So I'm ready for the street because for one thing, I did something with my time and it was productive, and you know, it sounds cheesy, but I gave back to society."

I responded simply, "That doesn't sound cheesy."

He continued, "So instead of getting out...what I'm saying is, instead of getting out feeling like a piece of shit, I'm getting out like, yeah, I'm a firefighter and I did something, you know what I mean? Actually I did something better than I've ever done in my whole life, all while I was in prison. That's ironic, huh? Like my daughter, well, she's proud of that, you know what I mean? She's 11, so she knows that I'm in prison, but she knows that I'm a firefighter, too. That means a lot to me."

What is interesting about Dewey's observation is that he combined multiple levels of public perception into one statement. On the one hand, he upholds a standard narrative that was discussed above, regarding his time on the IWP acting as a way to give back to the community. This narrative can be viewed critically, particularly if we consider the literature that describes

prison labor as a way for individuals to be ‘molded’ into ‘proper citizens’ (Wacquant 2009). IWP crewmembers who described their time fighting fires as a way to redeem themselves for their crimes can be seen as yet another example of the prison institution producing subjects that uphold normative social categories (e.g. like criminals needing to be redeemed), and thus modes of power (Taylor 2016). According to Maruna and King (2009) this “redeemability narrative” can in fact lead to further punitive measures (12), depending on society’s ideological beliefs regarding imprisoned peoples’ inherent moral qualities and perceived ability to change. I agree with this critique of the trope of IWP firefighting as a way to “pay back” society; the slope is too slippery between this statement and the assumption that prisoners are in some way morally deficient as a group, and therefore owe society a ‘debt.’ Not only does this uphold the social categorization of criminality, but it ignores the racial and class-based social structures that have helped pave the way to a person’s supposed social liability.

But, while keeping in mind the problematic nature of the “giving back” narrative of the IWP, it is possible to dig more deeply into Dewey’s statement and analyze the role of public perception using a different framework. The concept of ‘identity work’ provides an interesting way to conceptualize the effects of public interactions of IWP crewmembers beyond the narrative of ‘giving back.’ Identity work is a concept first used by Snow and Anderson (1987) to describe the intersection of “role, identity, and self-concept” among people who are homeless (1336). They argue that identity, far from a linear process, is something continually negotiated and re-generated. This becomes critical for individuals in precarious social positions, as people can strategically re-conceptualize their sense of self to maintain dignity or self-worth (Snow and Anderson 1987, p.1337). Rowe (2011) describes this process in the prison setting, stating, “Identities are imported into prison, shift in response to the experience and are negotiated...in

social encounters” (574). Identity work, therefore, upholds my definition of identity in the dissertation more broadly, as something that is constituted both individually and socially at the same time.

Several scholars have provided examples of the ways that prisoners conduct identity work and express alternative identities even in a penal context of homogeneity (Bosworth 1999, Irwin 2009). Toyoki and Brown (2013) describe the empowering self-narratives that Polish prisoners construct to reject the stigma placed upon them by their penal institution. They state that identity work is a set of “mutually constitutive processes whereby people strive to shape a relatively coherent and distinctive notion of personal self-identity” (717). That is, while people in prison are restricted physically, that does not extend to their sense of self; prisoners continually shape and re-shape who they think they are and could be through stories they tell about themselves. Taylor (2016), in her study on a palliative assistance program in which prisoners look after other elderly prisoners, describes how participation in certain prison work programs help prisoners construct new ways of considering what caring for one another means. This allows them to reject their criminal subjectification, and as Taylor contends, the program offers a transformative potential for self-relation.

The IWP, especially as it relates to public perception, allows prisoners to engage in similar forms of identity work. If we return to Dewey’s quote above, we see that he mentions giving back to the community, while in the same sentence mentioning his own self-worth, as well as the way his daughter considers him. He does not deny that he is incarcerated, but that his incarceration does not fully define him. Being seen as a wildland firefighter expands his perception of the self, and according to him, will allow him to engage in alternative identities when he is released from prison. The identity work that IWP crewmembers engage in,

interestingly, can be extended beyond the prisoners themselves, and to the family members of those incarcerated. An emerging area of prison scholarship is to analyze the impacts of incarceration on family members, economically, socially, and psychologically (see: Arditti et al. 2003). The social cauterization of imprisonment radiates outwards, with deleterious effects on family members, as well as entire communities where there are high rates of imprisonment (Patillo et al. 2004).

Becoming an IWP member, therefore, offers a rejection of such a negative feedback loop; families of crewmembers are able to re-conceptualize both the working identities and broader identities of their loved ones, and this in turn provides IWP members with the ability to re-craft their own self-narratives of what it means to be a son or father. Participants in the IWP have mothers who put ‘my son is a wildland firefighter’ bumper stickers on their cars, have spouses who subscribe to Wildfire Magazine so they can use the proper jargon to discuss burnouts during their monthly prison visits, and have children who refuse to buy any other toys besides fire trucks. One Cocopah crewmember summarized the impact that his mother’s view of him has had on his own identity, saying,

All I want is my mom to be proud of me. But how can she be proud of me in here? What do...I call her up and say ‘Hey ma, I made another hundred orange shirts today!’ [Laughs] But then I join the crew and I can tell her that I saved a person’s house, or that I hiked fifteen miles. I have fucked up so many times. I didn’t think she’d ever actually be proud of me, until she said, ‘Son, you are doing something good now.’ And now I just want to keep doing good. Because I heard it in her voice. I’m doing something good.

A public-facing job like the IWP can have a profound effect on the identity of an incarcerated person. Wildland firefighting may be an exceptional example, but I would argue that any program that allows both the public and the person in prison to witness other ways of ‘doing’ time—that is, other ways of moving through the world, other ways of working with one’s body and mind, and other ways of being seen—can fundamentally shape the meaning of ‘being’ a

prisoner. Family members, homeowners, and restaurant goers had to critically evaluate what being incarcerated means because of the continual public presence of the fire crews. This re-evaluation, in turn, shaped the self-evaluation of participants in the IWP.

Status making: the complicated role of IWP correctional officers

Below is a short excerpt from my fieldnotes, written at the beginning of my second year out with the IWP crews. It was a hot, dry day on a large firewising project, and a crewmember named Lucky had been pushing the limits of acceptable behavior for the past few days. He was insubordinate to his Blue Helmet, was barely performing his allotted tasks, and mouthing off to the COs. Occasionally, men on the crew would be in miserable moods for days or even weeks, and the COs had implemented ways to address such issues, mostly non-punitively. But this particular day, Lucky broke the only rule that was set in stone on the IWP. I was sitting with the COs, listening to them complain about the bad attitudes they were dealing with on the crew in general because of the weather and the bad work assignment, when Lucky approached and said quietly to the Sergeant, “I’m feeling like I want to escape.” My fieldnotes summarize the tightly controlled emotional chaos that ensued:

After he [Lucky] said that, I noticed immediately all the guards tensed up, in a way I hadn’t seen since being out here. They went into ‘guard’ mode, smiles wiped away and shoulders straightened. I am currently watching the Sergeant stand really close to Lucky, they are engaged in an intense conversation. The other two guards are restlessly watching, waiting to see what they’ll have to do. I hadn’t once heard the word escape and I am honestly not sure what will happen. Will things change on the crew? Will things become really strict, will the guys not be allowed to hike alone, or goof off as much, or will their relationships with the COs deteriorate? It is amazing what uttering one word does—what the threat of one potential action could result in. It seems like the hold on such a positive space they work to create each day is tenuous, but they all purposefully push that tenuousness aside...until something like this occurs.

I stepped away from the officers as soon as Lucky approached and said he was feeling like he wanted to run. I felt an immediate sense that their roles had shifted, and their duties were now

ones I was required to distance myself from. This was jarring, not only because this was the first time I had felt such a distance from the guards my entire time with the crew, but also because it was a clear reminder of the complicated nature of their position as both correctional officers and fellow crewmembers. I walked away to write down my observations, until I saw the Sergeant walk Lucky to his truck, where they both hopped in and drove away. Immediately, another CO walked up to me to tell me what happened.

He explained that Lucky's close family member had just died unexpectedly, which absolutely devastated him. Lucky had kept quiet about the effects of this death on his psyche, except to tell a few crewmembers that he was having trouble engaging in any sort of activity, like eating and sleeping, let alone working. He put in a request to ADC to attend the funeral, but was denied. What's worse, Lucky was from the area where our work project was taking place, and therefore, every day he knew that his grieving family was deceptively close, but he could not go to them. He began obsessing over ways he could escape—at first just for the funeral, but then for good. He was angry and lashing out, but as the CO described to me, his anger stemmed from grief. Apparently Lucky decided to tell the Sergeant, whom he trusted and had built a strong relationship with, the next time he felt the urge to flee.

There is standard protocol for attempted and actual escapes on the IWP, which align with ADC safety and security procedures. However, Lucky's situation—more ideation than concrete action or plan—resulted in the COs having to trust their gut, and react based on what they knew of the crewmember in question and the context of the event. It required the guards to confront the realities of incarceration from the perspective of the prisoner, its pains as well as its psychological impacts. It also demanded a much deeper affective knowledge of an incarcerated person than guards typically were privy to, or interested in learning, on the yard. The

relationships between COs and IWP participants were deep, but there was also an omnipresent, institutionally mandated role that separated them. The Sergeant, negotiating all of these tensions, made the call to simply take Lucky back to the yard, allowing Lucky to make the choice himself to quit the crew. No punitive actions were taken, no zip ties—the plastic restraining devices used in case of a potential escape—were fastened to Lucky’s wrists.

The guards were happy with this solution, because they knew that if he stayed, he would continue disrupting the crew’s work and potentially threaten the stability of the crew’s practices. And Lucky, according to other crewmembers who told me how he was doing a few days later, apparently felt great relief at not battling the urge to run each day. He was within a few months of being released and planned to get an easy job on the yard for the remainder of his time. The Sergeant, when I asked him a week later how he felt he handled the situation, simply shook his head and said, “This job is fucking *hard* sometimes.” Indeed, the challenges that the COs faced that day—a volcanic eruption of social context, penal policies, job duties, and emotional labor—aptly summarize the distinct challenges of IWP prison officers. COs experienced a tension between abiding by ADC’s institutional norms and expressing genuine care for crewmembers, which the intimacy of wildland firefighting engendered. I found in my 15 months of research that the extent to which COs adopted a wildfire working identity, as opposed to a normative prison guard working identity, had a direct impact on the working culture of the crew, and thus the affective opportunities for identity work for program participants.

A common question I receive about my research is, do individuals on the IWP come from a particular statistical segment of the prison population who might succeed at desistance (cessation from crime) or identity transformation, regardless of programmatic intervention? What I believe is a natural follow up question to this one, but one that is rarely asked, is: do the COs who ask to

be transferred to the IWP come from a statistical segment of the prison staff who are most willing to make a positive change in prisoners' lives? My data cannot directly answer questions regarding self selection and program success, yet based on my data sample, I found that the COs involved in the IWP are, in some ways, more self-selecting to join the crew than the prisoners are. Although prisoners had to meet certain criteria to be eligible for the crew—within 5 years of release, on a specific minimum security yard, able to pass the physical and written tests—many crewmembers could be considered “high risk” for re-offending, having been incarcerated dozens of times prior (see Appendix A for demographic details). Moreover, the reason that nearly two thirds (18) of the 31 prisoners I interviewed gave for initially joining the crew was not to experience any sort of profound life change, but to get off the yard, get higher pay, and get hard skills they could use on the outside. Therefore, there are fewer predictors than might be expected in regards to the carceral history of individuals who fought fires with the IWP.

For the COs of the IWP, however, there were more consistencies regarding both previous job experience as well as the reasons cited for being transferred to the program. Out of the 9 guards I worked with, six were U.S. military veterans. This in and of itself is not surprising: many military veterans who return home to rural towns find work in either the prison or Border Patrol. However, when I delved deeper into the reason why former military service compelled these officers to select the IWP as their next assignment, they cited “camaraderie” and an “important mission” as an element of their jobs in ADC that they felt was missing, and that they hoped to find on the crews. Similarly, five out of the nine guards described their desire to make a difference, as opposed to the routine work of another on-unit security post, as the reason they requested to be rotated onto the fire crews. This demonstrates the intentional role that COs play in the making of the IWP as a space for positive identity work to occur.

Yet, even COs who were not initially intentional about this process were relatively self-reflective about the change that the IWP held for them, too. Rex, a Desierto officer, described to me that he had originally transferred to the IWP because of the large amount of overtime pay COs accrue on fires. He explained,

Yeah, at first I was out here for the money. But then I realized I liked being out here. Being with these guys...Sarg and Chief [the two other officers] have become brothers in arms with me. And then Stevie [prison crew captain], he sits up front in the buggy with me every day. I learned about him. He learned about me. And now I'm here to help him.

This officer echoes the desire that many of the officers felt to “help” the prison crewmembers. Help, in this context, had less to do with gaining hard skills or any other sort of rehabilitative mandate put forth by ADC’s mission statement. Instead, I argue Oz’s use of the word ‘help’—based on my many informal interviews with him about his relationship with Stevie—was in regards to helping him work through his trauma, as well as preparing him for the emotional realities (confronting ex-girlfriends and family members of the friend he killed) on the outside. Other COs highlight the similarly affective qualities of the job of being an IWP officer. One guard on the Badger crew described his relationship to the IWP participants, stating, “Believe it or not, they’re everything to me.” These clear emotional connections between COs and crewmembers are part of the intimacy that arises from the job of wildland firefighting (see Chapter 5). And, although there were differences in the extent to which guards felt or expressed this deep connection to their fellow crewmembers, nearly all (8 out of 9) guards described that their role on the IWP was to ‘help’ prisoners find new ways of understanding and expressing themselves.

The most common examples that the COs gave in regards to helping prisoners were specific instances where they worked with crewmembers to find new modes of interpersonal communication and evaluations of self-worth. COs sometimes served as mediators between

crewmembers who had conflicts, spending ample time working through these disagreements to avoid potentially explosive fights. Other COs described their role as advisors to crewmembers, helping them to uncover their abilities to deal with failure on work projects, which became metaphors for bigger failures in life, like when a guard walked back a crewmember who nearly quit because of his inability to operate a chainsaw. There were many impromptu conversations under the shade of mesquite trees, where guards would listen to prisoners discuss their addictions and offer support in their recovery. A few days after the incident with Lucky happened, the Sergeant was rehashing how he responded to the situation and said, while chuckling, “After 5 years on this crew I’ll have a PhD in counseling, I’ve figured out how to talk so many guys back from the edge.” And although there were some exceptional moments like the one with Lucky, it was in the course of many more mundane moments of counsel that crewmembers came to see COs as mentors, or even just friendly and helpful coworkers, as opposed to enforcers of any punitive prison regime.

There were several crewmembers who did not form close relationships with the guards, and who kept a courteous but skeptical distance from them their entire tenure on the crew. In moments like the one with Lucky, the entire crew, COs and prisoners alike, were shocked back into the stark reality that their roles were concrete and the emotional boundaries between them were delineated by ADC. One prisoner summarized this complex feeling, stating, “Listen. They’re still guards, and I’m still an inmate. But do they help the guys who might really need it? They’re out here helping, and I can’t hold that against them.” This prisoner, like many others whom I interviewed, recognized the distinct roles of guard and inmate, and chose to abide by these social norms. But although all COs operated within the strictures of the prison, which

means that guards are tasked with security first and foremost, certain COs actively chose to utilize the space of the IWP to perform compassionate roles that are unfathomable on the yard.

For example, the Sergeant of the Desierto Crew established monthly ‘sharing circles’ in which he gathered the crew together, and had each of them express something/someone they could praise, and then express something that could be improved. After the crewmembers shared their feelings, the officers then stepped into the circle, and took their time to compliment the actions of specific crewmembers who had done something remarkable. They then used the opportunity to wax poetic about the identities of the crewmembers writ large, with statements like “You’re one of the few who have made it on this crew, which means you can be anything,” or, “It takes a special person to be here, and we are proud of you for making changes in your life.” These types of statements demonstrate that certain COs intentionally chose to provide prisoners with access to identity reclamation through various crew activities. The intentionality of the COs, therefore, shaped the work culture of the prison crews, and thus shaped the impact that the IWP had for crewmembers.

With his sharing circles, the Desierto Sergeant had a clear intention to show prisoners that they existed beyond the criminal social category placed on them by the prison and by other guards. But in this moment, he was distancing *both* the crewmembers and himself from the categorization of the penal regime. This distancing is a way to reject the dehumanization of incarceration both for prisoners *and* guards, as prison has been shown to deleteriously shape the identities of those who work there, as well as incarcerated people (Liebling et al. 2010). One of the ways this occurs on the yard is through the regulation of any emotional complexity guards might feel towards prisoners; there is a continual distancing both discursively (guards on complex call prisoners ‘inmates,’ for example) and physically (there is no friendly contact, only

contact in relation to punishment). Crawley (2004) describes how prison staff immediately learn the organization's "emotional map" and express their emotions "in clearly structured ways" (416). And yet, as seen on the IWP, the emotional relationships and non-punitive actions of prison guards offers us a view into the 'incompleteness' of any penal regime's agenda, in this case the social categorization of identity for both prisoners and guards (Crewe 2007: 259).

Indeed, the process of becoming a wildland firefighter was a profound shift in working identity, and identity more broadly, for all IWP participants. A Correctional Officer is widely considered to be a "tainted" job. (Tracy and Scott 2006). The profession is known for its high level of burnout, emotional stress, employee shortages, and turnover due to the difficulties officers have in managing identities that emerge in the face of work duties and societal perceptions that suggest correctional officers are no more than "professional babysitters" and "the scum of law enforcement" (Tracy and Scott 2006: 8). As such, the ability for IWP officers to shift their working status to something fundamentally different was a clear benefit of the job. One CO stated bluntly, "If I had to pick between calling myself a firefighter and calling myself a prison guard, come on. You know which one makes me feel better about myself! [laughs]"

Given that social status, work, and identities are so deeply entwined, it is clear to see how both COs and IWP crewmembers negotiated their socially 'Othered' positions through the daily work of fighting fires. This process, demonstrated clearly in the previous quote, was a strategic 'moving up' of identity for all program participants. But, the extent to which both guards and prisoners felt the calling to actively promote and enact humanizing relationships within this working identity cannot be understated. All IWP participants, COs and prisoners alike, chose to craft a *wildfire working identity* as one that included acts empowerment, care, and consideration for themselves and others. This proved to be one of the most remarkable aspects of the program,

and one that stands in stark contrast to the types of work and working cultures typically present in the modern penal system.

Conclusion

The goal of this chapter was to describe how a *wildfire working identity* was defined and enacted each day for IWP participants. This working identity is vastly more complex than other working identities on the prison yard, due to the specificities of the work of wildland firefighting. This complexity, I argue, allows for the possibility of transforming identities more broadly for individuals on the crew. Becoming a part of wildland firefighting culture offered both prisoners and prison guards the ability to move away from the strict role delineations present on the prison yard, and offered access to particular social statuses in the public and familial sphere not otherwise attainable in the carceral space. Further, a wildfire working identity is necessarily self-reflective, requires critical thinking, and provides working relationships that turn into affectively beneficial friendships, even between guards and prisoners.

A wildfire working identity, though, is not monolithic. Although the arguments I've presented in this chapter represent the majority views based on my interviews and observations, there were differences in working cultures between the three IWP crews. As such, there were differences in expectations of the transformative potential of the work for program participants in these different working groups. The differences in working cultures between the crews demonstrates that even within a single program like the IWP, an individual's access to new or emergent identities can differ based on the make-up of officers and other crewmembers. It is critical to record the differences within programs, to further understand the role that people play in the construction of institutions like the prison, and in the construction of identities for people in these institutions. However, even with these differences, a generalizable *wildfire working*

identity was defined and experienced daily for IWP participants. With the understanding that work is a key component of a person's identity, it is possible to understand the profound role that being a wildland firefighter played in allowing IWP crewmembers to re-conceptualize their senses of self-worth and social status. The working identity of wildland firefighting allowed participants to explicitly reject the cauterizing nature of criminal subject formation, challenged the deadening effects of the monotony of the prison yard, and required a continual negotiation of roles (between guard and prisoner, hero and criminal) that ultimately helped individuals reject the restrictive, punitive realities of modern incarceration.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

What can a rainbow teach us about prisoner resistance?

On the day that Eduardo was released from prison, the Badger crew was assigned to a firewising project located over an hour away from the yard. That meant they had to say their goodbyes to him early in the morning before they left for work. By the time I met the crew at the jobsite around 9:30 a.m., everyone was bandying about ideas on exactly where he was in the release process. Some thought his sister might be picking him up *right then*, while others thought the release could be delayed by some bureaucratic snafu and were worried he was stuck in the reception center. Others conjectured that maybe it had all gone smoothly and he was already on his way home to central Arizona, with a burger and fries in his lap, enjoying his first taste of real freedom in over a decade.

Some version of this conversation played out between IWP crewmembers each time someone was released. Certain crewmembers inspired daylong trips down memory lane upon their release, like Eduardo, who was universally liked. He was an excellent firefighter that wrote himself into the lore of the crew through uncanny feats of strength on the line. Interestingly, although he was capable of looking for wildfire work on the outside and the Badger crew boss said he would connect him with the head of the Forest Service crew near his hometown, Eduardo decided he was uninterested in fighting fires once he got out. In my interview with him a few days earlier, he explained to me that he was more interested in going back to his pre-prison career in the dairy manufacturing industry—he felt pretty confident his old boss would let him back on the payroll—and that he wanted to spend quality time with his daughter, now 11, who was less a year old when he went to prison.

I was initially surprised when crewmembers told me that they simply didn't want to pursue wildfire fighting as a career on the outside. Prior to my research I had heard that formerly

incarcerated people were completely barred from finding a job in this field because of their felonies. I also made the assumption that these individuals would have their hearts set on following this career path once they were released. The realities of this aspect of the IWP, though, were more complex than they first appeared (a useful microcosm of the program writ large). There were indeed many institutional barriers to wildfire fighting employment for former IWP crewmembers. Certain federal, private, and city fire agencies do not hire people with felonies. Some IWP crewmembers who had dreams of becoming firefighters on the outside would find little support in applying to these jobs once released—for a person who was incarcerated for years, the idea of compiling all the necessary personal documents and then filling out an online application within a short timeframe was entirely unrealistic.

However, during my 15 months with the IWP crews, several individuals were able to find wildfire work after leaving prison. The largest firefighting agency in the country—the U.S. Forest Service—accepted individuals on fire crews with criminal records. The competition for such jobs in Arizona was fierce, simply due to the small number of full-time crews in the state, but being a standout firefighter on the IWP and making connections with Forest Service crew bosses during one's time in the program could lead to full time employment. Thus, much like the broader experience of the IWP, there was a tension between the realities of it being a prison labor program, and thus beholden to the institutional lack of support and societal biases against criminal classification, and also the real possibilities for individuals to find meaningful work once released.

And then there were people like Eduardo, who never really intended to use the IWP as a means to a job, but as a way to escape the harsh experience of imprisonment. In our interview, he recounted the higher-level yard he was first housed on, and how he got mixed up in prison

politics with the Mexican Mafia his first few years inside. He became frustrated by what he felt prison was turning him in to. He had heard rumors of the relative freedoms of the IWP all the way on his level-4 yard, where the thought of leaving the prison complex and camping for weeks on end seemed almost laughably idyllic. Once he heard about it, though, he made joining the IWP his ultimate goal while inside. He worked his way down to lower-level yards. He trained not with weights like most incarcerated men do but simply with his body, running sprints and walking circles around the rec-yard so his muscles turned lean and his stamina increased. He told me that once he joined the crew he simply enjoyed every moment of it. When I asked him what skills he might use from his time on the IWP in his post-prison life, considering he wasn't going to be a firefighter, he said,

Is self-worth a skill? This time I'll be walking out of the gates knowing I have value. I learned what it means to be strong. It's making a link between your mind and your body...I learned any physical limit I had was a mental one, too. And now I can push through anything! That's the best way to put it. I'm excited to live a life where I have that value of myself, to be proud of my body and my mind, my heart. I'll live that life for my daughter...teach her self-worth, too.

The sentiments of this quote are not fully captured by standard discourses on prison labor, either by its critics or proponents. I have stressed throughout this dissertation that the IWP does not exist outside of the prison regime, and is bound to its ideological and policy-level degradations. But it also exists in another, more anomalous space, where participants find benefits that are not economic but affective, and thus more complicated and more profound. Eduardo understood his role in such a paradoxical program, and with this understanding, chose to utilize the IWP in a specific way. His time on the fire crew was spent re-crafting his own self-narrative, and engaging in multiple levels of identity work that resulted in a sense of self-worth not typically accessed through a prison labor program.



Figure 7.1. The crew sees a sundog.

A little later on that morning of Eduardo’s release, clouds began rolling in over the skies at the jobsite where the Badger crew worked and recounted memories of their time fighting fires with their former brother-in-arms. This change in weather was unusual, given it was early in the summer and early in the day. But the shade from the clouds provided welcome relief and the crew’s mood, already light, lifted higher. Then Dewey, who was leaning on the back of the Sergeant’s truck taking a water break, shouted for the rest of the group to look up at the sky. A sundog, a rare type of rainbow that doesn’t arch across the sky but hovers like a UFO between the clouds, emerged suddenly and vividly before them. As if on cue, the crew emerged from the various mesquite thickets and scrub brush where they had been working, convening into a close huddle. Once they were all together they began hollering Eduardo’s name. They shouted it again and again, to no one in particular, their voices echoing into the sky. They then excitedly agreed that the rainbow was a good omen for Eduardo—that it meant nothing but positivity in this new stage in his life. They high-fived and hugged and spent a few moments gazing upwards until the sun-dog faded, genuinely happy for what the future held for their friend. As a researcher bearing witness to this spontaneous and collective moment of joy and hope, I recognized that it was not

simply the existence of the sundog that made for a powerful event. It was that they had the opportunity to see it together in a particular way, to have the space of the IWP to speak freely of possibility, to put their arms around one another while looking at what lay above and ahead. Together, in one of many instances during my 15 months of fieldwork, the men of the IWP urged each other to believe.

What can we take from such a moment, beyond its affective power? Is there analytic use for concepts like hope and self-worth in the prison context? I argue that these concepts are particularly useful when related to the identity expression of people in subjugated spaces. Bosworth (1999), writing about women's prisons, argues that the way power is produced and maintained in the penal context is by constructing prisoners as particular subjects—in her case, “docile, feminine” ones (96). She further argues that this type of power, which is diffuse and seemingly authorless, is in fact challengeable—most effectively by daily exertions of selfhood. She describes how female prisoners challenge prison's subjectivity through dress, speech, or other subtle bodily mannerisms. Extending Bosworth's argument to the IWP context, especially given how hard Arizona's prison regime works to cement particular criminal subjectivities, I assert that expressions of non-carceral identities on the fire crew are “non-normative ways of being” (Rowe 2011: 585). They act as a form of resistance, which Rowe (2011) defines as “evading or overcoming the imposition of unwelcome power” (585).

Scholars like Rubin (2015, 2017) are wary of using the term resistance to describe assertions of identity in prison, because the concept has historically been linked to more political or organized actions against institutions. And yet, I hesitate to use a more passive term like ‘friction’ that Rubin presents as an alternative for describing the tension that exists between the power of an institution and the adaptation to such power by those within it. What I have

described throughout this dissertation is not simply friction, but much more agential and action-oriented. COs and prisoners alike speak freely about the pains of imprisonment and use the space of the IWP to reject its totalizing effects. Nor can what occurs on the IWP be described as a ‘hidden transcript,’ a concept used by Scott (1990) to define the “ideological resistance of subordinate groups” against those in power through ambiguous or anonymous acts like gossip and folktales (12). As I have discussed, the IWP is not subversive—quite the opposite, in fact, with approval from the ADC and strong community support. In fact it owes its existence, paradoxically, as a radical carceral space to its nature as a straightforward prison labor program.

The benefit of an in-depth anthropological analysis of the IWP, therefore, is in its paradoxical nature, because it affords us the opportunity to further interrogate the concept of resistance in the penal context. Even with the consideration that no unified political stance takes place on the IWP, and although the fundamental structure of Arizona’s prison regime is not challenged by what occurs on the prison fire crews, I believe the word resistance is the most apt for the profound identity-level shifts that occur there, given how directly these shifts work against the dehumanizing forces of modern incarceration. Crewmembers, correctional officers, and state forestry officials all intentionally construct a space on the IWP for incarcerated people to become someone as yet undefined—not fully subjugated—by the prison system.

One correctional officer stated to me, “[Prisoners] have nothing inside. This [program] at least gives them a chance to get out of the yard and...to look at themselves differently. They can be different than how all the voices in their heads are telling them to be. We help with that. But they do that work themselves.” In this quote, the CO isolated a key tenet of the IWP, which is to delineate a space in which prisoners reject the subjectivity of the prison system and its processes of criminal cauterization. Drawing from this premise, I ultimately conclude that the IWP is a

space of resistance not against the prison system per se, but against its *effects*. This type of resistance should be considered a key site of potential analysis for scholars who are interested in the ways subordinate groups creatively and critically maneuver within dominant institutions. The effects of power are the always-unfinished works of hegemony, and as such, people's rejection of them is where a particularly interesting type of resistance might occur. Over the course of this dissertation, I have shown how powerful this type of resistance is for the reclamation of dignity of incarcerated individuals who fight wildfires. Not only is Eduardo's quote on self-worth an example of this resistance, but so too was the crew's joy for him, their desire to see a rainbow as a sign that he was, and they might one day be, free.

Key findings and contributions

The state of Arizona continues to incarcerate people at high rates, and the use of private prisons to house them continues to expand (Williams and Opper 2018). Just recently, the Pima County Jail has created a 'pay-per-visit' policy for detainees, wherein family members and friends must pay to visit their loved ones (Sims 2018), further establishing the primacy of profit in the carceral regime. There have been efforts to reverse some of these trends; ADFFM creating an 'ex-con' firefighting crew made up of former IWP crewmembers at the end of 2017 was a first step in addressing the lack of material support that program participants receive once released. Other, broader efforts to address major issues of mass incarceration have emerged across the state and the country, like the fight to dismantle the current bail system (Santo 2016), or the establishment of community courts to redirect individuals away from incarceration and into treatment (Tabor 2018). However, prison systems are beholden to their own state's ideological histories, and to the fickle winds of politics. As such, it remains critical for scholars

to attempt to get inside the black box of modern incarceration and understand the daily realities for those inside.

In this dissertation I chose to explore a rather peculiar corner of this black box, and study the anomalous prison labor program called the Inmate Wildfire Program. I aimed to see how individuals experience this program at a daily level, both its exploitative issues and the potentials for transformation the job of fighting fires might bring. I believe the first major contribution of my dissertation emerged when I chose to ethnographically examine a non-traditional carceral space. Returning to my argument in the prologue of this dissertation, the IWP is an example of a ‘deviant’ case study—it is a program that doesn’t replicate the standard discourses surrounding prison labor in the current literature. This, I argue, not only helped me to underscore the complexity of the prison as a variegated institution (Goodman 2010), but it also allowed me to uncover a form of resistance against prison’s dehumanization described in the above section. In the face of continuing punitive processes in U.S. prisons, it is necessary to reject the notion that prisons are unchangeable, and that the power operating inside is authorless and completely diffuse. My research has shown that specific guards, wardens, state officials, and prisoners themselves can challenge certain aspects of incarceration’s most harmful effects.

A second contribution that this dissertation makes is to the anthropological literature on identity. This concept is at once over-used—often as a catchall phrase—and under-defined in the discipline since the 1990s and the rise of identity politics as an analytic framework. I have shown throughout this dissertation that identity can be broken apart and analyzed in its various sociocultural components (e.g. masculine identity, racial identity, or working identity), while retaining its use as a concept more broadly. At the outset of this manuscript I defined identity as the way an individual relates to and thinks about his- or her-self, a process that is based on the

co-constitutive relationship between self and society. This definition takes into account trenchant social structures (like gender or class) that determine norms and categories of identity, the performance of such norms and categorizations, but also the agential potential for individuals to enact aspects of selfhood that might reject or reframe such categories. In the case of the IWP, the prison operates as an incredibly restrictive institutional space where identities are categorized and contained, and certain norms must be continually performed to maintain their hegemony. I showed the negative effects of prison on a person's identity overall, and also how participation in the IWP allowed individuals to conduct identity work to re-orient self-narratives and embrace emergent and alternative notions of selfhood in specific ways. This dissertation helps to re-establish the concept of identity as a worthy analytic framework to discuss the interplay between structure and agency in a fraught ethnographic context.

A final contribution of my research is to the existing literature on masculinity. A particular aspect of identity work for IWP crewmembers that challenged the norms of imprisonment was the expression of alternative masculinities based on tenets of vulnerability, intimacy, and racial inclusion. The existence of such alternative masculine identity expressions, and the way they were fostered and enacted, adds nuance to current debates on the way men interact with one another, and consider themselves as masculine subjects, within the carceral context. Much of the existing literature on prison masculinity upholds the theory of hegemonic masculinity, and my data bears this out on the prison yard. Yet recently, scholars have indicated that it is our duty as researchers not to reify such gendered social structures, and give weight to penal spaces where hegemonic masculinity is not blindly accepted and replicated. My research does just that. On the IWP, crewmembers intentionally delineated a space where emotionally intimate and vulnerable relationships formed, and used this vulnerability to re-craft

considerations of what manhood meant for them. This resulted in masculinities based on concepts of care, trust, and love. This is a radical departure from masculine identity expression most often discussed in the prison context. I argue that studying alternative masculinities, and the sometimes surprising spaces where they emerge, help us to further define the possibility of complex gendered identities and the resistance to hegemonic norms.

Remaining questions and areas of future research

During my fieldwork period and throughout my data analysis and write-up phase, there arose several additional questions surrounding the IWP specifically, and prison labor more broadly. In the process of my research it became clear what a rich field of study the prison is and will continue to be, and that my inquiries only scratched the surface of potential questions, debates, and encounters. Overall, the biggest question that remains unanswered in my research is the notion of resistance that I discuss above. The term itself is increasingly used in the anthropological literature, and therefore threatens to become an empty concept if not grounded in ethnographic data and critical theory. And yet, I chose to use it in the context of the IWP because I could find no equivalent term that so aptly describes the intentional acts of IWP participants to create a space that resists the negative effects of incarceration. As I move forward in researching the IWP as well as other carceral spaces, I will continue to interrogate my use of the concept of resistance. I will also continue to explore the inherent tensions of the IWP that I have described throughout this dissertation—most notably the tension between exploitation and transformation that so commonly arose in my work. Beyond these broader questions, below I discuss two specific points of analysis that I plan on engaging in future research.

First, although I present the IWP as an exceptional carceral space, and although aspects of the program are unique, the experiences of transformation and resistance felt by crewmembers

are not singular. There are many other spaces in prisons—both in Arizona and beyond—where an ethnographic examination of identity work can occur. I would like to conduct a comparative study of such spaces by choosing at least three prison programs where identity work occurs, analyzing the experiences of these programs for participants. This would further my initial findings regarding identity and resistance on the IWP. Picking at least one program that is not a labor program to include in this study would be critical. As I describe at various points in this dissertation, the fact that the IWP is a labor program brings with it issues of inherent exploitation. How would participation in, say, a poetry workshop, educational program, or twelve-step program differ from a work program? In my conversations with prisoners I found that non-work programs are just as powerful as the IWP in terms of identity transformation. However, because they are not institutionally supported in the way a labor program is, these programs might be hampered in ways the IWP is not because they depend on external factors (like volunteer availability). I would like to understand the various contexts in which transformative prison programs exist within a particular state's prison system, and the specific processes through which participants can and cannot access strategies for identity reclamation. This would allow even further critical discussions on daily acts of resistance against the effects of modern incarceration.

A second area of future research is the period of prison re-entry. Throughout this dissertation I have described the IWP as a space where dignity is reclaimed and selfhood is not entirely beholden to processes of subject formation. What remains unanswered is what happens to these transformative potentials when a person is released from prison. The social cauterization of incarceration extends beyond prison walls, as individuals struggle to find work and housing, and as fractured families unevenly stitch themselves back together. How do the affective, as

opposed to the economic, benefits of the IWP remain useful for individuals once released? As I transform this dissertation into a book, I plan on asking this question in a final substantial chapter, to continue critically engaging with the concept of ‘resistance’ given that it is bracketed in an ultimately temporary space of the IWP. I am also interested in examining the relationship between identity, masculinity, and prison re-entry in other social contexts. I have begun putting together a proposal for a follow-up project to this one, which moves beyond the world of the IWP and examines how men being released from prison assert, adapt, and challenge their considerations of masculine identity upon re-entry, particularly as they look for employment. The re-entry period is understudied ethnographically, and so I plan to conduct in-depth qualitative research on the challenges to normative masculine identity during the first six months of release. My time with IWP crewmembers has underscored the need for anthropologists to examine masculine identity in fraught socioeconomic contexts, which this project will do.

Overall, I plan on continuing to employ ethnographic methods and the theoretical toolkit of anthropology to dismantle the black box of incarceration. I believe that a straightforward, but ultimately important, contribution of this dissertation has been to shed further light on the daily experiences of imprisonment for men who are currently inside, and to provide a more nuanced narrative to these obscured experiences. In my future research I will continue this trajectory, further establishing the prison as a valid anthropological field and asserting that the people behind bars are full and complex human beings worthy of their stories being told.

APPENDIX A: IWP PRISONER DEMOGRAPHICS

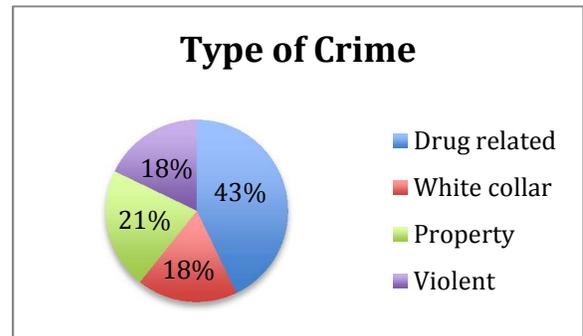
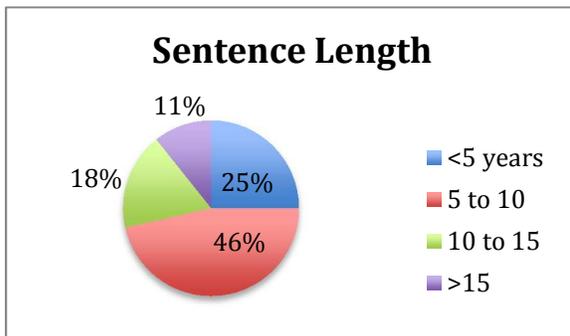
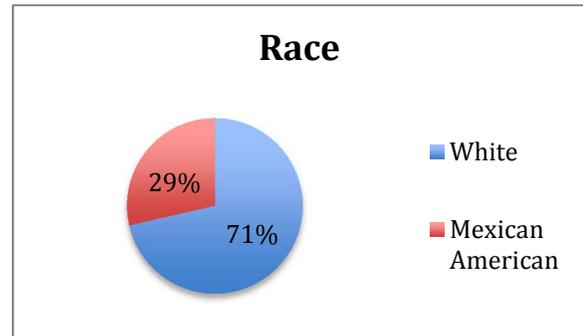
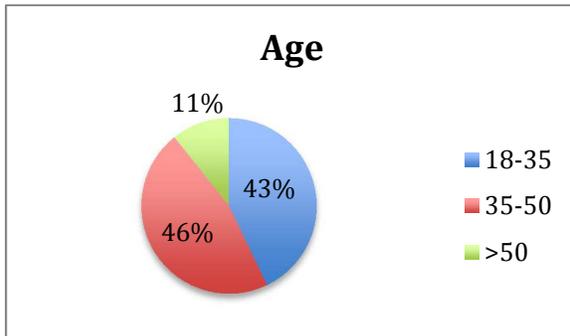
Below are demographic charts of the three prison crews I worked with during my fieldwork period. Every crew has approximately 20 prisoners at a time, but this number can fluctuate depending on when one person is released and another joins. The total number of individuals in bold represents the number of prisoners who initially signed consent forms at the beginning of fieldwork, as well as the new individuals on the crew who signed consent forms throughout the fieldwork period.

The demographics in the charts below are based on the total number of incarcerated research participants. Note that the actual number of semi-structured, recorded interviews is less than the total number of individuals who signed consent forms, as some individuals wanted to participate in the research but only be interviewed informally (without tape recording).

Racial categories below are based on the classifications created by the Arizona Department of Corrections at the time a person is admitted into the ADC system. The types of crimes listed below are my own categories, designed to summarize the major classifications of crimes committed on the crew, while remaining non-specific enough to maintain prisoner anonymity.

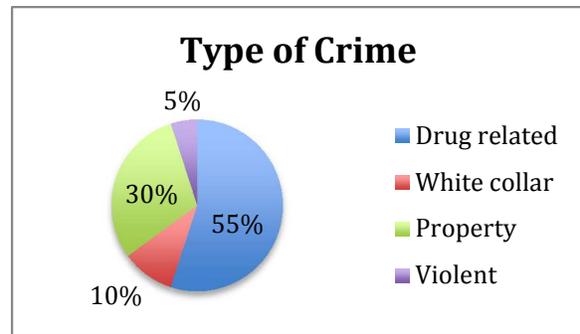
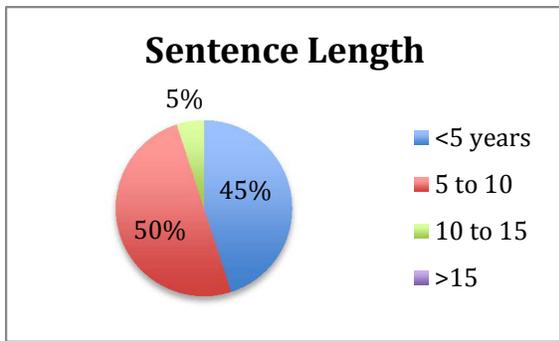
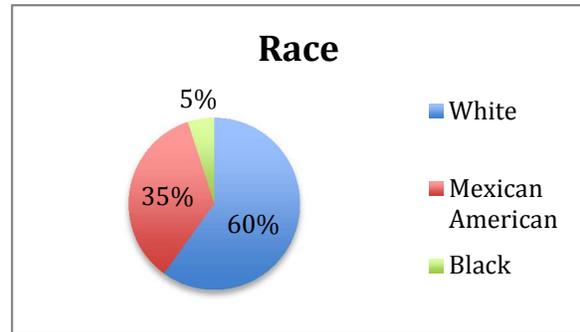
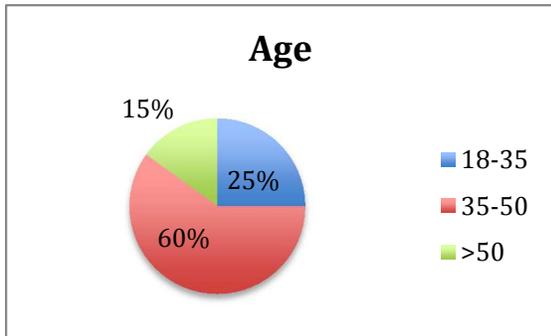
Desierto Crew (prisoners) (n=28)

- *Semi structured, recorded interviews (n=11)*



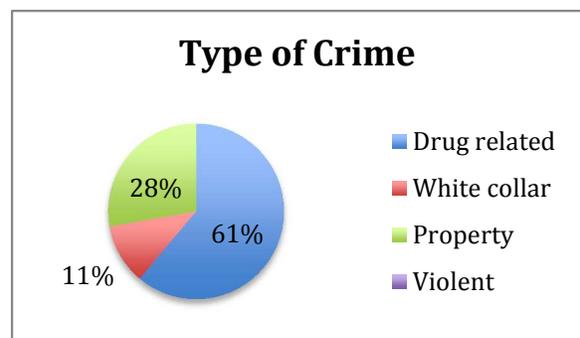
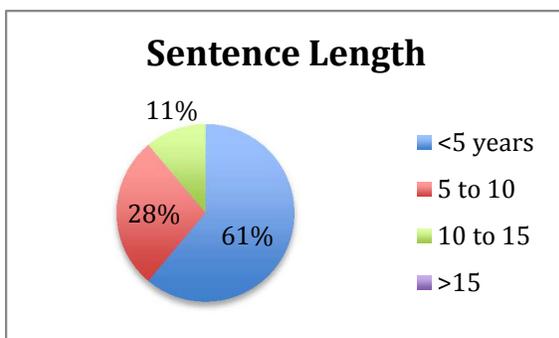
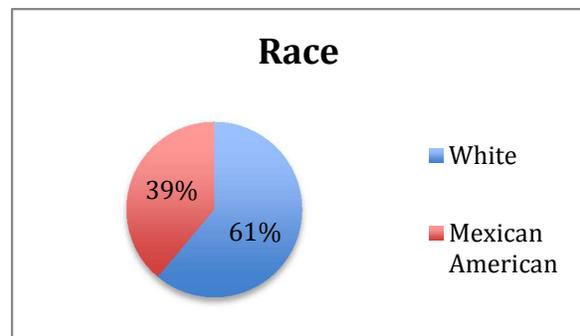
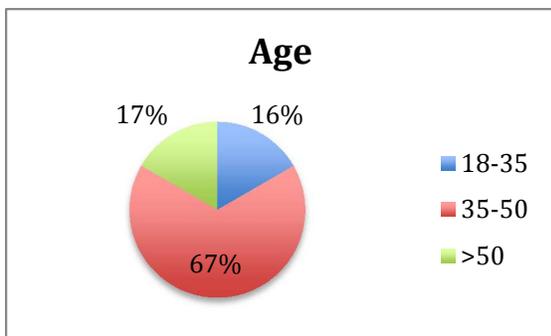
Badger Crew (prisoners) (n=20)

- *Semi structured, recorded interviews (n=11)*



Cocopah Crew (prisoners) (n=18)

- *Semi structured, recorded interviews (n=9)*



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