

Artistic Justice: A New Model for Corrections

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THE CIRCLE: A CENTER FOR ARTISTIC JUSTICE

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ABSTRACT

Prisons are places where histories of violence and trauma reign commonplace, and opportunities for connection and recognition of shared humanity within prison walls remain sparse. However, many folks inside prison find ways of breaking down these barriers—between themselves and other incarcerated individuals, and even with correctional staff. Art and storytelling is one medium for such connection. In this article, six incarcerated artists—in partnership with

prison arts scholars and practitioners—present a new model for forging shared humanity in correctional settings: Artistic Justice (AJ). The authors share the origins of this concept, how this team of artists created an AJ-focused workshop series for incarcerated individuals and correctional staff across eleven prison facilities in the state of Colorado, and the findings from pretest-posttest evaluations indicating promising outcomes: correctional staff and incarcerated individuals who participated in AJ workshops experienced increased empathy for one another, expanded perspectives, and expressed appreciation for meaningful opportunities for connection unavailable elsewhere in carceral settings. These findings offer insight into the potential of AJ as a tool and philosophy which can shift understanding of our shared humanity in carceral spaces and beyond.

Introduction

"It (the system) wasn't built to help people who were dealing with trauma in some sort...the whole experience was one of people crossing the street to avoid seeing me because they felt so awkward about my pain. And I understand that, but you know, I couldn't help it. I was where I was, and I couldn't be where I wasn't."

– Ethan's Mom, Victim's Mother, IF LIGHT CLOSED ITS EYES

What is Artistic Justice?

The Artistic Justice Praxis: *Artistic Justice strives to create individual and community connection and healing in and around the justice system through storytelling. Artistic Justice uses the vehicle of an artistic project or process which utilizes personal storytelling or narrative as its foundation. The practitioners involved in the project must hold a willingness to heal and transform individually and systemically. Practitioners must believe that individual change and healing can lead to community and systemic healing. Additionally, this shared space and experience of the artistic process must be based in intentionally crafted spaces that support new possibilities and a willingness to travel*

through the liminal. (Chavez, Draper, Hamilton, LaBonte, Lopez, Mosley, Phillips; 2021)

Prison is a place where histories of violence and trauma reign commonplace; most incarcerated people have endured traumatic histories, including physical and/or sexual abuse, substance use, abandonment or insufficient support from families and communities, among other stressors (Maschi et al., 2015). Further, there is a known tie between *experiencing* and *perpetrating* violence – histories of violent victimization have been associated with higher levels of involvement in violent crime (Harlow, 1999). In other words, there is no denying the adage: *Hurt people hurt people*. Yet, few practices within and beyond prison walls recognize—and attend to—the shared humanity within the cycles of violence experienced before and after incarceration.

Artistic Justice (AJ) claims the criminal legal system can shift to function as a space that is aware of, respects and thus acts from an understanding of universal, shared humanity. This shift comes from being accountable to our harm and working to forgive our own, and others', harm. As authors of the AJ theory and of this article, we believe that all humans are endlessly complex, are able to transform, and are inherently redeemable. This belief, with the artistic justice process, can create a sense of hope and healing that leads to a shift in one's sense of identity, which then can impact harmful actions which are creating and perpetuating our current correctional system.

The praxis of AJ formally emerged from a unique devised, collectively-created, interview-based theatre and film project that took place from 2019-2023 within Sterling Correctional Facility (a men's maximum-security prison) in Sterling, Colorado with a group of over 100 incarcerated artists, and led by Dr. Ashley Hamilton—titled IF LIGHT CLOSED ITS EYES. As the AJ praxis founders (Chavez, Draper, Hamilton, LaBonte, Lopez, Mosley, Phillips; 2021), we were also the interview team for IF LIGHT CLOSED ITS EYES. Together, we conducted over 100 interviews with incarcerated people, prison staff, victims and survivors of harm, family members of incarcerated people and victims, district attorneys, lawyers, senators, politicians, educators, spiritual leaders and more to understand their experiences with the criminal legal system. We then spent countless more hours crafting, designing and producing an unprecedented verbatim play—

and eventual movie—from those interviews. Through this process we discovered the power of collecting and holding other people's stories and how those stories connect us to our shared humanity and complex histories. This led us to create the very first Artistic Justice workshop in 2021, which we discuss at length in this manuscript. The IF LIGHT CLOSED ITS EYES process was a rich incubator that allowed for an exploration of the American criminal legal system at a pivotal time in history, as well as a vision of possibility for corrections in the future—thus birthing the Artistic Justice praxis.

AJ is, at its heart, a combination of artistic and educational practices, storytelling work based in personal narrative, and an intentional process of creating spaces to explore our shared humanity and responsibility to each other. AJ takes place specifically in and around the criminal legal system, where it was formed and claimed. The scope of AJ, on a macro level, does intend to reshape the criminal legal system—through a process of healing, accountability, and transformation on the individual level. Although AJ was created in majority by people who are incarcerated, we would also argue that the principles of Artistic Justice are universal and instrumental in not only shaping the lives of incarcerated people, but all stakeholders in and around the criminal legal system in the United States. We see the work of AJ existing on three co-existent planes: individual accountability and healing; intentional relationship and community building; and systemic change.

Paper Aims

The purpose of this manuscript is to provide a clear understanding of the definition and scope of Artistic Justice. We will describe the inception of AJ as a concept, the translation of the AJ concept into a two-day workshop for those who live(d) and work(ed) throughout the Colorado Department of Corrections (CDOC), and a case study pretest-posttest evaluation of the first set of AJ workshops. In doing so, we wish to form a foundation for AJ model development that can illuminate the shortcomings and gaps in our understanding and provide a clear path forward for ourselves and other correctional systems to follow.

A Note on Positionality

Before we proceed, it is helpful to name our positionality as authors of this text and some of the context under which this manuscript was written. You will notice that the paper is written in both present and past tense at different moments, as well as through the voices of diverse authors. Showing these cracks is intentional to capture this passage of time, our distinct perspectives, and our respective humanity as authors. The majority of this manuscript was written in the summer of 2022 by six of our nine authors, all of whom were and are (at time of publication) incarcerated—Chavez, Draper, LaBonte, Lopez, Mosley and Phillips. The manuscript was then completed in the summer and fall of 2024 by our other three authors—Hamilton, Hammoor and Littman—none of whom have been incarcerated but are experienced prison art and education facilitators and scholars. Together, these co-authors have over three decades of experience working closely with people who are incarcerated as well as with others in other applied arts settings. They also hold advanced degrees in applied theatre, education and social work.

As the authors who are incarcerated—we are also the co-founders of the Artistic Justice Praxis with Dr. Hamilton—and we have all spent between 16 and 30 years in prison with an average of 22 years each. We all have worked for the University of Denver Prison Arts Initiative (DU PAI), as the Artistic Development Team (ADT) and directly with Dr. Ashley Hamilton, for five years. DU PAI, as a large prison-arts program, had used AJ as a part of all of its curriculum, projects, and programming. The six ADT members functioned as DU PAI staff on the inside of prison working directly with day-to-day operations of the program, as well as driving the philosophy and maintaining the ethos of DU PAI for the last several years. As part of our work tasks, we support, participate in and manage all of the modalities of artistic expression offered within DU PAI's programming including creative writing, journalism, visual and fine arts, filmmaking, podcasting, radio, theatre making, producing and editing music. As a collective, we have all been drawn to this work because in our hearts, we all believe we owe society for the wrongs we have caused, and for the trauma and impact we have created because of our harm. In this work of Artistic Justice, we find solace as well as accountability. We want to pay back a debt we know we can never repay, as well as offer opportunities for others to change thereby reducing future harm. We know it is much

more difficult to cause harm when you see the humanity of another, and our work with AJ allows for continued creation of spaces of shared humanity.

The Context and Need for Artistic Justice

There are many factors that contribute to the necessity of Artistic Justice. However, this need, and Artistic Justice itself, lives within a much larger context of the United States criminal legal system. We see the United States criminal legal system as built on a foundation of crisis and as a violation of social and moral contracts. It is no wonder then, that we would struggle so deeply as a society to address and find solutions that catalyze meaningful change and healing for those who are incarcerated and those who work within the system of incarceration—and thus for our larger community. Our current criminal justice system is built on a complex mix of well-intentioned and ill-conceived notions. Its inherent immensity, danger and fragility make it a very difficult system to take apart and re-evaluate. These systems have been studied, litigated and designed over hundreds of years, but rarely if ever in collaboration with those on the inside who are serving time and being impacted by the system itself. We want to acknowledge both the work of those well-intentioned devotees to the difficult problem of rehabilitation and corrections as well as address a system that still has some tainted bones in the skeleton of its makeup. Here are a few of the issues we see, as part of the larger context, which point to the need for a new approach:

Mass Incarceration. At present, almost 2 million people are confined in the United States, inclusive of state prisons, local jails, federal prisons and jails, immigration detention, involuntary commitment, and youth incarceration (Sawyer & Wagner, 2022)—this phenomenon is often referred to as *mass incarceration*. Mass incarceration has awarded the United States the title of *leader in incarceration*, by incarcerating more people per capita than any other country in the world, thus creating fault lines in our economy and an aging prison population from survivors of decades of incarceration (Maschi, 2015; The Sentencing Project, 2021). Further, residents are often underserved within the facilities due to overcrowding, and system-impacted individuals often wait to enter

into the prison system from county jails across the country (American Civil Liberties Union, 2015). This only foretells the worsening conditions contributing to an already troubled criminal legal system. In our view, the laws U.S. society has constructed around crime and punishment are suffocating our humanity. Our laws do not incorporate our human ability to change, to heal, and to share with each other in that healing when we work together.

Recidivism. Recidivism, defined as a return to prison after release, in our home state of Colorado is around 50% within three years of initial release (Colorado Division of Criminal Justice, 2022). Recidivism rates in Colorado—and across the United States—contribute to the cycle of mass incarceration, and illustrate that prison—as it presently stands—is insufficient in preparing those incarcerated for return to society. We believe that changing the culture of prison environments creates possibility for self, and community healing.

Correctional Staffing Issues. Understanding experiences of correctional staff is vital to understanding systems of incarceration; correctional staff have the ability to directly impact the lives of those incarcerated, each other, and the families they return to every night. Through the type of interactions they have, or are empowered to have, they make a huge difference in opportunities for rehabilitation and healing.

Around the country we are seeing staffing shortages that create disruptions in every facilities day to day functions and make prison more dangerous (Blakinger et al, 2021). Just from 2019 to 2022 there was a 10% drop in staffing in state correctional facilities across the United States, with some states seeing much larger declines (The Marshall Project, 2024). The functions of correctional facilities are built to maintain control and safety, first and foremost. With staff shortages, meaningful programming and educational freedoms begin to suffer. Even the individual case plans to help residents progress out of the system begin to disintegrate, in our experience. An example would be that of a Case Manager who would normally serve residents at every stage of incarceration, starting with entry into the facility to the necessary

steps for progression, all the way up to reentry into society—no longer being able to do those tasks because that case manager is called to simply “operate” the prison so that it can function. When this happens, re-entry and rehabilitative measures fall by the wayside.

Literature Review: Foundations of Artistic Justice

While the concept of Artistic Justice is novel, it draws upon important historical lineages which are helpful to outline here: restorative justice practices, relationships between those who live and work in prisons, and prison arts programming more broadly which we will discuss in more detail. We want to specifically honor the prison art and prison education scholars and practitioners from across the globe who have come before us, whose work we have learned from and whose shoulders we stand on including the work of Katherine Vokins at Rehabilitation through the Arts, Michael Balfour, Nancy Smithner and Nicole Fleetwood at New York University, James Thompson and so many others.

Restorative Justice

Restorative justice (RJ) comprises a constellation of practices which transform our social understanding of ‘crime’ and ‘punishment,’ including facilitated dialogue (e.g., Victim Offender Dialogue), circle practices, and at times, offers of apologies and/or material exchanges between those who harm and are harmed (Menkel-Meadow, 2007). While restorative processes have been around for centuries—and are often embedded in spiritual and community-based practices across the globe (especially in Indigenous communities across the globe)—RJ has been gaining traction as an alternative to retributive justice practices in the Global West since the 1970’s (Marsh, 2019). At their core, RJ practices aim to repair harm, restore relationships, and offer opportunities for reintegration into community for both those who harm and are harmed. Recognizing that we are all human—and thus all have the capacity to cause harm—RJ centers relationships over procedural justice processes, in opposition to harsh and punitive practices which prioritize punishment over rehabilitation and repair.

Most often, engaging in RJ practices involves direct

communication between those who harm and have been harmed, as often seen in circle practices and Victim Offender Dialogues. AJ extends beyond these bounds to include symbolic (i.e., non-literal) representations of those engaged in harm or conflict, relying on archetypal versus personal relationships in repairing harm. In the case of AJ, this includes the relationships between those who live and work in prison settings, and the use of narratives and storytelling to build connections and relational possibility between two groups who have historically experienced (at best) distance and (at worse) distress and suffering when coming into contact.

Relationships between Incarcerated Individuals and Correctional Staff

Incarcerated individuals and correctional staff have few opportunities to connect with one another outside of (or beyond) their roles in carceral settings, which—alongside the power relations ingrained in such roles—creates a recipe for relational distress. Ample research within the study of intergroup relations has shown that people view their own ‘in-groups’ as more human than other groups (see: Haslam & Bain, 2007; Leyens et al., 2001; Viki et al., 2006, among others), sometimes even using uniquely human words (e.g., person) to refer to ‘in-group’ member, and animal-like words (e.g., creature) to describe ‘outgroup’ members (Viki et al., 2006). Research has even shown that individuals view themselves as having more ‘human’ traits than other people (Haslam & Bain, 2007), posing grave implications for the treatment of perceived ‘outgroup’ members.

In seeking to offset such dehumanization, Bain and colleagues sought to test the *contact hypothesis*—which suggests that face-to-face encounters between socially/psychologically distant groups may reduce prejudice and inter-group hostility (Allport, 1954)—to understand whether contact may mitigate dehumanization. They found that higher quality of contact among correctional staff was associated with less dehumanization and punitiveness towards incarcerated individuals (Bain et al., 2013). Further, when correctional staff ‘buy in’ to meaningful experiences of contact with incarcerated individuals they also tend to experience a shift in their sense of purpose and value in relationship to their work. This can create opportunities for a more positive work culture and even decreases cases of violence within the facility. And, when incarcerated individuals are able to share their

stories with those who hold power in carceral settings it allows those leaders to make more informed, thoughtful and even more humanistic decisions, while also creating a greater sense of autonomy for the residents. As such, opportunities to engage in meaningful face-to-face encounters—such as the AJ workshops—may offer promising alternatives to the dehumanization and distance often experienced by those who live and work in prison.

Prison Arts Programming

The arts have a long history in prison settings. As early as the 1800s and early 1900s, incarcerated people across the U.S. organized peer-led arts programming, such as music, performance, storytelling, and creative writing. Today, incarcerated artists are creating powerful art problematizing mass incarceration and elevating the human experience of isolation and punishment (Fleetwood, 2020). The prison arts movement has also been linked to the acceleration of critical consciousness through liberatory education, entangling with degree-granting and non-degree-granting liberal arts programs.

While prison arts practices and programs have been prevalent for over a century, a more limited body of research has documented the outcomes associated with participating in prison arts programs. Members of our own writing team (Littman & Sliva, 2020) have analyzed this body of work; we find that there are four main domains of outcomes associated with participation in prison arts programs: social emotional outcomes, educational and vocational outcomes, disciplinary outcomes, and community and policy outcomes. Participants also evidence social emotional outcomes such as social connections and relationships, such as building trust with one another and trusting environments (Marie Heard et al., 2013, Dunphy, 1999), empathy between other incarcerated individuals and community members (Albertson, 2015; Miner-Romanoff, 2016), and developing communication and collaboration skills (Tett et al., 2012; Marie Heard et al., 2013). However, no known work has explored the potential of arts in building connections between incarcerated individuals and correctional staff. AJ offers a framework and set of practices which draw upon the potential of both restorative and artistic practices to build connection and offset the dehumanization omnipresent in carceral settings.

Methods: Developing Artistic Justice

As previously mentioned, the theory and practice of Artistic Justice was born and grown from a devised theatre project and process entitled IF LIGHT CLOSED ITS EYES. IF LIGHT CLOSED ITS EYES is an interview-based play and movie created by the ADT, Dr. Hamilton and several other incarcerated artists at Sterling Correctional Facility, a maximum-security prison, which is the largest prison facility in the state of Colorado. This project officially began in November of 2019 with a team of nearly 50 incarcerated artists. When the COVID-19 pandemic began in early 2020, like many prisons across the United States, the entirety of Sterling Correctional Facility was locked down for extended periods of time. The ADT was quarantined in the same cell house in the prison and thus were given a unique chance to focus the project, by necessity and happenstance. During that period of extended lockdown, our incarcerated members of the IF LIGHT CLOSED ITS EYES interview team (and eventually co-founders of AJ) were able to meet on a limited basis in their cell house, and at times in a programs building, and work on the project by setting up interviews with other incarcerated people, correctional staff and with others outside of the prison via virtual meetings—through Dr. Hamilton and CDOC staff support. From summer 2020 through spring 2021, the team was able to conduct over 100 interviews with a diverse group of people from every perspective and experience of the criminal legal system. This was a deeply impactful, transformative, emotional and powerful experience for the team. Together, we were able to bear witness to the power of people's deep truths and stories about their experiences with the correctional system, but also about other aspects of their humanity—from their relationship to their own identity, to their experience with accountability, responsibility, hope and healing. These interviews awoke something deep within our incarcerated interview team, and in Dr. Hamilton—creating “a reckoning of souls” through the lens of others' experiences. From that large interview experience, our team felt a deep need to share what we had learned from those rich, impactful interviews and to attempt to translate their power into culture change for the system as a whole.

In early spring of 2021, the ADT, with Dr. Hamilton's guidance, began to create an arts-based, educational curriculum for a two-day workshop that was based upon our findings from our interviews, as well as exploring the theme “buckets” that were designed by our initial

team of 50 incarcerated artists at the very start of the project. The theme buckets were chosen after a devising workshop process led by Dr. Hamilton in late 2019/early 2020, leading the team through a process of distilling our topics for our interviews and creation of the larger projects content. These buckets explored the themes of 1) Identity and Self Knowledge, 2) Systems and Environments, 3) Accountability and Responsibility, 4) Forgiveness and Redemption, 5) Hope and Healing and 6) Transformation and Care.

During our interview process, we interviewed several correctional officers, and other CDOC staff, and found that the experience of speaking with and getting to know correctional staff and their experiences in the system was deeply transformative and meaningful—creating that sense of shared humanity—for those on “both sides of the line.” Thus, our 2-day AJ workshop curriculum was created to intentionally allow for interaction between the incarcerated population and CDOC staff (particularly for line staff who have a bulk of the daily interactions with inmates in the course of their regular work duties). We were in a system which breeds hostile environments but the prevailing thought in the ADT, from our experiences, was that experiencing the humanity of those normally perceived as the “other side” could begin to affect the culture of the facilities experiencing the workshop. As we knew anecdotally and through prior research on prison arts programming, the arts can create an environment that leads a person to a healthier path of identity and self-knowledge.

The workshop curriculum was completed in the summer of 2021 and was first facilitated at Sterling Correctional Facility as a pilot workshop. The 2-day workshop was co-facilitated by the ADT and Dr. Hamilton. The over 40 participants of the workshop, both incarcerated people and staff, were selected through a voluntary application process. There were pre-and post- workshop surveys distributed and filled out voluntarily and anonymously, with a participant-selected identifier for comparison of the changes in attitude and perspective.

After the initial workshop at Sterling Correctional Facility, the ADT and Dr. Hamilton immediately could sense that the workshop was powerful and had created something impactful for the participants. Bringing over 40 correctional staff and incarcerated people into the same room for a 2-day workshop is a “radical” act in and of itself, but then exploring the themes of the workshop, through an arts-based and storytelling activities, had created a transformative and healing

container for almost everyone present, from our perspective. While reflecting on the initial workshop, we had a few strong first takeaways:

- 1) Change comes back to building relationships.
- 2) We have to be willing to help *everyone* who is willing to listen, as well as those who do not even know there is a need *to* listen.
- 3) We re-discovered that we are all connected in some way or another.
- 4) It is not easy getting people to see themselves as the best version of themselves.
- 5) It takes being intentional in getting to know a person in every facet.
- 6) Incarcerated people are not the only ones who are “broken”—we re-discovered that everyone is “broken” to some degree or another.

With these learnings, and the success of the first workshop, the ADT and Dr. Hamilton went “on tour” around the state of Colorado for the summer and fall of 2021—bringing the AJ workshop to eleven prison facilities across CDOC, and to almost 300 incarcerated people and correctional staff. As each workshop was conducted, the pre- and post-workshop surveys were offered and completed on a voluntary basis. What the ADT and Dr. Hamilton discovered and re-discovered during the experience of facilitating this curriculum a dozen times was the power of art to create the liminal space necessary for growth and healing in even the most complex of circumstances. As defined, Artistic Justice involves an intentional act of art and storytelling as the stage, or aesthetic element, to produce the liminal space. It is in that space that we realized art creates the power and agency for change, as well as the power to affect people that were not involved in the artistic process itself. It is because of these qualities that, with our shared humanity, we can learn to provide more opportunities for real care for self and for others. It is this assertion that we put words to after a time of reflection and contemplation upon the completion of the workshop tour, leading our team to begin discussions of defining Artistic Justice in a more formal way.

The ADT and Dr. Hamilton realized after hours of discussion and reflection that we had been practicing the tenets of AJ well before we

actually grasped that AJ was a definable entity. And, that our immersion into this process, into the prison culture—as facilitator or participant, staff or inmate—proved to not be a hindrance to the experience; instead it was possibly our greatest strength as we were only able to discern the momentous effects the practice of AJ had due to the extreme circumstance of our shared experiences.

It is also important to note the challenges, complexity and some of the moments of resistance that occurred during the process of the AJ workshop tour. On a micro level, the realities of organizing the logistics of this workshop across twelve prison facilities (several of which were maximum security facilities), with almost 300 participants, and six currently incarcerated co-facilitators was extremely complicated. Dr. Hamilton and the ADT organized much of the logistics of the tour as a team, with the helpful support of Noah Toops, a CDOC staff member at the time. From announcing the workshop to the various prisons, gathering interest and applications from both incarcerated folks and CDOC staff across the sites, reviewing applications, communicating acceptance and details to participants, setting up space for the workshops, clearing staff's time to attend the workshop, clearing unique arts-based materials with the prisons, and managing the ADT's schedule and needs on tour (including moving the team of six from prison to prison with their needed belongings across the state multiple times—an unprecedented ask and occurrence) Dr. Hamilton sent quite literally thousands of emails. Dr. Hamilton and the ADT worked 12-14 hour days, daily during that period of time to manage logistics, the workshop itself, to reflect on each facility's needs—as well as to process the ADT's experience. Dr. Hamilton lived in motels and hotels across the state of Colorado for over a month “on tour” and even drove behind the prison van that carried the ADT in restraints from prison to prison.

Additionally, to speak to the challenges on a macro level of the system—we were introducing an intervention, the AJ Workshop, into our current day prison system with its centuries old model, norms and beliefs. And, our antidote was not only arts-based—which is unique enough, but was co-facilitated by incarcerated people (to CDOC staff—again, unprecedented), and was proposing the idea that no matter what side “of the line” you are on, we have shared humanity—asking CDOC staff to open up and be vulnerable with their experiences in life and work. “Radical” might be an understatement, given the context of

the space, time and system we were in. Our team continually experienced push back from CDOC staff and facilities over our work in small and big ways—both Dr. Hamilton and the ADT—experienced hurtful comments, pushback and intentional road blocks to their work during the process. Although, it is important to note that those experiences of resistance rarely (if ever) came from participants in the workshop, but were generally experienced outside the workshop space. However, those negative experiences were only a drop in the pond compared to the joy, connection, healing and transformation we witnessed emerge during this experience.

Case Study Findings: Implementing Artistic Justice

Data Collection

In presenting the possibilities of AJ, it is helpful to share findings from the pre- and post-workshop surveys collected at the AJ workshops in summer and fall 2021. For acceptance into the workshop, there was no pre-qualifying criteria other than the participants needed to somehow be involved in the criminal legal system as staff/administrators or incarcerated residents of CDOC facilities, and had to identify as interested in shifting the criminal legal system in some way. The applications were reviewed by the ADT, Dr. Hamilton, and each individual CDOC facility programs staff. In all, the ADT and Dr. Hamilton facilitated the AJ workshop to a total of 285 correctional staff, support staff and incarcerated persons across the twelve CDOC facilities. Roughly half of participants were CDOC staff, and half were incarcerated individuals.

At each workshop, the ADT distributed pre- and post-workshop surveys to each participant (with the exception of one facility due to administrative oversight). We reassured attendees that participation was completely voluntary and anonymous. Participants were asked to rate a series of statements at pre-and post-test time points on a Likert scale ranging between 1 and 7, measuring constructs such as empathy, sense of purpose, sense of community, hope, and relation to harm and repair. Participants were also asked to provide written open-ended responses to the following questions: *What, if anything, changed for you as a result of taking this workshop? What was the most meaningful moment in this workshop for you?*

Data Analysis

Quantitative Analysis. Of the 285 workshop participants, between 187 and 224 of the participants reported answers to both pre and post-test questions that we were able to match. Our DU PAI evaluation team used a paired samples *t*-test to analyze the differences between the mean values on each question and pretest and posttest, as shown in Table 1 (pp. 81-82).

Qualitative Analysis. Our DU PAI evaluation team analyzed qualitative open response questions using content analysis as described by Hseih & Shannon (2005), which included inductively creating categories after immersion in qualitative responses to the two listed questions. We conducted two rounds of coding – open coding to first create a comprehensive set of categories, then a second round of coding to combine the open coding categories into three themes per question, which comprehensively encapsulate our qualitative findings

Quantitative Findings

Table 1 outlines the results of the paired samples *t*-tests. Of the 11 questions which were asked at both pretest and posttest, 10 were statistically significant—nine at the <0.001 level, and one at the <0.05 level. As such, there is compelling evidence that participating in the AJ workshop is associated with feeling *closer with those participating in the workshop, a sense of purpose in daily life, feeling like a community member of the institution, empathy for incarcerated individuals and correctional staff (being able to imagine what others are thinking), feeling heard by incarcerated people and correctional staff, recognizing there are things one can do to repair harm in one's community, feeling a need to make amends, and feeling a sense of hope for the future.* While participants were more likely to endorse the perspective that they *have ways to process what they are thinking and feeling* after participating in the workshop, this item was not statistically significant.

Table 1. Pre and post AJ survey values, and paired samples t-test results (mean N=219)

Item	Pre-workshop		Post-workshop		<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
Of the people in this workshop, I feel close to...	3.53	1.29	5.01	1.41	-10.69	<0.001***
I feel like I have a sense of purpose in my day-to-day life	5.99	1.12	6.20	1.03	-1.98	0.049**
I feel like a community member of this institution	5.07	1.60	5.71	1.26	-4.49	<0.001***
I have ways to process what I am thinking and feeling	5.93	1.07	6.07	0.96	-1.47	0.14
I can imagine what incarcerated people at [facility] must be feeling	4.41	1.67	5.32	1.39	-6.174	<0.001***
I can imagine what correctional staff at [facility] must be feeling	4.27	1.83	5.28	1.43	-618	<0.001***

Table 1. Pre and post AJ survey values, and paired samples t-test results (mean N=219) [cont.]

Item	Pre-workshop		Post-workshop		t	p
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
I feel heard by incarcerated people	4.71	1.38	5.44	1.25	-5.98	<0.001***
I feel heard by correctional staff	4.02	1.57	5.16	1.33	-8.142	<0.001***
There are things I can do to help repair harm that has happened in my community	5.65	1.29	6.14	1.06	-4.45	<0.001***
Personally, there are people I need to make amends to	4.94	2.04	5.73	1.61	-4.57	<0.001***
I have a sense of hope for the future	6.08	1.28	6.36	0.97	-2.71	0.01***

***indicates significant at the .05 level*

****indicates significance at the .01 level*

Qualitative Findings

At the post-test, participants were asked: *what, if anything, changed for you as a result of taking this workshop?* And, *what was the most meaningful moment in this workshop for you?* When sharing about what changed as a result of participating in the workshop, participants described how they *gained perspective of oneself, others, and the (criminal justice) system*, the recognition that *change is possible*, and how they learned about the *potential of forgiveness*. When sharing about the most meaningful workshop elements, participants described a sense of *trust to be real with each other*, the fact that *blue and green can come together* (describing the colors worn by correctional officers, and incarcerated individuals, respectively), *and impactful workshop elements*—the letter of forgiveness, and sharing a meal together. Table 2 (pp. 84-85) outlines the key themes we identified within the qualitative responses, as well as participant quotes which represent each theme.

Table 2. Qualitative themes	
What, if anything, changed for you as a result of taking this workshop?	
<i>Gained perspective of oneself, others, and the (criminal justice) system</i>	"Ultimately my perspective. I can see light in things that felt dark. I see approachability in people who seemed untouchable." "Perhaps my perception that there are entrenched and malignant forces in this prison is misplaced. I will need to reframe my points of reference."
<i>Change is possible</i>	"How similar we all are. Developing relationships with others is the foundation of change." "This workshop cast the vision of what culture change looks like by inviting staff & offenders to a safe space for conversation. The conversations were what changed people. Gave me a lot of hope & also confidence in the daily exchanges with people & the cumulative impact."
<i>The potential of forgiveness</i>	"I was able to address the idea of forgiveness and begin the process of healing" "I'll be paying more attention to forgiveness"
What was the most meaningful moment in this workshop for you?	
<i>Trust to be real with each other</i>	"Seeing grown men moved to tears. Showing how vulnerable and weak we are shows how beautiful and strong we are because at that moment you are original." "Being able to be myself. Also, seeing other strong minded men being able to break down emotional walls."
<i>Blue and green can come together</i>	"Connecting and sharing and listening, to others, feeling their pain, understanding their struggles, and focusing on their healing instead of being so selfish and thinking only of myself" "I like that blue and green can come together"

Table 2. Qualitative themes [cont.]	
<i>Impactful workshop elements</i>	<i>Letter of forgiveness</i> • "When I read my partners letter back to him. He was talking about his children and how he is there for them because of his mistakes. It made me [realize] that I take for granted being able to just see and hug my children every day. • "When I read my forgiveness letter to a staff member. I could see that he saw the humanity in me and we weren't that different" <i>Having a meal together</i> • "Its super [simple] just eating with staff members gave me the biggest expression of hope. It let me know that we can get along"

Discussion

Through our shared experiences of living and creating Artistic Justice, and now naming it, we believe it is an important addition to the canon of prison arts work for several reasons. The co-creation process of coming to know and claim Artistic Justice between incarcerated people, scholars and correctional staff is a unique offering to the literature. It is a model that is applicable to the full spectrum of experience across the criminal legal system. So often, incarcerated people are not able to claim their own need for the system they are forced to exist in. AJ shifts this dynamic.

The blend of key elements that create the praxis of AJ—an artistic project, narrative storytelling, willingness to heal and intentional space—are a particularly special recipe that has proven, for us, to be life altering for our relationship to identity, accountability, forgiveness and healing—all themes that are threaded into the fabric of the criminal legal system yet rarely explored intentionally. And, the AJ belief that individual change and healing leads to larger community and system healing is vital to a culture change in our criminal legal system, yet is so rarely explored thoughtfully in our experience. Artistic Justice is a

unique container for vital, intense work.

Additionally, Artistic Justice has the ability to complement long-held and practiced restorative justice practices in and around the criminal legal system, that are powerful, healing and transformative for those who participate in them. However, the addition of AJ's use of an artistic project as a vehicle by which to create such healing allows for a similar experience to that of restorative justice, but has the potential to be more palatable for the participant(s) due to the aesthetic distance of the art. The artistic vehicle can allow for a level of safety in an incredibly unsafe environment for the similar work of restorative justice to be expanded upon.

Lastly, Artistic Justice is uniquely created for every human that is connected to the criminal legal system—not just for incarcerated people, correctional staff, victims or legal teams—but rather AJ is a praxis that can be used to impact any and everyone who is touched by the system. A system that is riddled with violence and trauma, for all parties who encounter it. Because the AJ praxis was born of holding so many complex stories, across so many identities and perspectives, it can also continue to hold that same complexity as a model.

Next Steps for Artistic Justice

Because of the success of the AJ workshop tour, the ADT, Dr Hamilton and co-author Dr. Hammoor, were asked in the spring of 2022 to collaborate with the CDOC to bring the praxis of Artist Justice to an unprecedented, first in the United States, project. They were asked to vision, design and co-create a new model for corrections in the United States—The Beacon at Skyline: A Correctional Community (The Beacon) in Canyon City, Colorado. Together, with CDOC staff, the team was asked to use their experiences with Artistic Justice to inform the creation of a new minimum correctional facilities structure and everyday practices. The Beacon would operate in a new, innovative, progressive way in its everyday operations, programming structure, re-entry services, visiting structure and more—with AJ as a foundation for its creation. The Artistic Justice ethos, projects and workshops would be a core part of The Beacon's model. The Beacon at Skyline: A Correctional Community officially opened to incarcerated residents, with its new model, in January of 2023 with Chavez, Draper, LaBonte, Lopez, Mosley Phillips, Dr. Hamilton and Dr. Hammoor as co-founders

and leaders of the facility.

Additionally, in the fall of 2022 the ADT created their first “train the trainer” process for other incarcerated leaders across the CDOC—training fellow incarcerated participants to be able to eventually conduct their own AJ workshops and projects at their respective prison facilities.

Conclusion

We believe Artistic Justice can be a new model for our correctional system. Through the experience of creating IF LIGHT CLOSED ITS EYES, which created the Artistic Justice workshop and praxis, we came to know that there is great potential to positively impact and cultivate change within our criminal justice for both incarcerated people and correctional staff. Our experiences, as incarcerated artists and as prison art educators and scholars, have shown us time and time again that our shared humanity is universal. And, one of the greatest ways we have to access that sense of shared humanity is through an artistic process that involves narrative storytelling. Through holding a willingness to share our individual stories with others in an intentional fashion, within a holding of an artistic project or process, we embarked on the journey of healing not only for ourselves, but also for our larger community.

Creating intentional space and opportunity for arts practice and storytelling creates new possibilities for healing and transformation, which can create systemic culture change. Although our whole team has lived and worked in correctional spaces for decades, it has been through the practice of Artistic Justice we have brought into the light what was in the dark for so long in our individual journeys with the system. And, because of these life changing experiences with Artistic Justice we now choose every day, in every encounter, to explore healing and shared humanity—a way of being that we argue is the most meaningful, transformative and life giving way to live and work in the criminal legal system.

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George Chavez, Andrew Draper, Matthew LaBonte, Angel Lopez, Terry W. Mosley Jr. and Brett Phillips are the co-authors who are incarcerated—and are also the co-founders of the Artistic Justice Praxis and The Beacon at Skyline Facility with Dr. Hamilton. Each co-author has spent between 16 and 30 years in prison with an average of 22 years each and all are still incarcerated at the time of publication. Each co-author worked for the University of Denver Prison Arts Initiative (DU PAI) for years, as part of the Artistic Development Team, and functioned as DU PAI staff on the inside of prison working directly with day-to-day operations of the program, as well as driving the philosophy and maintaining the ethos of DU PAI across the state of Colorado. As part of their work tasks, they have created, managed and participated in all of the modalities of artistic expression offered within DU PAI's programming including creative writing, journalism, visual and fine arts, filmmaking, podcasting, radio, theatre making, producing and editing music. The co-authors are writers, poets, performers, producers, photographers, dancers, chefs, mentors, philosophers, leaders, teachers, fathers, brothers, sons and full of humanity.

Dr. Ashley Hamilton, Dr. Clare Hammor and Dr. Danielle Littman have never been incarcerated but are experienced prison art and education facilitators and scholars. Together, these co-authors have over three decades of experience working closely with people who are incarcerated as well as with others in other applied arts settings. They also hold advanced degrees in applied theatre, education and social work. They are writers, directors, dancers, performers, gardeners, chefs, teachers, philosophers, mentors and full of humanity.