Success within a UK open prison and surviving the 'pains of freedom'

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Category D open prisons mark a critical juncture of a prisoner's sentence as they near the end of imprisonment and reach the cusp of release. Such establishments aim to support prisoner re-entry by offering greater freedom and autonomy. A greater understanding of the reality of life within an open establishment and exactly how these conditions support prisoner re-entry is needed. This study is made up of interviews with 11 prisoners residing in a UK open prison. Interviews were analysed qualitatively using interpretative phenomenological analysis which revealed two superordinate themes: 'redemption through active citizenship' and 'coping with invisible boundaries'. These themes are unpacked and their relevance to prisoner re-entry are discussed. The study found that greater freedom and autonomy encouraged reciprocal support amongst residents. Participants discuss strategies they utilise to help them to cope with the 'pains of freedom'. Implications for supporting individuals in their transformation from prisoner to citizen within an open establishment are highlighted and suggestions for future research offered.

Introduction

In closed establishments prisoners are subjected to a regimented, habitual and dependent prison regime, which they must psychologically adapt to in order to survive (Sykes, 1958). Prisoners must learn specific rules (both formal and informal) of behaviour to adapt to the prison subculture they reside within (Weinrath, 2016). Whilst they become better able to live within restricted conditions, they become poorly equipped to live autonomously in the community (Clemmer, 1958; Berger & Luckman, 1967; Honeywell, 2015). The longer the sentence, the more entrenched these adaptations become, some suggesting that long-term prisoners revert to a 'childlike state' where they are unable to make decisions for themselves (Cohen & Taylor, 1981, p. 65). A category D open establishment offers the lowest level of security in the UK prison system, aiming to reverse some of the negative impacts of imprisonment through greater freedom and autonomy (Crewe, 2012; Shammas, 2015). Release is often eagerly anticipated by prisoners and this becomes concrete and tangible in open conditions (Micklethwaite, 2020). Conditions strive to mirror the outside world, to allow a gradual adjustment to independence, an ability to strengthen family ties and seek employment (Prison Reform Trust, 2015; HMIP, 2018; Auty & Liebling, 2019). Release on temporary license (ROTLs) must be granted for residents to leave the prison to attend work and other approved appointments (Danks & Bradley, 2018). Greater trust means higher behavioural expectations are placed on residents, who must already be deemed low risk to the public and of absconding prior to accessing open conditions (Brown, 2018). Most prisoners who access open prisons have done so based on their good conduct and positive relations with prison staff (Meško & Hacin, 2018). These individuals are likely to have rejected the norms of prison subculture in closed departments, such as norms which prohibits cooperation with prison staff and promotes

rule breaking. Meško and Hacin (2018) highlight how the hierarchy and prisoner subculture is often vastly different within open establishments, whereby charismatic individuals who have access to financial resources within the community are usually among the higher rungs of the hierarchy. They suggest prisoner subculture within open establishments is often more subtle and changeable based on the individuals housed within it. Despite the open prison setting being a valuable site for individuals who are transitioning from prisoner to citizen, extremely little research has been conducted within it. Residents are in a unique position that encourages both reflection on the sentence and anticipation for the future. More understanding is needed around the differences in prisoner subculture within open establishments and how easily prisoners are able to adapt to this specific subculture.

Historically the prison service has a poor record in reducing recidivism (Langan & Levin, 2002; Cullen, Jonson & Nagin, 2011) with statistics highlighting that 46.8% of adults reoffend within a year of release from custody (Ministry of Justice, 2020). This rate reduces to 13% for adults who have accessed ROTL within six months prior to their release (Hillier & Mews, 2018). The majority of ROTL's are authorised from open conditions and this is likely to afford to the lower reoffending rate found amongst those released from open conditions (Prison Reform Trust, 2015). Whilst these statistics are encouraging, they offer little explanation as to how lower reoffending rates are achieved and may reflect the considerable amount of social filtration that occurs before prisoners are deemed suitable for such conditions (Shammas, 2015). Open prisons are comparatively inexpensive to run due to relaxed physical security and authoritarian control (Crewe, 2012), yet these establishments are reported to be insufficiently utilised: in 2015 occupancy rates dropped below 85% as ROTL procedures became increasingly stringent following a number of high-profile abscond

cases (Prison Reform Trust, 2015). This pressured ministers to close open establishments and reserve resources for the overcrowded closed prison estate – likely to harm the cost effectiveness of the prison service and its capacity to reduce reoffending (Prison Reform Trust, 2015). Further understanding is needed to clarify the ways in which open establishments support prisoner reintegration and how these services can reach a broader range of individuals within the prison system.

Whilst release is often eagerly anticipated, individuals face numerous barriers as they leave a place of familiar routine to enter more unpredictable circumstances (Nelson, Deess & Allen, 1999). Many who return to prison following release do so due to technical parole violations (e.g. failure to report to probation), rather than having committed a crime (Ostermann, 2015; Hanrahan, Gibbs & Zimmerman, 2005; Langan & Levin, 2002). Prisoners can be revoked to closed conditions from open establishments for various reasons, including: lapses with substance misuse, feeling threatened and bullied or a use of violence (Hallet & Lowbridge, 2014). Managing different roles and alternating between family, employment and prison life can be too much for some to deal with (Honeywell, 2015). Reports have highlighted problematic numbers of absconds and rule violations resulting in residents being revoked to closed conditions (Hallett & Lowbridge, 2014; Independent Monitoring Boards, 2018). Prisoner misconduct is seen to be a consequence of unsuccessful adaptation to life in prison and a failure to internalise the basic elements of the prisoner subculture (Meško & Hacin, 2018). The internalised rules, expectations and adaptations made within closed conditions are likely to be inapplicable within an open establishment where there are a new set of rules and newfound sense of independence. Being aware of the challenges presented by restricted freedom, many prisoners even decline parole when they are eligible (Ostermann, 2011).

Crewe, Liebling and Hulley (2011) found that prisoners dislike establishments which are over-permissive as it is too easy to 'get into trouble' (p. 105). A lack of physical boundaries puts pressure on individuals' personal resources, which can be intimidating for those who have become dependent on others (Crewe, 2011). Constrained freedom then becomes the source of experienced pain, described by Shammas (2014) as the 'pains of freedom' where freedom can be 'experienced as ambiguous, bittersweet or tainted' (p. 104). Open establishments are not always the coveted institutions they're expected to be and the precise coping mechanisms adopted by individuals who successfully remain within these conditions are unknown. ingenuity

In an autoethnographic study conducted within an open establishment, Micklethwaite (2020) describes how witnessing so many residents transfer back to closed conditions daily 'served for a very insecure sense of environment' (p.7). Danks and Bradley (2018) highlight how this perceived fragility of the open prison position results in residents being reluctant to seek support for mental health issues, due to a fear of jeopardising their position. As their review focused on mental health provision, they did not explore any of the broader impacts this impression of fragility had on residents. A local report conducted within an open prison highlights that prisoners lacked confidence in utilising the complaint system, due to fear of being regarded as problematic and revoked to closed conditions (HMIP, 2018). Whilst no evidence was found to support that prisoners' views were accurate to the establishments proceedings, they urge that the rehabilitative quality of staff-prisoner relationships needed to be addressed to tackle this issue. Nelson et al. (1999) report that residents within a half-way house were more likely to seek support from fellow residents rather than staff members, as they felt staff would recall them for trivial transgressions. This perceived fragility of the open prison position appears to compromise effective staff-prisoner

relationships. With a lessening of physical security, dynamic security is imperative –
but this relies on prisoners feeling comfortable to approach staff before problems
escalate (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2015). Findings that allude to this
fragile sense of environment where residents avoid seeking support from staff are
disconcerting, given that the purpose of open establishments is to assist residents to
overcome barriers in their resettlement before their eventual release (Prison Reform
Trust, 2015). These fears may be reflective of residents' recognition of the prison
service's historic priority in upholding the security of the establishment over supporting
individual resettlement needs (Liebling, 2004). The contradictory nature of these
agendas within the prison service has led some to question whether staff-prisoner
relations can indeed be authentic and supportive (Crewe, 2011). It is suggested that only
when staff are able to work within highly risk-averse parameters without feeling obliged
to act will they successfully promote desistance (Crewe, 2011). Further insight is
needed to understand the broader impact this perceived fragility has on daily life within
open establishments and how it affects staff-prisoner relationships,

The 'problem of order' refers to the lack of perceived legitimacy within
modern prisons (Bosworth, 1996). It is argued that the way a prisoner perceives the
institution (i.e. whether it is legitimate in that it has the right and justification to use
power) is largely influenced by the quality of relationships between prisoners and staff
members (Steiner & Wooldredge, 2015). Self-legitimacy in prison staff has been shown
to increase prison officers' fair treatment of prisoners (Meško, Haskin, Tankebe &
Fields, 2017). Where prisoners view staff procedures as just, they are thought to be less
likely to violate prison rules than those who view staff actions as unfair or arbitrary
(Reisig & Meško, 2009). This may be particularly important to consider within open
conditions, since absconds and rule violations are considered to be problematic (Hallett

& Lowbridge, 2014; Independent Monitoring Boards, 2018). Where staff are confident in their roles, the power and rules they uphold and have a robust sense of self-legitimacy, they are thought to be less likely to contribute to the 'problem of order' (Hacin, Fields & Meško, 2019). This notion is even more relevant in an open prison where organisational rules are different to those in higher security prisons and the flexibility in administrating such rules may be seen as weakness and fragility instead. The social climate of a prison may impact the rehabilitation of prisoners, with a more therapeutic climate and positive attitudes from prison staff giving 'prisoners 'headspace' to work through problems and change' (Blagden, Winder & Hames, 2016, p.371). The perceived legitimacy of the system and the way in which rules are applied is likely to contribute to the rehabilitative quality of the social climate and may also link to abscond rates and rule violations. How perceived legitimacy may differ within an open establishment where boundaries are vague and uncertain warrants further exploration.

Virtually all research with offender samples focuses on negative outcomes. For example, Phillips and Lindsay (2011) explore what coping styles are utilised by individuals (N=20) who returned to prison following release, reporting that most participants avoided their problems. Their sample comprised individuals with histories of substance misuse, making their results difficult to generalise as these individuals are known to face specific barriers upon re-entry (Zamble & Quinsey, 2001). Whilst it is important to understand why individuals fail, such research misses a large portion of variance in inmate adjustment by failing to accommodate for those who have successfully reintegrated. Zamble and Quinsey (2001) found that individuals who returned to prison (N=311) had poorer coping skills than those who successfully reintegrated (N=36). Whilst they include successfully reintegrated individuals, the disparity between the population sizes of the two groups makes the statistical strength of

the study weak and the comparisons drawn tentative. The authors report the difficulties

they had in capturing released individuals who had successfully reintegrated, as they

had often geographically dispersed or, once identified, reoffended prior to interviewing.

Both studies (Phillips & Lindsay, 2011; Zamble & Quinsey, 2001) rely on retrospective

recall which is limited in that it requires individuals to be able to accurately and

honestly recall information. This is unlikely, given that those who are asked to discuss

reasons for recall often use minimisations and justifications to portray themselves in a

positive light (Quinsey, Harris, Rice & Cormier, 1998). Focusing on the positives rather

than the negatives may be important as individuals may be less likely to manipulate

information to portray themselves in a positive light, as they are not being asked to

describe events they could potentially feel ashamed of. An open establishment is likely

to be a valuable site to capture individuals who are actively reintegrating, preventing the

need for retrospective recall and making them an easier population to capture.

There is a comprehensive understanding in the literature of risk factors

which are correlated with offender recidivism (e.g. Hanrahan et al., 2005; Gideon, 2009;

Zamble & Quinsey, 2001). Some examples include substance abuse, criminal

associates, pro-offending attitudes and poor problem-solving abilities (Andrews &

Bonta, 2003). Simply eliminating these factors is likely to leave individuals with gaps in

their lives and doesn't provide them with tools to help them to thrive and flourish (Laws

& Ward, 2011; Ward & Brown, 2004). The current study aims to hear the voices of

those who are succeeding thus far in their resettlement journey, a population often

overlooked in recidivism research. What is missed is an understanding of how

successful transformation from prisoner to citizen is supported within an open

establishment. How individuals manage known barriers to reintegration whilst still

residing in a 'fragile' prison environment is explored in this study. Individual

experiences are studied in depth to offer a greater understanding of daily life within

open conditions.

Method

Ethics

Access to participants was granted following ethical approval by Her Majesty's

Prison Service and a UK University. All participants were given information sheets,

signed consent forms and were debriefed following the interview to reiterate their

rights. Interviews were recorded on a password-protected dictaphone and transcribed

verbatim. Names and places were anonymised; where names are used, these are

pseudonyms.

Participants and data collection

Data collection was facilitated by the resettlement department of a category D

open prison in the UK. Participants were recommended by resettlement staff and letters

were dispatched outlining the research and ethical procedures. This method of

purposive sampling ensures individuals to whom the research issue matters the most are

recruited (Smith & Osborn, 2003). Participation was voluntary and all contacted

individuals (N=11) agreed to engage in the research. This sample size (N=11)

represented approximately 1.91 percent of the prison population (N=576) within the

prison of study. As the first fourteen weeks were highlighted by the Governor as being

the most high-risk period for rule violations and absconds – resulting in recall to closed

conditions (security governor, personal communication, May 2019) – participants were

required to have surpassed this time frame. This enabled them to reflect on how and

why they had succeeded past this time and to provide a more holistic account of living

within an open establishment, having resided there for a considerable length of time. At the time of interview, some participants were employed in paid work within the community (N=5), one individual was completing voluntary work in the community (N=1) and the remainder were employed within the prison (N=6). Table 1 presents further demographic and offence related information.

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews which lasted between 49 and 88 minutes (mean = 68 minutes). Interviews were conducted on a one-to-one basis (the researcher and participant) in a purpose-built, private interview room within the prison. The interview schedule was divided into four main sections: 'introductory questions', 'experience of open conditions', 'overcoming boundaries' and 'future goals'. This schedule was flexible and questions were open ended and non-directive, allowing participants to focus on matters which arose and were important to them (Smith & Osborn, 2008).

Table 1. Participant Information.

[Table 1 near here]

Analytical process

Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) was the chosen analytical method (Smith, 2003). Human beings are viewed as sense making creatures who engage in a considerable amount of reflection, thinking and feeling to work out what significant events mean to them (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009). Both the researcher and participant engage in this process, known as a 'double hermeneutic' (Smith, 2004, p. 40). Of interest is how people make sense of major transitions in their life (Smith, 1996; Smith et al., 2009); relevant to the current sample who were undergoing the transition from prisoner to citizen. The final sample (N=11) is considered generous for IPA,

where the aim is not to generalise but to commit to an idiographic level of analysis (Guest, Bunce & Johnson, 2006). Participants are viewed as the expert in their world and given a voice through verbatim extracts, allowing the reader to check the credibility of the authors interpretations (Eatough & Smith, 2006; Glackin & Beale, 2017). The lead author's interpretations of the data were checked by consulting with other researchers to further bolster credibility (Willig, 2008). Prisoner voices have been reported to be valuable in improving services within the CJS (e.g. Day, 1999; Garrett, Oliver, Wilcox & Middleton, 2003) highlighting their value in the current research. Whilst there is no prescribed way of conducting IPA, analysis was guided by Smith et al. (2009). This involved reading, re-reading, note-taking and developing clusters of themes of each account. Superordinate themes were then formed which offer a higher level of abstraction to capture the most significant experiences within and between accounts. The aim of analysis was to facilitate an understanding how participants make sense of their transformation from prisoner to citizen and to illuminate the subjective experiences of living within open conditions.

Results and Discussion

Analysis revealed two key themes: redemption through active citizenship and coping with invisible boundaries. The themes and associated sub-themes are unpacked in this section and an overview is provided in Table 2.

Table 2. Superordinate and subordinate themes.

[Table 2 near here]

Superordinate theme 1: Active citizenship

Participants described the various ways in which open conditions facilitated them to move away from being passive recipients of the prison service, towards being active citizens both inside and outside of the establishment.

Subordinate theme 1.1: Sense of community

A sense of community flourished as a result of the more relaxed regime and less authoritarian presence. Residents connected through offering each other reciprocal support, as more time out of their cells enabled them to interact throughout the day:

Josh (lines 59-62)

> You can just walk to the lads, and one of the lads will normally help you, or know someone who will help you. I'd say it's like a community, you can just walk up, if someone's good at something – can you help me with this mate? It's not, how do I put it, awkward. I think it's because, everyone knows, you're going home soon. This is the last part, and, if you can help someone out, you can help someone out. Everyone sort of, sticks together.

In the open establishment, strangers instantaneously became acquaintances or 'mates' through their shared common fates. Josh's use of colloquial language to describe his fellow prisoners ('lads') reflects the laid-back nature of the community where residents felt comfortable in approaching others for guidance and support. A sense of shared fate is thought to foster solidarity, increase empathetic responses and unite individuals (Drury, Brown, González, & Miranda, 2016). The suggestion that people 'stick'

together implies that residents are stronger in unity than they would be alone. A sense of togetherness within stigmatised groups has been found to empower individuals to collectively resist prejudice (Kellezi, Bowe, Wakefield, McNamara & Bosworth, 2019; Alfadhli & Drury, 2018). Beginning the resettlement journey within a micro-community of similarly stigmatised others may give residents strength in resisting damaging labels, reversing some of the negative impacts associated with imprisonment (Sykes, 1958). In these ways, shared identities within the community served as 'Social Cures' (Kellezi et al., 2019, p.333) as they facilitated the exchange of support, mitigated tension and allowed residents to make sense of overwhelming experiences:

Ray (lines 498-503)

> It's amazing, the amount of support, you get from each other, if need be. […] But, that makes that person feel a bit more accepted, and they'll start talking, coming out their shell a bit more. It gives them a bit of confidence, because a lot of people aren't. You help each other along the way.

Ray recognises the stress and anxiety newer residents face upon the transition into open conditions. Life transitions yield uncertainty and instability, yet group membership has protective qualities over psychological wellbeing during times of transition, as they offer a sense of ontological security and a stable base through which individuals can make sense of such overwhelming changes (Iyer, Jetten, & Tsivrikos, 2008; Thoits, 1983). Upon arrival, newcomers retreated into a 'shell' of safety where they were vigilant for signs of danger. Supportive gestures from fellow residents facilitated the process of prisoner adjustment, allowing new residents to step out of their protective armour and reap the benefits available to them within their community. The 'hard' façade reported to be crucial in surviving the rigours of imprisonment (Jewkes, 2005, p.

56) appeared no longer conducive to success within the open establishment. To progress, individuals were required to reverse this psychological adaptation and expose their inner self, which allowed others to support and guide them through their transition into a less restrictive prisoner subculture. Jewkes (2005) notes how prisoners are unable to maintain masculine fronts for prolonged periods of time and often reveal their inner selves behind locked cell doors. With increased freedom and no requirement to be locked in cells, residents perhaps had little choice other than to expose their inner selves within public spaces. This was intimidating initially, yet fostered a supportive community:

Kyle (lines 302-308)

> You can get support from others here, because the freedom of being able to move about within the dormitories, as opposed to closed conditions and being behind that door with your pad mate, you have that opportunity to talk with other people – whether they're long term prisoners or they've been in prison two, three or four times and have that experience, or, for someone a little bit older like myself, who has life experience, to be able to pull upon that to help younger people to deal with certain situations. There are listeners here, but, it's us, as a collective group.

Through no longer being trapped behind a closed door with limited options available for managing difficult emotions, open doors unbolted a broader range of coping resources. Kyle reports how residents embrace their similarities and disregard their differences, allowing a web of support to develop. When a person defines themselves in terms of their group membership; 'it's us, as a collective group', they see fellow group members as a part of who and what they are. Internalising groups in this way is thought to have protective qualities for psychological wellbeing, as group membership offers a sense of

belonging, meaning and purpose (Haslam, Jetten & Alexander, 2012). Being part of a cohort of individuals who are going through the same life transition is thought to make change a highly ritualised process and collective experience (Schmitt, Spears & Branscombe, 2003). In their interviews with prison directors, Meško and Hacin (2018) refer to the fundamental need human beings have to belong somewhere when they are placed into a new environment. Where the powerful group that draws people in within closed establishments is a pervasive criminal subculture and toxic masculinity, individuals in the open estate were drawn together by a shared common fate and a desire to reintegrate into the outside world. Those who had a real sense of belonging within the criminal subculture within the closed estate then may have found it more difficult to adapt to the open establishment, given the subculture in the open estate appeared to be based upon determination towards a pro-social lifestyle.

Subtheme 1.2: Expansion of peer support

Although membership to the community was in some ways exclusive, participants did discuss their attempts to include anti-social residents. In doing so, they automatically occupied roles as 'wounded healers' or 'professional ex's' (White, 2000, p. 1; Brown, 1991, p. 219) where an offender who is more advanced in their journey towards rehabilitation supports those further behind. This role gave residents a sense of purpose and meaning, permitting them to reap the benefits associated with being a peer support mentor (Perrin & Blagden, 2014; Edgar et al., 2011):

Mo (lines 202-204)

> I love helping, because I think it's rewarding. If you've got a skill that can help somebody else, then use that skill. We're all here in one boat aren't we. We're here to help each other.

Mo refers to the personal rewards he gains through altruistic behaviour, thought to increase sensations of purpose, accomplishment and self-esteem (Reissman, 1965). The community provided a forum in which residents could occupy help-giving roles – these are considered to have preventative qualities against reoffending as they encourage the construction and enactment of a pro-social identity (LeBel, 2007; Burnett & Maruna, 2006; Maruna, 2001). Being all 'in one boat' insinuates that those onboard are heading in the same direction and are likely to face the same challenges ahead. For a smoother journey, residents were encouraged to rely on each other's skills and attributes. Those who declined to board 'the boat' were effectively demonstrating a lack of interest in moving towards a pro-social future; others were prohibited to board through fear they would rock the stability of the boat. Although not everyone was welcome on board, residents did illuminate to occasions where they had attempted to give anti-social others a chance to access the community by encouraging them to change their behaviour:

Jerry (lines 208-222)

>I bang up [share a cell] with a 21-year-old kid, and I have to break him into certain ways, to get him, mature and understand, coming out of that juvenile way. When I breaking it into him, he's like – ahh I never knew that or I get what you're saying. So, you have to teach them. [...] Everyone needs help. And help don't cost nothing. So, if I can help him, in his D Cat and to be getting out and getting a job, of course, it's just rewarding that to be seen that you are sorting that.

Through this nurturing role, Jerry utilises his criminal past as a source of wisdom to motivate the younger resident to alter his criminal trajectory. Where prisoners are able to form a coherent desistance narrative that restructures their criminal past into a new and reformed self, it is thought to promote longer lasting change as it helps them to

create a 'socially acceptable image' and psychologically prepare for release (Giordano, Cernkovich & Rudolph, 2002; Maruna, 2001). Jerry alludes to 'break[ing] him into certain ways', suggesting that the process of fragmenting his cellmate's' identity is quite a brutal one, but necessary to restructure the parts into a more sustainable and adaptive version of himself.

This leverage to 'break him' is only available because the subject is receptive to Jerry's advice. Motivation to conform to group norms is most powerful when an individual perceives themselves to be similar to those within the group (Turner & Hoggs, 1987). Fellow residents from the community are likely to be appropriate role models in facilitating change – having 'been there too' – which is reported to be integral to success within self-help groups (Humphreys, 2004, p. 15). Jerry notes that helping others 'cost[s] nothing' yet generates positive effects for himself and his cellmate. Through these reciprocal relations, residents were subject to the 'hidden wealth of society', where individuals are motivated not by financial goods but by their desire to help each other, share resources and demonstrate consideration and respect (Halpern, 2010, p. 54):

Joe (lines 375-382)

> He had a bad cannabis problem and all sorts, you know, he didn't touch anything with me. Because I said to him if you come to me, with red eyes in the morning, I will kick you off the job, because I don't work with people like that. And he came to work, absolutely fantastic. He was like my son again, it was fantastic. And there's other lads here, who can get a sense of that and to help other people […] to just say, come with us, you don't have to go to the Officers. Sometimes, lads sort things out themselves, and they can say, don't get involved in all that shit.

Joe revels in the satisfaction this role gives him as he is able to re-connect with his role as a father. Upon entering a total institution, a person is stripped of their normal identities, emasculating the individual and attacking their sense of self-worth (Goffman, 1961; Jewkes, 2005). Through this role, Joe was able to resurrect a positive fragment of his identity and incorporate it into his current sense of self. He re-aligns his past self with his current self, giving him continuity of identity that is linked to higher levels of wellbeing (Haslam, Jetten & Alexander, 2012). Such roles may also contribute to a diluted version of masculinity within the establishment. Jewkes (2005) asserts that roles which enable prisoners to assert their masculinity in positive ways makes them less inclined to uphold a 'hard man' stance (p. 56). The receiver of help appears to benefit from these relationships as, through guidance of other residents, they are offered more concrete boundaries in an otherwise 'boundless' environment (Shammas, 2014, p. 111). This can be observed in Joe's transcript, as he establishes clear boundaries to his colleague and threatens to 'kick' him off the job if he oversteps them. Through greater flexibility, the open establishment generates innovative opportunities for peer support, which could serve to enhance the associated transformative benefits (Perrin & Blagden, 2014). Roles which encourage a sense of agency ultimately allow residents to reconnect with positive aspects of their identities, which is likely to have a positive effect on the overall transformation process.

Superordinate theme 2: Coping with invisible boundaries.

The majority of participants described how arriving at an open prison felt overwhelming, as reduced physical security meant the onus was on residents to resist temptation. This created a sense of panic and unease, as the coping mechanisms they

had devised to survive the rigours of imprisonment were now redundant. Residents were required to develop new coping mechanisms to enable them to remain within the invisible boundaries.

Subtheme 2.1: Social distance from anti-social others.

Participants often spoke about residents who they actively distanced themselves from due to their willing association with illicit trade. There was a careful balancing act where participants sought to get on with such residents at face value but were sure to keep themselves at a comfortable distance through fear of contamination:

Josh (line 305-310)

> You do have, the odd ones that are dicks. You have the odd ones that are like that. But you just separate from them. You don't, need to chat to them. Separate yourself, and if they're gonna be like that, they find their own way. More than likely, they're gonna get kicked out. So, you just let them deal with that. Stop to yourself, get your head down.

The way that Josh disconnects himself from others who choose to pursue a criminal trajectory is clear in this extract. He is focussed on his own path towards desistance and is not willing to stray for anyone who isn't on the same journey as him. Residents who did not appear to want to help themselves were left to fend single-handedly. Participants were often very blunt in this respect, reflected in Josh's conviction to dissociate from such residents. The strategy employed here is consistent with the concept of 'knifing off' in desistance theory, which is when an individual reaches a 'structurally induced turning point' and choose to sever themselves from their past criminal identity (Laub & Sampson, 2003, p. 149). This can be achieved by distancing the self from aspects of

their lives which signify risk factors to their criminal selves, such as harmful environments or undesirable companions (Maruna & Roy, 2007). An open establishment may mark a structurally induced turning point for identity transformation, as individuals enter a new social milieu where they are unknown to many and have no pressure to maintain a consistent identity (Baumeister, 1994). The initial step to identity transformation is the 'ritual wiping out of self', followed by the 'construction of a new one' (Kirn, 2002, p. 28-29). Josh appears to be at the initial step of this process, as he abruptly disconnects from criminal others and attempts to achieve a blank slate on which he can construct a new identity. How personal transformation occurs is contested in literature: some suggest it is more of a 'drip-by-drip' process rather than a distinct 'knifing off' (Perrin & Blagden, 2014, p. 902). In this particular context, residents appear to foster an abrupt process of severing off undesirable associates:

Ray (lines 356-362)

> If you don't build that wall around you, then people will prey on you – have you got this, can you do this, can you do that, and before you know it, you're in neck deep. Whereas, you've got to build your bridges as you start, and say to them, look, this is my route, don't cross it, I'm not living like this, I don't do that. You have to set your stall out.

Ray highlights the importance of asserting himself in order to keep anti-social others away from his personal space. He sharply establishes his boundaries to prevent unwanted others becoming a hindrance to his personal transformation, thus keeping his own psychological space sterile and allowing him to construct his new sense of identity. The suggestion that others 'prey' on residents suggests that individuals aren't safe from exploitation until they have sufficiently marked their territory. If one does not

sufficiently warn others off in the early stages of their arrival then their position may be irreversibly compromised, as one is then in 'neck deep'. This suggests some level of masculine toxicity is imported into the open establishment, as he describes some features of prisoner subculture described within closed estates (Meško & Hacin, 2018). Honeywell (2015) highlights how within open establishments residents increasingly interact with the outside world, which enables new identities to emerge. Grasping onto the new identities can be difficult when inside prison due to the conflicting need to immerse into prison culture. To manage this conflict, participants appeared to cut themselves off from anyone who wouldn't fit in with their new identity:

Ben (lines 219-222)

> When I came here, and I was on eleven pounds a week, and I thought, how am I gonna phone home every day? I did [consider getting a phone] because it was the norm here. Because everybody has one. But I thought, get away from that circle, get away from those people, because I don't need it.

Ben describes the split-second decision he made to cut off from a circle of friends, halting his temptation to become involved in the illicit trade. This highlights the perils of temptation should residents not sever themselves from anti-social others. Such temptation made it harder for residents to resist impulses that they knew were self-destructive. Maruna and Roy (2007) assert that in the early stages of change, it is particularly important for prisoners to disconnect from their criminal risk factors as this allows them to establish and strengthen a new pro-social identity. Until this new identity is concrete, it is difficult for individuals to come into contact with previous risk factors, as they haven't yet formulated how their criminal pasts fit in with their new identity. Being in a liminal state between prison and release, residents in an open establishment

may be at the early stages of their transformation from prisoner to citizen. It appears important that residents who seek change choose to psychologically distance themselves from anti-social others, being unable to physically distance themselves.

Sub-theme 2.2 – 'Stepping on eggshells' - staff-prisoner relationships

Members of staff were regarded as having additional power in open conditions as the caveat to having greater privileges was that residents had more to lose. Consistent with previous research, participants saw their place in the establishment as fragile and easy to jeopardise (Danks & Bradley, 2018; Micklethwaite, 2020):

Jerry (lines 80-83)

I bited in reception. Because I came here thinking I'm in open D cat now – so less Officers, less answering for things. But I bited. I put my bags up and I said I will go back on the van now, because I'm not going to tolerate that I'm on eggshells, when there's a way of talking. He was just, being, very, job powerful, cus he can.

When Jerry was met with a harsh greeting on his arrival, he felt this violated his entitlement to be afforded with greater autonomy as he had expected. Being on 'eggshells' suggests that Jerry quickly recognised his need to tread carefully to avoid suffering, yet he felt he would rather return to closed conditions than live in a state of heightened anxiety. When individuals expect to have control but are denied this opportunity, they are more likely to react adversely to control limitations by manifesting aggressiveness toward those who restrict their freedom (Brehm, 1966). As residents expected to be afforded with more autonomy in open conditions, when members of staff restricted residents through their use of authority this elicited a strong emotional response. Jerry alludes to an animalistic gesture of 'bit[ing]' to demonstrate how he

reacted to the unexpected assertion of authority. Whilst reactance may involve costs to the individual, the person views themselves as retaining autonomy to reassert their lost freedom (Brehm, 1966). Residents felt some officers took advantage of their additional power afforded by the fragile environment:

Ash (lines 227-231)

> In a Cat[egory] C, or a Cat[egory] B, I've never seen Officers like that. Never. Just here. They know they've got the authority. They know they can. If they tell you, you have to do something, you know you have to do that. They haven't got nothing to lose. […] they've got that decision, where they can just ship me out at any point. You never know. And I've only got eight months left. So I might as well just sit, smile.

Gaining increased privileges within the open establishment was double-edged – the scope for punishment became greater the more residents had to lose, which heightened the sense of power held by officers. On the contrary, officers were seen as having 'nothing to lose' and so the divide between prisoners and staff grew, with problematic residents being easily removed (or 'shipped out'). Ash's frustration towards this is visible in his use of short sentences and his repetition of the word 'they', highlighting his cynical, 'us-them' attitude towards staff-prisoner relationships (Muir, 1977, p. 182). To remain in the open establishment, residents felt compelled to conceal any frustrations induced through these uncertain and ambiguous relationships, demonstrated in Ash's reference to his inauthentic smile. It was the 'never know[ing]' of how power would be enforced which evoked anxiety amongst residents. Discretion refers to prison officer's role personal judgement in deciding between disciplinary action or toleration of minor infringements in exchange for general goodwill (Sykes, 1958; Liebling, 2011). As this discretionary power yielded greater consequences in the open establishment,

residents were increasingly wary of staff which thus impacted relationships between the two groups. The consensus was that a select few officers took advantage of their additional power by asserting their authority belligerently. It was safer for residents to assume all Officers were not legitimate in their use of authority and exercise caution within these relations. Whilst this made residents feel frustrated and degraded, they passively concealed their emotions as this was thought to be the safest way to prevent further exploitation:

Alan (lines 286-292)

> I think, the longer you're here, you behave yourself and stuff. Because, what can happen, if you get in confrontations and things like that, they're gonna chuck an IEP at you, if you start arguing. No questions about it. […] So, don't argue, just accept theirs, and that's it, that's what you do.

Residents were increasingly vigilant for warnings, attempting to avoid them as they were carelessly 'chuck[ed]' around. This may highlight that whilst prisoners were acutely aware of the power dynamic, officers themselves were less so and failed to understand its impact on the daily lives of prisoners. Survival in an open prison was seen to require a passive, robotic approach to staff-prisoner relationships. This tactic made residents feel better able to avoid an IEP (Incentives and Earned Privileges) warning, so reducing the potential threat to privileges (Bottoms, 2003). The 'longer' residents were in the open prison, the stronger their ties were with the outside community (e.g. familial and employment) and so the greater consequences these IEP warnings had. No longer did they threaten access to in-cell television or time out of cells for association, such as they would have in closed conditions (Liebling, 2008) – instead they potentially jeopardised the futures that residents were in the process of

building. Crewe (2011) refers to the 'soft' power that staff members have through their use of discretion in filing misconduct reports on prisoners and making notes on their records (p. 445). This power can hinder the development of close relationships between prisoners and staff as it is a source of psychological threat to prisoners (Crewe, 2011). In the open establishment, this 'soft' power becomes increasingly intimidating due to a greater potential for destruction:

Jack (lines 256-264)

I said to her, every time I do something you're just moving the goal posts. If you're not going to let me out, just tell me. She's just making it impossible for me, basically. As much as its hurting me, there's not much I can do really. I can stand and scream, I can shout and I can fall out with them, but where's it gonna get me? I don't want to be making a rod for my own back, do you know what I mean. It's just, I've suffered it really.

Jack is defeated and feels his attempts to make progress are futile in an environment where the rules and expectations are constantly changing. The intensity of his pain is described using language typically associated with physical torture, highlighting the torment caused by the removal of privilege without clear reason or prior warning. Jack uses quite brutal imagery, suggesting that only by withdrawing from the situation and not 'making a rod for [his] own back' can he prevent future pain and abuse from the system. Learnt helplessness is when an individual learns to react passively to an event, believing that their attempts to control the situation or predict the outcome are futile (Seligman, 1975). Such reactions are typical amongst prisoners, who reside in an environment where personal control is severely limited (Goodstein, MacKenzie & Shotland, 1984). Learnt helplessness is a typical feature of institutionalisation (Sykes,

1958; Clemmer, 1940), as prisoners can gain more psychological comfort in withdrawing from the system, rather than chasing 'carrots' that may not be obtained (Crewe, 2012, p.108). Whilst this style of coping may be conducive to a smoothly operating prison regime, it is thought to be ineffective to successful prison reintegration (Seligman, 1975; Pugh, 1993). Individuals who rely on this coping style are more likely to experience emotional difficulties upon release and are more likely to become defeated by challenges rather than persist in overcoming them (Goodstein, MacKenzie & Shotland, 1984).

General Discussion

Using a phenomenological approach, this research aimed to generate a richer understanding of prisoner experience within open prison conditions. Taking into account findings from previous research, this study was intended to shine a light on the broader impacts of the perceived fragility of daily life within an open establishment, and how residents have successfully overcome barriers to their resettlement whilst still residing in a prison setting.

A sense of community flourished as prisoners relied on support from their peers to navigate their way through the nuanced challenges presented to them within open conditions. A sense of common fate encouraged strong connections to form between residents, who demonstrated a newfound ease in exchanging practical and emotional support. This sense of community in turn allowed opportunities to surface, enabling residents to become unofficial peer mentors and to experience the transformative benefits associated with these roles (Perrin & Blagden, 2014). Through roles which encouraged active citizenship, residents were able to rework their criminal pasts into a source of wisdom and form a coherent life story, associated with longer lasting change

(Maruna, 2007; Maruna & Roy, 2007). Further development of innovative roles which encourage active citizenship is likely to support residents in their transformation from prisoner to citizen. The open establishment appeared to capture individuals as they were in liminal states; 'no longer belong[ing] to their old world, or to their new one' (Moran, 2013, p. 10). Straddling the boundary between prisoner and citizen, residents had the opportunity to construct and enact a desirable identity – both of which form crucial components of the desistance process (Perrin & Blagden, 2016). Part of the transformative process for those who desired change appeared to be an active dissociation from anti-social residents for fear of contamination. This distance allowed them to compress their own temptations and provided space to construct a new, pro-social identity in preparation for release.

Findings that highlight a sense of community suggest that the masculine culture observed within closed prisons (Jewkes, 2005; De Vigiani, 2012; Sim, 1994) may be somewhat diluted within open establishments. This supports previous research suggesting that greater freedom within open establishments provided more space for 'emotion zones' (Danks & Bradley, 2018, p. 13). Whether the culture of masculinity is indeed diluted in open establishments and the impact this has on the mental wellbeing of residents requires further exploration. Future research should also seek to understand the broader impacts of informal peer support on residents, to ensure any risks associated with such roles are mitigated (Howard League for Penal Reform, 2017). This research suggested that only some aspects of the prisoner subculture were transported into the open estate. This is consistent with previous research, which highlights the subculture within open establishments is usually less intensive than that in closed establishments (Meško & Hacin, 2018). What united residents in the current study were their motivations to live pro-socially and re-integrate into the community. It could be

hypothesised from the research that those who were more immersed into the prisoner subculture within a closed prison, characterised by a lack of cooperation with prison staff and rule breaking, find it more difficult to immerse into the prison subculture within an open prison, where the pre-dominant subculture is a desire to reintegrate successfully into the community. This could be an avenue of further study.

Residing within a fragile environment coupled with the ambiguities afforded by the use of discretion amongst prison staff was a debilitating combination. Boundaries were seen as moving 'goal posts' and residents were unclear of what behaviour might jeopardise their place and privileges. The way power was applied was perceived as unfair and arbitrary, thus contributing to the 'problem of order' (Bosworth, 1996; Reisig & Meško, 2009). The more residents built their ties with the community, the more threatening it became to reside in an environment where they were ultimately answerable to authority. This is consistent with the social control theory of crime, which suggests that the more bonds individuals have with society; the more they are deterred from offending through having more to lose (Laub & Sampson, 2001; Hirschi, 1969). To minimise the anxiety provoked through ambiguous staff-prisoner relationships, participants policed their interactions excessively. Whilst residents acknowledged only the minority of staff members we belligerent in their use of authority, this had a large impact on their perceived legitimacy of the institution as they voiced little faith that rules would be applied fairly and consistently. Neumann (2012) suggests the contradiction between being in an environment that promises more freedom yet being accountable to authority causes a greater 'imprisonment of the soul' than those who reside in high security establishments (p. 139). Staff members should be aware of residents increased sensitivities towards authority and strive to impose it in manner that is subtle and transparent. Such communication styles are thought to alleviate the

distance between staff-prisoner relationships by allowing trust to develop (Liebling, 2011). Open establishments should strive to offer residents autonomy wherever possible, to ensure they are supporting individuals to reverse the impacts of institutionalisation (Sykes, 1958; Clemmer, 1940).

More attention needs to be paid to the ways in which power is exerted over residents in open establishments, along with the impact this has on staff-prisoner relationships. Future research should also aim to illuminate staff perceptions of this issue. Whilst Danks and Bradley (2018) do explore the views of staff within their research, they do not account for the inconsistency present between those and the views of prisoners. Staff reported that the open prison environment was healthy for staff-prisoner relationships, whereas prisoners testified their reluctance to seek support for mental health difficulties. When research is conducted on both prisoners and staff, it can be somewhat paradoxical (e.g. Crewe, Liebing & Hully, 2011; Wakeling, Webster & Mann, 2005). Findings from such research are likely to further illuminate the deprivations that exist in seemingly 'soft' forms of imprisonment, which are likely to be 'occluded from view, unusual and counter-intuitive' (Shammas, 2014, p. 119). The portrayal of staff-prisoner relationships captured by this report presents prisoners general approach to such relationships. Participants did acknowledge some relationships they had formed which appeared to be rehabilitative and supportive.

Further research may seek to understand staff members views in the application of authority in an open establishment and some of the challenges surrounding this. Research could consider how confident staff are in their roles, their sense of self-legitimacy and how they apply the power and rules they uphold specifically within the open estate. Since individuals are more likely to break rules when authority is not perceived as legitimate (Reisig & Meško, 2009) understanding

how authority is applied within the open estate and getting this balance right could have traction in reducing abscond rates and rule violations.

Limitations

This study focused on an idiographic level of analysis, making findings difficult to generalise (Guest, Bunce & Johnson, 2006). Whilst the links to the literature throughout the discussion bolster the credibility of the findings, further research on a wider scale would be beneficial to explore whether the themes discovered in this study are applicable to other open establishments. Samples of residents from open establishments are unlikely to be representative of those who enter the Criminal Justice System, given that a considerable amount of social filtration occurs prior to individuals being deemed suitable for such conditions (Shammas, 2015). Researchers should be mindful of this when considering the impact open establishments have on successful reintegration or reduced recidivism.

This research is limited in that it does not account for the differences in experiences which may be accredited to factors such as sentence type, religion, age or ethnicity. For example, experiences of open conditions for prisoners completing life sentences and without a concrete release date are likely to differ from those who are completing relatively short sentences and know their date of release (Honeywell, 2015). Adjustments developed by prisoners on life sentences to cope with imprisonment are likely to be more entrenched (Cohen & Taylor, 1981), thus they may experience nuanced difficulties within the open establishment. For those who have been in the system a long time and who arrive at an open prison, it should be recognised that 'this new freedom throws them off the track' (Meško & Hacin, 2018, p.341). Further

research should seek to explain how the 'pains of freedom' may differ amongst various populations.

This research only provides a snapshot of residents at one point in time thus it does not guarantee that participants did indeed go on to successfully reintegrate. Longitudinal research following residents after release from an open prison may shed further light on how such establishments support effective reintegration.

Conclusion

This study highlighted the challenges of being in an open prison, with less structure, fewer rules and, consequently, greater 'pains of freedom'. These pains of freedom underpinned challenges prisoners (and staff) had to adapting to a more flexible and less restrictive framework. For staff, this is how to maintain control whilst reducing control: for prisoners, how to sit with the cage door open, while not flying away.

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