

The Contradictions of Prisoner Life and Rehabilitation: An Auto-ethnographic Life Sentence Experience

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ABSTRACT

With the current Conservative government employing, once again, punitive tough on crime, tough on sentencing rhetoric, the U.K. criminal justice system may well be embarking on another voyage into ineffective attempts at crime prevention and prisoner rehabilitation. Since 2008, I have been a life sentenced prisoner. This reflective auto-ethnographic study draws on lived experience, informal observations, and personal communications to help unpack some of the many factors that play a role in prisoner rehabilitation and its continued failure. A core part of this study is the role of masculinity within the prisoner experience. Within the prisoner experience is the continued impact of powerlessness, disenfranchisement, and social exclusion that operates to reinforce negative masculine pressures. There is a need for radical change in the way prisons are conceptualized in media and political spheres. Prisons may be part of a solution to social problems, but not in their enduring vogue.

INTRODUCTION

Despite an enduring and media focus on sensationalist crimes and extreme criminal figures, the lives and experiences of the prisoners remain largely hidden. The social construction of certain crimes leads to what Stanley Cohen (1980) historically labelled as a ‘moral panic’. Examples include Cohen’s (1971) original research on the Mods and Rockers at Brighton beach in the 1950s and, more recently, the public outrage and political response around the release of John Warboys, an individual who had committed a series of rapes against women. The construction and dissemination of such examples not only creates public fear, but also does very little to make visible the deleterious dimensions of the prisoner experience. This is important because prisons do not and have never satisfied the mandate of crime reduction. Indeed, prisons are spaces that produce and perpetuate significant harms. Whether as result of prisoner’s subsequent future crimes or the personal damage accumulated throughout a sentence, these harms inevitably find their way into mainstream society.

Despite endless political ‘tough on crime’ rhetoric such as the historical war on drugs in the U.S, the introduction of indeterminate public protection sentencing and policy around meting out 25-year minimum tariffs for knife crime orientated murder in the U.K., prisons continue the trend of rehabilitative failure. This alone justifies continued research into the mechanisms of this failure. This critical focuses on specific prisoner sociological phenomena and lived experience, arguing therein are inherent contradictions that militate against successful rehabilitative outcomes. Masculinities, specifically toxic masculinities, are a pervasive theme throughout prison sociology and prisoner experience (De Viggiani, 2012; Jewkes, 2005). Research has explored the dynamics of prison phenomena and masculine prisoner identity. Michalski’s (2015) theory of prison violence does this well. The qualities of toxic prison masculinities are difficult to reconcile with the ideas of prisoners going on to lead pro-social crime free lives. Nonetheless the prisons rehabilitative machine impacts significantly on the prisoners therein (Crewe, 2009). In the 1990s, the mode of prison rehabilitation underwent significant change through the establishment of prison based cognitive behavioural interventions (Maguire, 1995), along with the application of the Risk, Need and Responsibility model (RnR) (Andrews et al., 2011) to the management of prisoners. The contradiction appears, here, to be that despite research showing the RnR model impacting significantly on the prevention of crime and offending (Mcguire, 1995; Andrews et al., 2011), prison populations and recidivism continue at high levels. In this paper, the author’s lived experience is operationalized through autoethnographic methodology to explore and make visible the incongruence, showing the tensions between prisoner phenomenology, prison process, and prison rehabilitation.

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Sykes (1958) classic deprivation model provided an early apparatus for explaining the production and reification of prison culture and prisoner identities. The nuts and bolts of this model contends that the pains experienced as consequence of incarceration and the inflicted deprivations therein moderate over prisoner behaviour and adaptations, manifesting prison culture. An alternate but also classic approach to understanding prison life is the importation model (Irwin & Cressey, 1962). This model argues that prisoners import facets of their pre-prison identities into the prison

upon incarceration. When exposed to the qualities of the prison experience these dynamics moderate to produce prisoner identity and prison culture. Both models have explanatory power and, as Michalski (2015, p. 3) states, “elements of deprivation importation and situational effects influence the behaviours of inmates generally and prison violence in particular”. When considered together these models can be understood as an integration model of prison culture and prisoner identity.

Goffman (1959) considered that identity, or self, represents a dynamic akin to that of a theatrical performance. This being comprised of front stage performances of socially congruent and purposeful behaviour, and backstage performances whereby the more personal, emotional, and private parts of the self can be expressed in a safer setting. A powerful moderator of the front stage presentation of self is that of fronting or the front. This is the way in which people, in this case prisoners, select and construct appropriate available fronts as modes of self-presentation and preservation in given social dynamics. The concept of fronting in prison culture is well established in the literature (Crewe, 2009; de Viggiani, 2012, Jewkes, 2005). “Wearing a mask” is arguably the most common strategy for coping with the rigours of imprisonment, and all prison researchers will be familiar with the sentiment that prisoners feel it necessary to adopt a facade while inside” (Jewkes, 2005, p. 55). In prisons, and indeed in wider society, such performances hold a pervasive masculine quality. de Viggiani (2012, p. 3) writes that “prisons are essentially microcosms of wider society where individuals perform their gender within the “rules” of the social group”. The quality of this gender prison performance is described as intermale dominance and subordination, where relationships are constructed around the performance and reproduction of multiple masculinities (ibid). Such masculine prison culture can be understood as instrumental in phenomena of cultural conformity, social hierarchies and status, emotional concealment, and institutional reinforcement (Crewe, 2009; de Viggiani, 2012; Jewkes, 2005; Bandyopadhyay, 2016; Newton, 1994). These prisoner identities, performances and culture are symbolic of what is known as the prisoner code. “While actual levels of adherence to the code appeared to differ between groups of prisoners and between prisons, there was a consistent finding among studies in men’s prisons of a professed code with similar elements” (Newton, 1994, p. 195).

As Crewe (2009) demonstrates in an ethnography at HMP Winchester, this prisoner code is an enduring and pervasive dynamic in the prisoner

experience. This is not a code one necessarily reserves the control to get in or out of. To a greater or lesser degree, the prisoner will be impacted by and must negotiate this masculine code. Masculine or gendered codes and norms are visible throughout society. The armed forces, the police, and the building site are all spaces that include such themes. It is important to note that it is not a sex difference but a quality of socially constructed phenomena (Messerschmidt, 1986). There is now a wide base of literature around masculinities and a full review of this field is beyond the scope of this article. Of relevance, however, are the understandings that masculinities are an entrenched part of social and psychic landscapes, which are entangled with experiences and expressions of power and control, and that many of the manifestations there-of can be considered toxic or harmful hegemonies (see Connell & Messerschmidt, 1993; Messerschmidt, 1986; Newburn & Stanko, 1994; Remy, 1990).

Within the prison it is the toxic and harmful aspects of masculine hegemony that tend to become inflated and evermore powerful. Michalski's (2015) theory of prison violence makes the mechanics of this clear. Michalski's (2015) utilizes the resource structuralism paradigm to explain how prisoners face an environment of resource poverty regarding their access to identity resources. He notes, "[v]irtually every aspect of the prisoner experience threatens inmates' masculinity and strips away the various layers of their gendered identities that might include self-sufficiency, autonomy, heterosexual relations and fatherhood" (ibid, p. 1). In an environment that has such a deleterious ontological impact, Michalski argues that prisoners place a greater emphasis on those resources that are available. These are identity resources, of a symbolic quality, such a social status, honour, and respect. Many of these concepts can be understood as examples of how hegemony and the prisoner code are enacted. "Within male prison systems almost anywhere in the world, the evidence indicates that the key symbolic resource underlying the inmate status hierarchies involves various displays or evidence of masculinity" (ibid, p. 5).

A major and effective vehicle for the acquisition of these symbolic resources is violence congruent with the prevailing toxic hegemony on the prisoner code. "In effect, inmates earn respect mainly by using violence as a form of moralism to express grievances, settle disputes and protect themselves" (ibid, p. 6). There are of course, other practices that are employed that influence the acquisition of symbolic capital. de Viggiani (2012) cites social phenomena such as banter, one-upmanship and the use

of exercise and sport. Importantly, however, is the recognition that the use of these practices and resources are mechanisms for the reproduction and reinforcement of toxic hegemonic prison culture. It is well documented that the prison machine plays a significant role in the causes and continuation of these harms, in the ways in which prisoners adapt to survive prison (Newton, 1994; Jewkes, 2005). Indeed, to this end de Viggiani (2012, p. 4) writes, "Prison authorities can, moreover, reinforce a hegemonic social system through measures to control behaviour and instil order and discipline. In this regard prisons may not recognise their culpability in reinforcing exploitation and social inequality". What this brief and limited exploration of prison sociological literature lays bare is the longstanding knowledge that prisoner experience includes aspects that are both malignant and damaging.

Despite the entrenched prison hegemony, the prison institution is charged with the role of rehabilitating its residents as part of its responsibility towards reducing crime, recidivism and protecting the public. Already, then, a contradiction begins to emerge in the prison mandate of both punishing and rehabilitating. The notion of rehabilitation in prisons is not new and the role of psychology is an enduring of prisons on prisoner experience. The modes and instruments of the prison rehabilitative and psychological movement have undergone significant change and development over the past hundred or so years. Given the injuring size, breadth, and significance of the prison institution in the western world, advocates and actors within prison rehabilitative and psychological roles face a huge challenge and carry a significant responsibility. The prison is nothing if not far reaching, made clear by Bierie and Mann's (2017) citation of the world prison population figures that in 2015 the U.K. saw 86,000 people incarcerated. Bierie and Mann (2017) go on to present an encouraging account of the beneficial contributions from psychology two improvements around prison function and outcomes, stating "it would be hard to find a prison in the western world without at least one psychologist dedicated to applying their training to the operation of the prison" (ibid, p. 480). This account explores ethical prison practice, treatment over warehousing prisoners, and understanding relationship dynamics within the prison. Reference is made to the finest Stanford Prison Experiment (Zimbardo, 1972), which "revealed, powerfully, that prisoners and guards were not so very different from each other (or the rest of us)" (Bierie & Mann, 2017, p. 481).

Since the 18th century psychological thought has provided ever evolving lenses through which to understand prisoners and their criminal aetiologies.

Cesare Lombroso (1876) pioneered a movement known as Biologism. This was developed around the idea that criminals were identifiable through specific biological differences, such as beady eyes or the shape of one's head, which differentiated them from the normal civilised non-criminal. Such notions have been long dispelled but, historically, represented cutting edge scientific and anthropological ideology. Subsequent paradigm shift in psycho-criminological thought include the study of body type, Somatotype's, (Sheldon, 1949), Neurological explanations (Hill & Pond, 1952), Psychodynamic models (Bowlby, 1951; Freud, 1953), conditioning and operant models (Skinner, 1938, 1965), social theories (Nietzel, 1979), and cognitive behavioural theories (Ross & Fabiano, 1985). There is not, nor is there likely to be anytime soon, a silver bullet approach toward criminal aetiology or prison rehabilitation. The cognitive-behavioural approach, however, has fast become the preferred model since its emergence in prisons in the 1990s.

The cognitive-behavioural shift can be understood as a response to the prevailing dogma that 'nothing works' in prison rehabilitation and corrections (Mcguire, 1995). This enabled advocates to attribute the political attractive label of evidence-led scientific interventions. This is the very well-known what works (Mcguire, 1995) movement in prison to rehabilitation and corrections. Cognitive behaviouralism is a synthesis of cognitive and behavioural psychologies (Mcguire, 1995; Palmer, 2009; Ross & Fabiano, 1985). Cognitive behavioural interventions can therefore include a wide range of psychosocial behavioural skills and devices. For example, social skills training (Priestley et al., 1984), emotional management skills (Mcdougall et al., 1987), and moral reasoning skills (RosenKoeter et al., 1986). Evidence led cognitive behavioural interventions have yielded consistently impressive findings in comparison to other rehabilitative and correctional interventions.

A standard evaluative research tool is that a meta-analysis, which involves the aggregation and side by side analysis of large numbers of experimental studies (Mcguire, 1995, pp. 7-8). In his early meta-analysis of the 'what works' literature Mcguire (1995, p. 18) found that cognitive behavioural multimodal programmes "afforded one of the strongest prospects of systematic reduction of reoffending rates". Findings from Redondo and colleagues (1999) support this finding within their meta-analytic finding that cognitive behavioural interventions were the most effective tool available "causing a 23% reduction in recidivism on average" (Joy Tong & Farrington, 2006, p. 4). Pearson and colleagues (2002) also undertook meta-analysis of rehabilitative and correctional inventions, concluding favourably on the

efficacy of cognitive behaviouralism. Similarly, Joy Tong and Farrington (2006) conducted a meta-analysis into the effectiveness of the Reasoning and Rehabilitation programme. The reasoning and rehabilitation programme is a cognitive behavioural intervention. They state, “[a] meta-analysis showed that, overall, there was a significant 14% decrease in recidivism for programme participants compared with controls. This programme was effective in Canada, the USA and the UK. It was effective in community and institutional settings, and for low risk and high-risk offender” (ibid, p. 3). Of particular relevance in their study is their finding that, “[i]n community settings, there was a 27% increase in recidivism for controls compared to programme participants, or conversely a 21% decrease in recidivism for programme participants compared to controls” (ibid, p. 18). They further noted that, “[i]n institutional settings, there was a 16% increase in recidivism for controls compared to programme participants, or conversely a 14% decrease in recidivism for programme participants compared to controls. Both effect sizes were statistically significant. The effect size in community settings was not significantly greater than the effect size in institutional settings” (ibid).

Joy Tong and Farrington present this positively in relation to prior research showing community intervention being more successful. I explained this as a potential moderator effect of the prison and associated restrictions placed on prisoners. The variable of ‘volunteering’ to participate is also used as a factor as “most evaluations conducted in institutional settings had voluntary participants, while participants in many of the community evaluations had been compulsorily assigned to the R+R programme as part of a probation or parole order” (ibid, p. 20).

There is, curiously, no reference or consideration given to the moderator of prison culture and hegemony over this finding. This is certainly an interesting idea, the empirical testing of the inverse relationship between inflated hegemony and reduced intervention efficacy within the prison setting. The significance of prisoners volunteering to participate in programmes is also potentially ambiguous. Crewe (2009) provides an excellent critique of the power imbalance prisoners face in this regard. Here, Crewe explains how programmes are inextricably linked to risk assessment devices that are instrumental in prisoner sentence progression and are therefore ensnared in a coercive process of satisfying risk based rehabilitative targets. From his perspective, then, the validity of the volunteer variable needs to be weighed against its coercive context.

McNeill (2006) attends to the issue of coercion in relation to the dynamics of probation offender oversight. He notes:

Overconfidence in the prospects for affecting change through treatment had permitted its advocates both to coerce offenders into interventions (because the treatment provider was an expert who knew best) and to ignore offenders views of their own situations (because offenders were victims of their own lack of insight). Perhaps most insidiously of all, within this ideology coerced treatment could be justified in offenders own best interests (McNeill, 2006, p.41).

Ergo the volunteer variable that Joy Tong and Farrington (2006) operationalize in their conclusion may actually be something altogether different. McNeill (2006, p. 42) provides an interpretation as “the offenders constrained consent”. This also raises critical arguments around the epistemological assumptions implicit in the meta-analytical method. As Maguire (1995, p. 9) states:

Perhaps the most telling observation is that, like many average figures, the mean effect size conceals wide variations. This there are studies in which much larger reductions in re-offence rates were obtained, and others in which recidivism rates actually worsened. Amidst this variation some clear trends can be detected concerning the ingredients of programmes with higher or lower kinds of effectiveness in reducing re-offending.

Despite the robustness of these empirical measures there is also a lot of information that is missed. The quality or robustness of the data that is fed into the meta-analytic device is also open to criticism. As Joy Tong and Farrington (2006, p. 21) acknowledge, “[a] shortcoming of the meta-analytic technique is that studies of different methodological quality might be given equal weight (Lipsey & Wilson, 2001). Some of the older and smaller-scale studies were methodologically weak, but they had low weightings in the meta-analysis because of their low sample size. One could arguably, then, interpret this method as a looking glass but from a distance. There is thus much that is missed and the reductionism therein does little to illuminate the dynamics of the ‘how’ or epistemology underneath the reported trends. There are, as Joy Tong and Farrington (2006) offer, techniques for reducing such problems, but

there is clearly much more to be learnt than can be gleaned from the numbers alone. Also, the numbers should not be accepted as absolute.

There is another aspect of cognitive-behaviouralism that is also embedded in positivist scientific ideologies. The application of prison rehabilitation and corrections cannot be understood without reference to risk and ‘what works’ ideologies and technologies. Whereas cognitive behaviouralism represents a specific mode of interventions, the ‘risk’ dimensions of this movement do not. “When practitioners say they are doing ‘what works’, they usually mean that they are drawing on Risk Need Responsivity (RNR) principles or related products” (Maruna & Mann, 2019, p. 7). Within the prison system, the allocation of cognitive-behavioural resources are directed by assessment made with RNR technologies that are “[c]entral to informing programme selection decisions is the application of assessment tools which have been underpinned by the risk, need and responsivity principles” (Ramsey et al., 2019, p. 264).

Andrews colleagues (2011, p. 735) assert that the RNR model underlies some of the most widely used risk-needs offender assessment instruments, and is the only theoretical model that has been used to interpret the ‘offender’ treatment literature. They adopt a General Personality and Cognitive Social Learning (GPCSL) model underpinning their defence and advocacy of the RNR model. They also make clear the epistemological strengths therein and the positive impact its focus on criminogenic need has shown on recidivism and reoffending. Indeed, the aforementioned meta-analytic studies suggest as much. Strict robust empiricism informs this model, with consistently favourable findings enabling the position of centre stage in the ‘what works’ camp. The scientific validity of the RNR model is well established and need not to be exhaustively repeated here. There are, however, elements of this model, and its relationship with prison functions and prisoner experience, that are significant.

The RNR model has been criticized on grounds of being reductionist (Ward & Marshall, 2007; Ward et al., 2007; Ward & Brown, 2004). Indeed Andrews and colleagues (2011) respond to these, as well as the criticism around the neglect of attention to ‘offender’ motivation and agency, well enough with their GPCSL model advocacy. Significantly, however, they make clear that alongside the risk, need and responsivity instruments employed by professionals there are other practices and considerations that should be present (see *Table 1*).

Andrews and colleagues (2011, p. 743) also vehemently rebut criticisms that the RNR does not adequately encompass ‘offender’ motivation and agency, noting that motivational issues are endemic to working with this population and is a primary aspect of specific responsivity within the model. A theme that is emphasized to be a fundamental importance in the rehabilitative or correction process is that of a healthy working alliance that engenders trust a mutuality (Andrews et al., 2011; Maruna, 2012; Mcneill, 2006). Andrews and colleagues (2011, p. 746) note:

The importance of the therapeutic alliance in correctional supervision is highlighted by our efforts to systematically train probation officers in establishing collaborative goals and establishing quality interpersonal relationships with their clients. The Strategic Training Initiative in Community Supervision project involves training probation officers in active listening skills, developing common goals with their clients, and providing non-judgmental feedback.

Table 1: The Expanded Risk-Need-Responsivity (RNR) Model

Principles	Statement
Respect for the person	Services are provided in an ethical, legal, just, moral, humane, and decent manner
Relationship skills	Relationship skills include warmth, respect, and being collaborative.

* Adapted from Andrews and colleagues, 2011, p.738).

Although writing from a distant paradigm, Maruna (2001) advocates a strength-based approach arguably congruent with Andrews and colleagues’ (2011) strategic training initiatives. In reality, however, there is an overt focus on recognizing a managing risk. The alliance a mutuality that Andrews and colleagues argue for does not manifest in the experience of many prisoners. Indeed, they state, “[w]e too, share a serious concern about the application of RNR based intervention without consideration for individual differences among offenders, even among those who may exist at the same level of risk and share the same need” (ibid, pp. 746-747). Criticism is levelled, here,

not at the validity of the RNR model but the ways in which practitioners interpret and apply it.

Crewe (2009) found many prisoners to be ambivalent towards the nature of the rehabilitative correctional efforts of the prison. Courses were perceived as tick box exercises with no real-world functions. Moreover, Crewe found many prisoners were fearful or resentful towards labels derived from notions of risk, only too aware of the power such things have over their life. Maruna (2012, p. 76) also states:

The prisoners whom I have met and worked with over the years are deeply ambivalent about expert correctional treatment and highly sceptical of expert risk assessment. They are, however, very interested in the idea over redeeming themselves (i.e signalling their distance). they ask, “What do I have to do to get a second chance?” And if that means sitting through a “What works” course or smiling while a 23-year-old trainee psychologist from the suburbs risk assess them, so be it.

As the above notes, the literature shows a robust empirically proven approach to prisoner rehabilitation. This RNR cognitive behavioural approach has received criticism, which includes concerns about the ways this approach is operationalized. There appears to be some discrepancy between the need for therapeutic alliance, mutuality, motivation, and the experiences of the prisoners therein. In light of such concerns, Maruna advocates a signalling theory approach to work with offenders, even going as far as to state, “Surely, it is time to retire this “what works” phrase once and for all and to agree that the word “works” does not “work” when talking about human lives” (ibid).

This article examines the ways in which the prisoner experiences the criticism and contradiction that are clearly present between the masculine prison culture, the idea of RNR based cognitive behavioural intervention, and the manifestations therein. Although there is a wide body of literature around prisons, masculinities, rehabilitations on prisoners, relatively few studies are autoethnographic and known have specifically addressed the mechanisms of ‘contradiction’. In doing so, this article aims to make grassroots experience visible, helping to fill the research gap and further knowledge of the prisoner experience.

METHODOLOGY

This research used autoethnographic methodology to produce a first-hand life sentence account of lived experience. Ethnography, particularly autoethnography, have always been a marginalized field in prison research, always seemingly in the shadow of empiricism and claims of scientific validity despite a rich body of scholarship exploring the nuances of prison life and prisoner sociology (see Crewe, 2009; de Viggiani, 2012; Earle, 2014; Jewkes, 2011; Phillips & Earle, 2010). Both the continued growth of groups such as convict criminology (Tietjen, 2019) and the popularity of the desistance-based interventions and research (e.g. Burnett & Maruna, 2006; Kirkwood & McNeill, 2015; Kitson-Boyce et al., 2019; Maruna, 2012; McNeill, 2006) represent the increasing value placed upon qualitative experience-based research. The ontological and epistemological assumptions therein are difficult to refute – experience is fundamental to being human. Experience, or the consumption of, is also fundamentally how people learn. This, then, makes autoethnography a valid method for exploring lived experience. It is very often the ‘human’ factor that empirical measures are criticized for missing. Jewkes (2013, p. 14) makes clear that “prison statistics can similarly ‘dazzle’ and ‘anaesthetise’”. Indeed, there is certainly a different quality to the experience of reading about things happening in a prison, then the experience of seeing such things or being on the receiving end of such things. Analyzing one’s experience, however, is not without its problems. This paper does not advocate an insider-outside of dualism. As Phillips and Earle (2010, p. 361) state, “Social groups borrow ideas from each other rather than them being held onto by one group, and that individuals have a number of interrelated statuses and not a singular one that solely defines their behaviour and perspectives”.

No perspective holds monopoly and nor is a singular perspective always helpful when analyzing experience. Phillips and Earle articulate well the benefits of a post-modern approach, acknowledging identities, perspectives, and truths as intersectional. In terms of an insider perspective, I am, arguably, as insider as an insider gets. I am a mandatory life sentence prisoner and, at the time of writing, had spent approximately 14 years of my life incarcerated. However, I have not always been a prisoner. Indeed, in recent years I have had substantial access to the community as part of my resettlement and preparation for release. For this reason, the research lens

can never be an absolute either-or affair. I therefore argue my researcher position as immersive and perhaps that of 'insider-out'. Insider-outsider positions considered here on a continuum, not a singular category. My hope is that my position soon changes to that of an outsider in.

Methods such as an autoethnography have potential to overstep the analytic line, indulging bias, personal opinion or emotionalism (Jewkes, 2011). Traditional modernistic ideology considers objectification as primary, with emotion often viewed as a research contaminant. However, from the perspective that all experience is coloured in some way by emotion it seems, then, that the exercising of emotion from research is the exercising of an integral human quality.

There is of course an important distinction between unhelpful emotionalism and emotion in research, with "no place for hot headedness in academic writing, but an emotional response does not equate to a lack of reason or cognition" (ibid, p. 71). From Jewkes' perspective emotion can be an important part of the research process. Otherwise, hidden dynamics and nuances may be uncovered and so benefit the research with this intrinsic human quality. This is a view I concur with; it would be very difficult to present a realistic account of my prisoner experience without the insight of emotion. "An acknowledgement that subjective experience and emotional responses can play a roll in the formulation of knowledge would deepen our understanding of the people and context we study" (ibid, p. 72).

Following this, a key part of autoethnography is the role of reflexivity. This involves the process of simultaneously living through and the collection of data, which then requires a subsequent process of looking back and evaluating. A variable that is particularly rare here is that I undertook this research while still incarcerated, adding to "[n]umerous first-hand accounts of prison life have been written but until recently, accredited research from former prisoners equipped with higher degrees has been rare" (Newbold et al., 2004, p. 440).

My subject position throughout the entirety of the research process means that the research is totally immersed and situated. I recognize that my researcher position has over the course of my academic development throughout my sentence become perhaps more than a future ambition or a means of passing time. It is no doubt entangled with my coping, masculinity, and identity in relation to circumstance. Data collection included personal journal entries, official prison documentation relating both to myself

specifically and to prisoners generally, personal communications, along with observations on interactions with the myriad facets of the prison machine. Data collection was, always is, unstructured and sporadic. It is upon the process of research formulation that certain data may take on new meaning or offer new understanding. The reflexive analysis was thematic, but with recognition of what Buetow (2010) conceptualizes as a saliency analysis. This method of analysis aims to refine with the thematic process by also interpreting importance, rather than just recurrence. This is arguably a more approachable method giving that I am considering my own lived experience. Throughout the research ethical guidelines set out by the British Psychological Society were adhered to. Although formal consent was not sought, both prison senior management and probation services well aware of my research activity around my life sentence and experience.

Data was gathered in the form of a personal journal, something that any prisoner is permitted to do and official prison documents, which all prisoners receive in relation to their journey through the prison system. All data was stored in my prison cell. My cell remained locked at all times, either by prison personnel or by myself with the use of a privacy key. Data was therefore secure. Any identifying features in the data have been changed so as to protect the anonymity of those people that I have come into contact with throughout the course of my sentence. I am of the view that the undertaking of my research did not place myself or others at any increased risk outside of that which is faced everyday by those within the prison walls. This includes both physical and emotional harm. Throughout I had support from my key work (prison officer) within the prison on a research supervisor who I had regular contact with via telephone.

The informed consent of research participants is fundamental in most research studies. However, Gelinis et al. (2016, p. 35) argue that, "Socially valuable research is justified without the consent of the participants if the research stands to intrigue no right of the participants and it is impracticable to obtain consent". I invoke both of the above justifications. The continued harms resultant from a political paralysed prison system and the public that receives skewed information from the media gives this kind of research significant social value. There is the moral argument to say that prisons should be transparent, that the public should get to see the lived realities of the prisoner they pay to house.

Given that anonymity is protected I argue that my research does infringe on the rights of those people included. To this end Gelinas and colleagues (2016, p. 36) argue:

The main point, then, is this. The most basic function of consent is to waive rights of control, allowing others to interact with us in ways that would otherwise be wrong. Consent is needed when, and only when, interactions stand to wrong one of the parties involved, by violating their personal sovereignty all rights of control. So, it will be relatively easy to justify research without consent when such research does not violate the rights of subjects.

I argue this research does not violate the rights of those that are recorded in my journal. I also argue that if this were to represent a violation, such a violation would be minor and outweighed by the social value of the research.

Personal journals, correspondence and official discourse produced in relation to myself and my life sentence were analyzed. Recurrent and salient themes were identified and in relation to the underlying meaning regards my life sentence experience. Three superordinate themes each with three subordinate themes emerged (see *Table 2*).

Table 2: Superordinate and Subordinate Themes Arising from Data Analysis

	1 The lifer identity	2 The psychological battle	3 Masculinity and identity
1	Frankenstein's monster	Powerlessness	The training
2	Numbers factors and confusion	Hopelessness	Masculine fertiliser
3	Actual, life does mean life	The courses	Masculine compliance

THE LIFER IDENTITY

Upon receiving a life sentence, one's life will never completely belong to oneself again. The life sentence identity is permanent, represented by myriad factors many of which are outside of the prisoner's control.

The sentence is fixed by law and am bound to impose a sentence of imprisonment for life and that is the sentence which I pass (Sentencing Remarks, 30 May 2008, p. 5).

As and when you are released then you will be subject to licence. As I have already indicated that license will last forever and should you break the terms of it, you would be liable to serve the rest of this sentence in custody (Sentencing Remarks, 30 May 2008, p. 8).

Listening to the words above was perhaps the most disempowering experience of my life. Despite my fear and horror at the situation I had created, I was at that point in my life unable to fully understand what it meant to be a life sentence prisoner.

Frankenstein's Monster

The life sentence prisoner becomes an identity in and of itself, constructed and prescribed by professionals with a monopoly of technologies.

The HCR-20 (version 3) is a structured violence risk assessment tool and was developed by Douglas, Hart, Webster and Belfrage in 2013. It consists of 20 items, 2 of which assess historical (past) factors, 5 clinical (current/recent) factors and 5 risk management (future) factors. (Psychological risk assessment, 19 March 2020, p. 9)

The personality assessment inventory (PAI) is a best administered objective inventory of adult personality, designed to provide information and critical, clinical variables also. There are 344 items that make up 22 non overlapping full scales. These comprise 4 validity scales, 11 clinical scales, 5 treatment scales and 2 interpersonal scales (Psychological report, 1 May 2008, p. 28).

Assessment technologies such as these play a significant role in the directions a life sentence experience may take. They hold significant power and have major influence over considerations of sentence progression, release, and other life events. They can often be given the recognition of truth, which outweighs anything voiced by the prisoner.

Numbers, Factors and Confusion

Prisoner assessment technologies are predominantly qualitative, prescribing risk categories that reduce human beings to percentages.

He has 14 convictions for a total of 25 offences committed between August 1992 and June 2004. All the offences were committed as an adult. There are five of the convictions for violent offending. There is a pattern of anti-social behaviour associated with alcohol misuse. This case is being managed at level 1 category 2 (Offender Assessment System, 2020, p. 554).

**Table 3: Predictor Scores for Reoffending
(Offending Assessment System, 2020, p. 560)**

Predictor Scores % and Risk Category			
	Year 1	Year 2	Category
OGRS3	35	53	Medium
OGP	17	27	Low
OVP	11	19	Low

For the life sentence prisoner such representations can become symbolic of not just the powerlessness of one's predicament, but also of the fact that there is ultimately no escape from one's past. Having such labels forcibly attributed can be both confusing and frustrating as the method of calculation remains, at best, difficult to grasp.

Actually, Life Does Mean Life!

Every life sentence prisoner lives with reality that their future is and will always be subject to terms and conditions. Others will forever have responsibility over what the life sentence prisoner may or may not be permitted to do.

Both the RMP (risk management plan) and SP (sentence plan) have been redeveloped to reflect the changing situation since Mr Micklethwaite's return to closed conditions a significant number of new controls including AP (approved premises) placement have been added to the RMP. I do not assess that this has been an escalation in risk, but the new measure served to add extra levels of control and monitoring (Offender Assessment System, 2020, p. 566).

I continue to support Mr Micklethwaite's release into the community with a robust risk management plan including a boost of substance misuse intervention (via a substance misuse support service or his OM on an individual basis); consideration given to a stipulation regarding random phone checks, if considered warranted and a potential referral to Building Better Relationships (BBR) in the community, if recommended by those managing him. My impression is that BBR is not necessarily for his risk management. Mr Micklethwaite has completed extensive intervention to date would be at risk of 'overtreatment' (Independent Psychological Assessment, 2020, p. 38).

In order for the life sentence prisoner to achieve release, any future liberty must entail an acceptance that one will live with reduced autonomy, reduced opportunity, and the knowledge that being returned to prison depends upon decisions made by others.

THE PSYCHOLOGICAL BATTLE

In relation to notions of rehabilitation there are many facets of a life sentence that can be seen as anti-rehabilitative. There is an unavoidable and often enduring psychological battle that accompanies the survival of a life sentence.

He was suffering from anxiety and advised that he is likely to be highly traumatised. He was suffering from symptoms of post-traumatic stress

and there was a possibility that he has a traumatic reaction to this current offence (Psychological Report, 2008).

This assessment marks the beginning of my life sentence. Whilst my position has ameliorated as adaptations set in there is a psychological quality to a life sentence that is ever threatening.

Powerlessness

This is a well-documented and pervasive theme within a life sentence. From the experience of being sentenced to the experience of sitting in front of a parole board the life sentence carries an undercurrent of powerlessness.

I can only begin to imagine how you must be feeling, but I am not going to encourage you to wallow in any 'poor me' or system based whinging (Email to a Prisoner Service, 28 August 2019)

I woke feeling rather negative this morning, I was also knowing I'm trapped here until others see fit to decide otherwise. There is certainly a different psychological quality to being post tariff. I realise it being returned to closed conditions has had a big impact on my wellbeing and I continue to struggle (Personal Journal, 29 February 2020).

The reality of having autonomy and freedom within the boundaries demarcated by others is fundamentally disempowering. The negative impact this can have cannot be overstated.

Hopelessness

A life sentence is not necessarily a linear journey and given that the stakes, for the prisoner, are often very high, there are at times a sense of hopelessness. There is a feeling of being trapped and with little capital to affect change.

I have just returned from 2 weeks leave and I'm absolutely gutted for you after reading the outcome of your parole review although it wasn't entirely unexpected. It was a very difficult hearing and I feel that they focused on your decision making rather than on your risks (Memo from Offender Supervisor, July 2020).

The past ten months have been filled with uncertainty, false hope and desperation. I do not have much hope left – I can see that under the 2 or 3 years could easily be my parole outcome (Personal Journal, 6 May 2020).

The above extracts demonstrate well enough the difficult position life sentence prisoners can find themselves in. Decisions made about a prisoner's life are often absolute and any resource or opportunity for amelioration can feel hopeless.

The Courses

The life sentence is a continual process of being assessed, the outcomes of which can dictate the need for specific intervention. Courses are the means through which sentence progression is achieved. Unfortunately, there is often a gulf between the prisoner's opinion of a given course and the positive self-report they may give up on completion.

CALM is an anger and an emotional management programme run over 24 2-hour sessions for groups of 6 to 8 participants. The premise of this programme is the anger is natural but can be problematic when experienced too often, too intensely and for too long, and when it is expressed in aggressive or anti-social ways. The course looks at participants own experiences of anger aims to improve emotional self-management and communication skills through exercises designed to impact on the following areas (CALM Post Programme Report, 8 June 2012).

Progress in meeting targets set at the last meeting:

Mr Micklethwaite has completed all his targets as noted earlier. Mr Micklethwaite Have completed numerous courses including Social and Life Skills and Family Relationships in 2011, Drug Awareness for the individual, Alcohol Awareness for the individual. Level 1 award for progression – Understanding Aspects of Citizenship He has also completed the CALM programme, and this was a positive report and Mr Micklethwaite noted that he has gained a lot from the programme. In addition, he has participated in a T.C. (Therapeutic Community) well he has completed a lot of work on victim awareness. (Sentence Planning and Review Meeting Notes, 19 February 2015).

It would not be correct to say that I did not benefit from participation in some of the behaviour interventions in the past 13 years. It is also fair to say that they served their purpose in that my risk scores have reduced as a result. However, there are facets of this process that are fundamentally not rehabilitative and are not congruent with typical prison life, or indeed with the lives of many prisoners returned to upon release.

MASCULINITY AND IDENTITY

Masculinity is a pervasive part of social fabric that has an influence over social interaction, the self-concept in the complex dynamics of identity. The influence of prison experience only works to complicate these dynamics further.

A conversation yesterday made me aware of the hooch brewing that has become more preferable – due to lockdown drugs are harder to get. But, locked out means no cell spins, so brewing is much easier (Personal Journal, 16 June 2020).

In years gone by lack of self-awareness and a skewed view of my own masculinity would have influenced my involvement in such an endeavour. The pervasive force of masculinity will often manifest in toxic practices. Binge drinking alcohol in prison is but one example.

The Training

Prior to receiving a life sentence much of my life was preoccupied with the pursuit of hegemonic status, and thus the reproduction and amplification of toxic masculine values, often resulting in harmful and offending behaviour.

Furthermore, he was able to identify that he is engaged in similar behaviours that were demonstrated by his parents, such as drinking and being aggressive from an early age. He also discussed having the belief that aggression is good and it is “what a man it does” (CALM Post Programme Report, 8 June 2012).

Mr Micklethwaite’s experiences as a child led to the development of beliefs around violence being an acceptable way to solve problems and to show off

his masculinity. This was a result of him trying to be like his father as this is who he thought his father wanted him to be. He would then use violence to mask his insecurities and fears about himself and situations he found himself in (Psychological Risk Assessment, 19 March 2020).

Much of my pre-prison life can be understood through a masculine lens. Implicitly and explicitly, the role of toxic masculinity in my offending behaviour cannot be overstated. In prison toxic masculine identities often become more entrenched and more powerful, rather than finding amelioration.

Masculine Fertiliser

Life sentence prisoners and those serving long sentences can often experience a distancing emotionally and psychologically from many of the things that make them who they are.

At earlier stages in my sentence Christmas was always a very difficult time of year. But as the years have gone by it has simply become more and more like any other day. There is a small Christmas tree on the wing, but I hardly notice it. I have made a small effort and displayed the Christmas cards from family on my windowsill. But as yet I do not feel especially festive. I am not depressed or anxious and I do not feel negative, but nor am I particularly interested in Santa Claus. When I ring home my mother explained her stress and hectic running around trying to prepare (for Christmas) whilst my stepfather complains of the expense (of Christmas). For the most part this is fairly meaningless to me, I understand what they mean but my feelings towards it are both near and far. I had a visit on Sunday at which my nine year old son was overtly hyperactive and tangibly excited. His Christmas will be a good one, for which I'm thankful to my parents. But I'm not really part of my son's excitement, I do not really connect with it and I am unable to share it. My emotional distance is probably how I've learned to cope over the years. This is not to say that I do not feel, because I can feel greatly. But the notion of missing out, special occasions and of nostalgia just feels less real to me. My experience of Christmas is fairly empty (Personal Journal, 20 December 2016).

Mr Micklethwaite spoke about having an identity before coming into prison, a partner and a family and a fairly good life. When he arrived at

prison for the first time the realisation of what he might lose has slowly dragged him down and last year the break up with his partner and the fear that he might be losing contact with his son had dragged him into new depths. He was using prescribed drugs to take him to another place but had realised he was not in control (End of Therapy Report, 18 January 2013, p. 12).

The impact of a life sentence can often equate to deprivation of identity or of the self. The prisoner has limited means and resources to maintain a coherent sense of self. The masculine identity resources available are often toxic and harmful.

Masculine Compliance

Toxic prison masculinity is pervasive. The power of the social phenomenon may fluctuate from prison to prison or wing to wing, but it is a permanent unavoidable factor in the prison experience.

Trying to argue the case for the guy being labelled as a sex offender proved and welcome this morning. the fact that Google size is much makes my attempts close to impossible. probation assure me that he does not have any sexual convictions, which means he is being targeted for something he has never done. People were talking about wanting to ‘fill him in’ and ‘slice him up’. I’ll have to be careful to appear impartial when telling people, he’s actually not a sex offender – trying to oppose prison culture is potentially dangerous. Yet it would be wrong for me to sit by and say nothing. I cannot abide bullying to begin with. The idea that he is being wrongfully labelled makes it seem even worse. For my part, I am tired of prison and the politics (Personal Journal, 2 March 2020).

Since the episode where people were checking up on other’s crimes on Google there has been a clear divide – groups of prisoners and groups have so called ‘wrong uns’ etc. There are also those that try to ignore the politics, such as myself, but there is no getting away from this age-old prison norm. In terms of violence is prison is really quite mild. I have been in places where this would have certainly led to violence – in one such example I witnessed a prisoner being hit on the head with a dumbbell, another whereby a prisoner had his throat slashed. With this in mind I can

live with the atmosphere here. Hopefully it won't be for too much longer
(Personal Journal, 19 August 2020).

All prisoners are in some way impacted by these toxic masculine prison codes. It is a constant and can have a powerful influence over prisoner experience. Toxic masculine practices can often become a means of navigating the complex prisoner environment.

DISCUSSION

The aim of this article centres around unpacking the ways in which prisoner experience can militate against prisoner rehabilitation. These processes are unpacked in relation to masculinities and prisoner identities. Whilst the themes identified may not be entirely novel, I am unaware of other research that explores them either through an autoethnographic lens by a person serving a life sentence or in relation to the emergent contradictions regarding prisoner rehabilitation. In so doing, I add to the literature and knowledge around prison effects and situated life sentence experience.

The lifer identity is a powerful and far-reaching contraption that will, with or without the owner's compliance, dictate the course of the individual's future. The reality of what it meant to be a lifer took years for me to come to terms with. The trauma involved in this process was unlike anything I would have otherwise ever experienced. A fellow life sentence prisoner once described his experience of becoming a life sentence prisoner as akin to falling through a "trap door into another world" (Personal Communication, 2016). The experience of one's life suddenly and irrevocably changing in such an extreme way is, in itself, something that requires significant time and effort to recover from – the absolute infantilizing and emasculating effect of this constituent significant ontological attack on the self.

Such an attack often continues through the construction of the 'Frankenstein's Monster' as the prisoner's existence, the past present and future, is reconstructed by criminal justice professionals and the application of risk technologies. Within the ongoing process the prisoner has little autonomy or control, and little agency for resource if there is a disagreement regard the quality of this assessment and identity construction. The prisoner is reduced throughout this process, with much of their self being obscured. As Crewe (2009, p. 123) notes, "A significant problem is that actuarial tools

are predictive of groups rather than individuals. Based on prisoners record, a psychologist can be confident that there is, say, an 80% likelihood that s/he will reoffend but cannot tell whether s/he is one of the individuals who falls into the 80% who will or the 20% who will not”.

As a life sentence prisoner, I am overwhelmed by the power of these tools and the associated professional opinions. This represents a fundamental eradication of my agency, autonomy, and control regarding how my identity is construed. The removal or destruction of these fundamental ontological resources is anti-rehabilitative. Thirteen years into my life sentence there are still factors within this prescribed identity that I do not relate to and do not agree with. In this way, my autonomy will never return.

The numbers, factors, and confusion that is symbolic of much of this prescribed identity can be understood as another dimension of not only the reduction of the individual, but also another way in which agency and autonomy are taken away. The prescription of my risk category as low or medium feels arbitrary in my everyday life, despite it being the perspective from which criminal justice professionals view me. Such categories and percentages are only as reliable as the information they are calculated from. For example, my first conviction was in 1992 and at twelve years of age. My risk calculation via the Offender Assessment System states that all my offences were committed as an adult. This shows a clear incongruence. Although this may, in my example, seem a minor issue it is for many a serious cause for concern. It is perhaps little wonder that Crewe (2009) found frustration and resentment among prisoners’ opinion of probation and psychology services. This also completely undermines the notion of a working therapeutic alliance, which is argued to be a fundamental important to the rehabilitative process (Andrews et al., 2011). Such errors can add up, are taken as fact, and become truth against which the prisoner is defenceless. When such errors are a more serious quality it is not difficult to understand why prisoners may be unwilling to place their trust in a system that misrepresents them. My Offender Risk Assessment presents me with a barrage a facts and figures that embody my prescribed identity, yet there is no explanation and nor do I understand exactly how these conclusions are reached and assumptions are made, or the equations used. I am, however, obliged to accept the validity of these RNR tools. For a system that purports its scientific basis (Mcguire, 1995; Andrews et al., 2011), the fact that it relied on the faith and trust of its subjects in the forging of any therapeutic

alliance is another example of the power imbalance resulted from a reduction of prisoner agency and autonomy. The removal or suppression of agency and autonomy is fundamentally anti-rehabilitative.

As a life sentence prisoner progresses toward release, there can be an amelioration in this ontological attack. My experience includes accessing the community via release on temporary licence (ROTL). This enabled me to pursue an academic career and begin to gradually adjust to the pace of life in the free world. However, as the research findings make clear, life actually does mean life. Upon entering the community, it quickly became clear to me that I did not have sovereignty over my future. This goes far beyond having to abide by generic sets of licence conditions. The large sentence prisoner need not commit further crime or even increased levels of prescribed risk to have any potential future removed and placed in prison again for an undisclosed number of years. I do not enjoy the luxury of having a private life. Relationships, accommodation, finances, hobbies, and interests are all things that become transformed into a construct subject to the approval and management of others. This continued process of infantilization is only enhanced by the knowledge that it will effectively continue for the rest of one's life. Indeed, I was informed by legal representative that I do not have automatic entitlement to the same level of human rights as those in the free world (Personal Communication, 2019). A probation officer also informed me, during a supervision session, that as I was a life sentence prisoner my life was effectively not my own (Personal Communication, 2019). This continued to logical attack militates against any successful enactment of a 'new me' (Maruna, 2001). The argued empowerment offered by the assimilation of prison rehabilitative dogma stands in contrast to many of the factors at play in the dynamics of "offender management". The loss of autonomy and the masculinization described in the literature (de Viggiani, 2012; Jewkes, 2005; Michalski, 2015; Newton, 1994; Sykes, 1958) may change substance and quality, but nonetheless remains a persistent part of the life sentence prisoner's future. In this way, rather than the eradication of identity, induction into a life sentence can represent and be understood as the refusal to allow the individual to move on from a damaging past and the prescribed identity by the Criminal Justice System.

For many the preceding offence, receipt of a negotiation of a life sentence can be highly traumatic. Psychological assessments from the earliest stages of my sentence demonstrate this clearly enough. If a prisoner is to be

rehabilitated, then the impact of receiving a life sentence can be understood as initially pushing the prisoner further away from the desired rehabilitative position. The powerlessness of the life sentence position is a constant theme. It is a delirious phenomenon that makes any amelioration more difficult to realize. In my experience there was little support for my trauma, aside from being monitored and having a monthly 20-minute psychiatrist appointment. In this regard, the prison's duty of care (Crewe, 2009) to my wellbeing seemed overly concerned with preventing suicide, rather than being encouraging and seeking to enhance the quality of my wellbeing. The theme of powerlessness can, naturally, change dynamic throughout the various stages of a sentence. The process of parole is a succinct example of powerlessness that characterizes the progressive stages of a life sentence. Once one's future is effectively placed in the hands of strangers, they take influence from criminal justice professionals around assignments of risk. But to add another dimension of uncertainty the parole board reserve the right to make a decision independent of other opinions. It is in this process that the extracts for superordinate theme 2, as well as superordinate theme 1 illuminate. In this example, I was waiting for a parole hearing that was deferred on three separate occasions. The endemic powerlessness of the prisoner situation well, as Michalski (2015) makes clear, influence the prisoner to engage in attempts at empowerment and regaining a degree of control. It is no surprise then, as Murana (2012) acknowledges, to find disingenuous and ambivalent engagement by prisoners with the professionals concerned. Indeed, therein lies a potential explanation as to why some life sentence prisoners seemingly self-sabotage during the latter stages of prison progression.

Hopelessness can arguably be understood as a progression of powerlessness. In my experience it bears all the same hallmarks but with the added emotional pain that comes with the reality of being trapped indefinitely. If a situation fails hopelessly then it is difficult to see how this can be congruent with said prisoner drawing optimal benefit from what should be a rehabilitative journey. To this end Grey (2018, p. 4) right about the barriers to progression for life sentence prisoners, stating: "The maintenance of hopelessness and the "feared self" was identified as being a barrier and their ability to desist from offending in general". The rehabilitative contradiction here is clear. Martin and Stermac (2009, p. 1) situate hope as a "[p]sychological construct that has aided in the survival and wellbeing of humans for hundreds of years".

In my experience hopelessness is a large part of continuation of the way in which the processes the criminal justice system impact upon the prisoner. Hopelessness is not a novel theme in prison research and so need not be exhaustively repeated here. The point to make is that it is not simply a prisoner response to a passive or ambivalent system, it is a phenomenon that is cultivated and inflicted by a system that declared the abilities of ideals and a duty of care to its captives. The powerlessness and hopelessness of the life sentence experience can potentially be exacerbated by the prescribed need to undertake specific interventions and courses. Rehabilitation should, logically, be a process of self-improvement, empowerment preparation for the future, and based on therapeutic alliances is characterized by empathy, guidance, and mutual respect. This, then, should not be a process that many consider a tick-box exercise designed to reduce risk and satisfy criminal justice professionals. Unfortunately, my experience has often been more toward the latter. The RNR assessment criteria presents contradiction at the outset. The prisoner is disempowered and disenfranchised by the knowledge that despite the need to give consent, refusal to participate will likely make it much more difficult to progress or realize eventual release. The voluntary aspect of prison intervention is therefore often coercive, as acknowledged by McNeill (2006). The notion that cognitive behavioural interventions are contingent on powerlessness and coercion to ensure participation renders them inherently contradictory. This inherent contradiction often leads to prisoner resentment (Crewe, 2009), which can also be understood as an anti-rehabilitative influence. Moreover, in my experience, prisons do not have the cognitive behavioural resources to meet the demands of a risk-based prison economy. The outcome here is that sentence progression may stagnate whilst the prisoner awaits allocation on a course or transfer to an establishment for specific intervention. It is easy to see how a prisoner could feel tormented by this process. This scenario is no doubt made worse when the prisoner see little meaningful benefit to the prescribed intervention. As Crewe (2009, p. 134) observes:

Programme content was demanding and ideologically rigid as some facilitators acknowledge. Role plays assumed a rational choice agent, unconstrained by, or resistant to, the kinds of pressures that dominated the cultures and communities to which prisoners would return precious to maintain “face and reputation”, not to back down in the face of provocation,

and never to appear passive. In the classroom then, many prisoners functioned with a kind of dual consciousness. They often recognise that the behaviours advanced by the course had merit in principle, yet saw them as bearing little relevance to their lives.

As a life sentence prisoner having served over a decade and satisfying a raft of rehabilitative targets, I struggled to recall any prisoner, outside of the classroom, express the views that an offending behaviour course had helped them develop on a personal or internal level. I can, however, recall a conversation with a close friend and fellow life sentence prisoner in which he referred to such interventions as a waste of time. This same prisoner, currently more than halfway through a lengthy tariff, is a model prisoner who having satisfied all rehabilitative targets is now simply waiting for the time whereby a transfer to the open prisoner status is possible. To add to this are conversations I have had with prison probation officers where they have expressed the view that prison courses do not really work, but they are what parole board expects to see.

To return to the literature, this is congruent with Goffman's (1959) theory that people present fronts that serve to successfully negotiate specific social situations. Here, prisoners present criminal justice professionals with their cleanest most rehabilitated front. This front can be viewed as an attempt to empower oneself, regain a semblance of control over one's life and instil some certainty in one's future. The fundamental problem with this is that the nature of this rehabilitative maze can influence duplicity and disingenuous engagement. No life sentence prisoner in their right mind will report that they have not benefited from participation in an intervention unless they are content to stay put. This demonstrates a glaring rehabilitative incongruent and a pervasive contradictory dimension within prison based cognitive behavioural interventions. Reduced risk scores are not necessarily synonymous with prisoners rehabilitating. The interactions prisoners must negotiate in this way are often not conducive to prisoner wellbeing. So far, much of the prisoner experience framed in this discussion can be understood to be symbolic of prisoner emasculation. The process of imprisonment, in relation to sentence progression on rehabilitation, can actually manifest a process of debilitation.

As the literature states, masculinities are a pervasive psychological and sociological force, which has been my experience much of my life prior to and while being a prisoner. My offending behaviour was precipitated by

maladaptive childhood experiences that influenced my development into an emotionally labile and aggressive young man. I was exposed to violence and substance abuse at an early age, and so to some degree these were normative practices for me. Toxic practices of hegemonic masculinity permeated my childhood, my adolescence, and adulthood. My offending behaviour, which typically involved binge drinking and violence, can be understood as an expression of toxic masculine identity and a pursuit of hegemonic status. Upon reflection, it is apparent that prison was always a likely outcome for me. I had been, in Goffmanian terms, fronting for most of my toxic masculine life, which may well have prepared me for prison culture. Jewkes (2005, p. 51) notes:

The desire to prove one's manhood, which frequently leads to criminal behaviour, conviction, and imprisonment may itself, then, be a prerequisite to a successful adaptation to life inside. This might be particularly true of those who have committed very serious offences, who might be said to import with them into prison the ideology of aggressive masculine values that precipitate their crimes in the first place.

For me, Jewkes could not be more accurate. My offending was not a result of social or cognitive skills deficits. It was a result of my identity and life, which had been construed and reproduced time and again through a lens of toxic masculinity. Prison rehabilitation may be missing the masculine point. Although aspects of my cognitive behavioural experience can be viewed through a masculine lens, there is no explicit reference to masculinity. In my experience this felt like an attempt to change what people do, rather than enabling people to understand and come to terms with who they are and who they have been. For context, yes cognitive behavioural skills could have prevented my offending behaviour, but at that stage in my life I seriously doubt I would have used them.

There is also a huge contradiction in that the culture of prison works to reinforce the emasculation that, Michaliski (2015) argues, drives these toxic masculine practices. Prison culture is, then, part of the problem in that it becomes part of an ongoing aetiological explanation for toxic behaviour and, arguably, manifested offending. Goffman (1959, p. 37) asserts:

In addition to the fact that different routines may employ the same front, it is to be noted that a given social front tends to become institutionalised

in terms of the abstract stereotyped expectation to which it gives rise, and tends to take on a meaning and stability apart from the specific tasks which happen at the time to be performed in its name. The front becomes a “collective representation” and an act in its own right.

This explains both the fertilisation and pressure towards compliance of prison masculine culture. Again, this contradicts rehabilitative efforts, “[s]ince fronts tend to be selected, not created” and so “we may expect trouble to arise when those who perform a given task are forced to select a suitable front for themselves from among several quite dissimilar ones” (ibid, p. 38).

In relation to the themes in this research, a cognitive behavioural front would not fit within the prevailing social norms or approved fronts – the prisoner brewing hooch or those bullying a suspected perpetrator of sexual crimes. Prisoners might not feel able or might not even desire to use cognitive behavioural skills, regardless of demonstrations within the sterile classroom environment. Unfortunately, the adaptations to living within the toxic grasp of the prisoner code, while also negotiating the ontological attacks inflicted by the prison, do not simply go away once released. It is only logical that if prisoner imports toxic practices into the prison, they then may well export these back out again, perhaps with the added quality of prison experience to boot. Indeed, Hulley and (2015, p. 1) posit that: “While earlier scholars concluded the effects of long term imprisonment were not “cumulative” and “deleterious”, adaptation to long term imprisonment has a deep and profound impact on the prisoner, so that the process of coping leads to fundamental changes in the self, which go far beyond the attitudinal”. This can in no way be understood as rehabilitative, as “the very coping mechanisms that are to alleviate some of the pains and problems of imprisonment might, as a secondary effect, be deeply transformational and in some sense debilitating” (ibid, p. 22). It is difficult to see how this, and the evidence presented in my research can be reconciled with notions of rehabilitation, a duty of care or public protection.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The prison as it stands is in need of major reform. An active, progressive prison regime that influences real prisoner empowerment is required. This will be a complex commitment towards removing the structural catalysts that drive toxic prison culture. Then, perhaps, there will be realistic scope

for prisons to assist in real and beneficial rehabilitation. This necessarily needs to be a reform that is guided by academic knowledge and prisoner life experience. Political engines should not be commodifying crime if this moves prison away from progressive reform – how many times will “tough on crime” rhetoric need to fail before it is commonly realized that it does not work? The media have an important role to play, which needs to be that of informing not sensationalizing. In rehabilitation, a personal approach that includes the impact masculinities have could be beneficially integrated. As the literature states, such an approach to rehabilitation can impact recidivism. It could perhaps be so much more if it was not hamstrung by so many other factors.

CONCLUSION

This paper has presented an autoethnographic life sentence account of prison rehabilitation and the contradictory mechanisms of the prisoner experience. My experience was framed here, through a lens that considered the interactions between cognitive behavioural risk-based prison rehabilitation and the toxic influence of prison culture and masculinity. It has been shown that the labelling, reducing, and management of prisoners not only contradicts but drives toxic masculine culture. Thus, prison was shown to reinforce rather than reduce offending related behaviours. The highlighted themes and the exploration of their rehabilitative incongruence adds first person lived experienced account to reinforce the well-established knowledge around ontologically deleterious prison effects. Recommendations centre around promoting prisoner empowerment and detachment of political interest in prison function, which recognizes masculine influence on prisoner rehabilitation.

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