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16. Everyday life in UK Probation Approved Premises for sex offenders

Carla Reeves

Introduction

In England and Wales the National Probation Service is the government organisation¹ that has statutory responsibility to ensure the safe re-entry of high-risk offenders being released from prison into the community. These offenders are considered to be high-risk of reoffending, absconding and/or causing serious harm and, thus, Probation Approved Premises (PAP) may be a required part of this re-entry plan. More commonly referred to as hostels, they are semi-secure environments housing normally around 15-30 inmates who have just been released from prison or are awaiting trial or sentencing for serious offences. Hostels have two primary functions:

1. To support safe resettlement and reintegration from prison into the community through a gradual, risk managed re-entry process
2. To provide semi-secure accommodation for people awaiting trial or sentence who are judged as not requiring remand in custody, but do not have appropriate housing in the community.

Hostel inmates are accommodated in a range of single or shared rooms with some recreational, laundry and cooking facilities. Depending on the situation of the individual hostel and composition of inmates, hostels have set curfew hours, rules and procedures, such

as being subject to random room and property searches, drugs and alcohol testing and prohibitions on unauthorised guests, alcohol or drugs. Hostels accommodating high risk offenders have a double shift cover so that at any one time there are at least two members of staff on duty. As part of their accommodation inmates are required to work on their offence-based behaviours and attitudes and attend relevant treatment or intervention programmes. Breaches of the hostel rules can eventually result in a return to prison under the release licence conditions for the inmate.

Currently in England and Wales there are 104 hostels, of which 14 do not accommodate sex offenders as they are situated too near to locations vulnerable people may frequent, such as schools, play parks and nurseries. The remaining hostels often accommodate relatively high proportions of sex offenders as they offer the most secure and highly monitored re-entry strategy available.

The findings reported in this chapter stem from an exploratory ethnographic study into the daily lived experiences of people accommodated and working in Probation Approved Premises (hostels), focussing on those inmates convicted or charged with sexual offences. What life is like in the hostel is essential to understanding how such offenders respond to being resident in a hostel and the affect it can have on their readiness and willingness to actively engage in wider work to support desistance (see Healy 2014 and Maruna 2001, set out in the introduction to part three of this text). Through this study it became evident that for all inmates life is shaped by the exercise of power and control through formal and informal mechanisms, and inmates' resistance or acquiescence to that control. In this chapter the informal mechanisms of power and control are explored using Foucault's work on

disciplinary power as a framework coupled with Goffman's work on secondary adjustments to understand the nature of forms of resistance. The experience of the inmates is the focus of this chapter, for an exploration of the staff experience please see Cowe's chapter in this text.

Method

Fieldwork was undertaken in three interactive phases.

Phase one: The author conducted micro-level observations of hostel life over 20 months² focussing on the way in which inmates and staff interact with each other, and how that affects hostel practice and the accomplishment of probation aims. I conducted these observations at all times of the day and night and across all days of the week. They involved observing interactions between inmates, and between inmates and staff in the public areas of the hostel (not the inmates' bedrooms, toilets or washrooms). I was also granted free access to staff-only areas.

Phase two: Semi-structured interviews with inmates and staff were developed from the initial findings from phase one. For inmates the main question was how they found living in a hostel. Key themes from phases one and two emerged around the social organisation of the inmate group, how sex offender inmates construct accounts of their offending, how both inmates and staff understand the purpose of accommodation in a hostel, interactions between inmates and staff, staff understandings of the nature of their work with sex offenders, and power relationships between inmates and staff. This chapter focusses on this latter theme.

I conducted twenty-four interviews with seventeen inmates (see table one) and a further seventeen interviews with eleven staff members (see table two). Staff members who took part

included probation staff, probation services officers (PSO: staff employed by the probation service, but not qualified probation officers) and residential service officers (RSO: support staff who undertake frontline duties in ensuring the welfare of hostel inmates and their adherence to hostel rules, but do not engage in offence-based work). Additional staff and inmates of the hostel took part in informal conversations as part of the observation phase.

Phase three: I observed twelve monthly Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Committees (MARACs). These statutory meetings involve representatives from probation, police, housing services and other relevant agencies such as adult mental health services and social services who come together to discuss the progress of medium and high risk offenders in their locality being released from prison or on release licence in the community, and design risk management plans for them³. Observations from these committee meetings contextualised the findings from phases one and two.

Hostels as institutions of change and conformity

The study this chapter reports on explored a UK probation approved hostel as a site of state control for sex offenders in the community. However, the hostel itself is a strategy of control, not simply a place in which other strategies are enacted. In this respect the hostel may be likened to a closed institution, the nature and use of which, is described by Foucault and Goffman: Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* (1977) and Goffman's *Asylums* (1961) being the most pertinent to this discussion.

Goffman and Foucault both explore the closed or 'total' institution. These are institutions that accommodate inmates and isolate them from outside society. Few of these institutions house inmates involuntarily, as prisons do, with both Goffman and Foucault considering other

Endnotes

¹ The probation service, coupled with the prison service, comprise the National Offender Management Service (NOMS), established in 2004. Since 2007 this service has been part of the Ministry of Justice. In 2014 the proportion of the probation service that manages high risk offenders split from that proportion that deals with medium and low risk offenders. This created a two tier system, with the publically-owned National Probation Service managing the most dangerous 30% (approximately) of offenders, and the regional Probation CRCs (Community Rehabilitation Companies) managing the remainder. These Probation CRCs are intended to become privately managed through contracts with NOMS within a year of creation.

² The time period in which the research took place, as well as the location are confidential under the access agreement with the hostel.

³ These MARACs are a form of Multi-Agency Public Protection Panels (MAPPPs). In the area studied further ad hoc MAPPPs were held as needed to focus on a single critical risk offender. MAPPPs are part of the statutory Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA) established in England and Wales in 2001 under the Crime and Courts Services Act 2000. For further information on these MARAC meetings and how they operated, please see Reeves (2013a).

Interview	Inmate pseudonym	Age band	sex	Offence for which in hostel	Licence type	Time in hostel	How left hostel	Victim/s characteristics
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Table 16.1: Details of inmates interviewed

1,2	Kevin	20-29	m	Indecent assault	Extended licence ⁵	12 months	Recalled to prison for further offence	13 years, female
3	Dave	20-29	m	Fraud (multiple)	Bail	3 months	Sentenced to prison	Parents
4,5	Bill	20-29	m	Gross indecency (multiple)	Extended licence	6 months	Still resident	2-3 years, female
6	William	60-79	m	Indecent assault	Extended licence	Over 21 months	Still resident	9 years, female
7,8	Julie	50-59	f	Murder	Life licence	5 months	Still resident	Male adult
9	George	20-29	m	Indecent assault	Bail	2 months	Sentenced to prison	8 years, female
10,11	Joe	40-49	m	Indecent assault and abduction (multiple)	Extended licence	6 months	Still resident	8-9 years, female
12	Al	40-49	m	Downloading obscene images of children	Extended licence	3 months	Still resident	-
13	Pete	40-49	m	Indecent assault	Bail	3 months	Sentenced to prison	20 years, female
14	Dan	-	m	Indecent assault	Bail	4 months	Sentenced to prison	5 years, unknown sex
15	Phil	50-59	m	Attempted murder	Licence	3 months	Recalled to prison for breaching hostel rules	Male adult
16,17	Winston	40-49	m	Rape	Extended licence	Unknown	Moved on to less secure hostel	Female adult
18,19,20	Bob	40-49	m	Rape (multiple)	Extended licence	Unknown	Recalled to prison for breaching hostel rules	Female adult
21	Jerry	50-59	m	Indecent assault	Extended licence	Unknown	Moved on to own accommodation	14 years, female
22	Frank	60-79	m	Indecent assault (multiple)	Extended licence	13 months	Moved to sheltered housing	Both male and female children of unknown ages
23	Anthony	20-29	m	Indecent assault	Bail	Unknown	Sentenced to prison	Child, unknown
24	Mo	unknown	m	Indecent assault	Extended licence	3 months	Still resident	Child, unknown

Table 16.2: Details of staff interviewed

Interview	Staff pseudonym	Position	Sex	Age band	Background
1	Tina	Previous relief RSO	f	30-39	Retail
2	John	Hostel management, Senior Probation Officer	m	50-59	Probation
3, 4, 5	Sam	Relief RSO	m	40-49	Youth justice, academic
6	Jack	PSO	m	40-49	Unknown
7	Gil	RSO/PSO	m	40-49	Police
8, 9	Shaz	Relief RSO	f	30-39	Health services
10, 11, 12	Nick	RSO	m	40-49	Police
11, 12, 13	Ben	RSO	m	50-59	Education
14, 15	Paul	RSO	m	50-59	Military
16	Felix	RSO	m	40-49	Unknown
17	Monica	Relief RSO	f	30-39	Housing

institutions such as hospitals and clinics, boarding schools, monasteries and convents.

However, Foucault and Goffman argued that there is a common function for those categories of closed institution that accommodate inmates because of illness or criminality. Goffman considered these institutions as socially segregating and stigmatising inmates, thereby supporting and perpetuating social exclusion and the label of 'abnormal': a process sociologists and criminologists often refer to as 'othering' (*c.f.* Young 2007; Reeves 2013). Through stripping inmates of their previous social roles and identities the institution can then work with the inmate to build a new positive identity (Crewe 2007). Foucault argued that total institutions are concerned primarily with the training, cure or reform of inmates and that whilst social condemnation and ostracisation may result in their accommodation in such places initially, once there the institutions work to conform them to a state of social acceptability through the exercise of disciplinary power. Disciplinary power is the implementation of techniques of control to manipulate, persuade or coerce people to change to act in conformity with social norms, rules and regulations. In more modern risk management language we may regard it as a social control and rehabilitation process.

As discussed earlier, however, hostels do not isolate inmates from society, as such they are better characterised by their historical moniker of 'half-way houses', which captures their position as semi-secure, community-based institutions rather than that of total institutions. Foucault regards these semi-closed institutions as having the same conforming purpose and function as closed institutions (just less efficiently exercised on the inmates). Goffman, however, regarded such institutions as 'hybrids', being part residential and part community and that, rather than being socially exclusive (as he viewed total institutions), are instead "the forcing houses for changing persons in our society" (Goffman 1957:7; 1961:22) which prepares inmates for social reintegration. Thus, hostels fit the concept of a hybrid institution

and are considered by both Foucault and Goffman as being places to support inmates' desistance through personal change towards conformity with social rules and norms.

The idea that inmates need to undergo a personal transformation through which they internalise social norms and value systems and come to be regarded and self-regarded as 'reformed' offenders accords with Maruna's (2001) narrative theory of desistance, outlined in the introduction to part three of this text. The significance of Foucault's work in *Discipline and Punish* (1977) is that it describes the processes by which disciplinary power works to change an individual through internalising social control and value systems within conforming institutions, such as a probation hostel. Foucault referred to these techniques of disciplinary power as hierarchical observations, normalising judgements and examinations. This chapter will now explore each of these in turn to consider how the environment and structures of hostel life utilised these techniques.

Hierarchical observations and the 'Power of the Gaze'

Foucault (1977) identifies surveillance as a key technique of disciplinary power characterised by one or more of three features of practice which readily equate to hostel work and operation:

1. The collection and storage of information;
2. Supervision of subjects;
3. Application of the information gathered through the monitoring of those observed and supervised (Dandeker 1990).

This is the same technique of disciplinary power idealised in Bentham's Panopticon: a circular prison design that allowed for the continuous, simultaneous surveillance of numerous individuals by a single or few observer/s (Dinwiddy 1989). Foucault regarded this design as the pure archetypal of disciplinary power through surveillance in which "...visibility is a trap..." (Foucault 1977: 200). The significance of this surveillance is that it can manipulate the attitudes and thoughts of those inmates subject to it through 'the power of the gaze':

Just a gaze. An inspecting gaze, a gaze which each individual under its weight will end by interiorising to the point that he is his own overseer, each individual thus exercising this surveillance over, and against, himself.

(Foucault 1980b: 155)

Surveillance, therefore, produces conformity by supporting inmates to internalise pro-social values and norms. This is what Foucault (1977: 174) calls the "disciplinary gaze" and Yar (2003: 264) the "normalising gaze".

In the hostel, inmates are almost constantly under surveillance, via either the human or electronic eye. In an earlier paper (Reeves 2011), I commented on the centrality of surveillance to supervision work, which is considered intrinsic to the role and function of probation hostels. Such work underpins why high risk prisoners on release may be required to reside in such an institution. This was summed up by the hostel manager when he commented that violent offenders were accommodated in the hostel to have "detailed observation" of their behaviour (MARAC 8).

The most noticeable form of observation was that by the staff themselves and by the CCTV that covered the 'public' areas of the lower floor which comprised the recreation and service

rooms as well as the garden, although the double shift residential staff (alongside administrative, managerial and other probation staff during office hours) were not able to monitor all areas at all times. Of course, the inmates were not aware of what areas were being monitored at what times, leading them to assume that they may be being watched all of the time via the CCTV. Inmates found this one of the most objectionable and ‘controlling’ aspects of the hostel regime: the inability to escape from the gaze, with inmates frequently likening life in the hostel to “living in a goldfish bowl” (Bob, field notes 24-23.5).

Furthermore, inmates commented that the hostel was worse than prison as inmates were subject to more individual attention due to being accommodated in smaller numbers and not being categorised and ordered in large groups as they were in prison, which enabled them to hide within the crowd: “You feel like *you* are being watched as well, because it’s not as many people in here.” (Joe, in interview). Again, Foucault regarded this separating out of inmates as individual units of analysis as central to the exertion of disciplinary power: “Discipline ‘makes’ individuals; it is the specific technique of a power that regards individuals both as objects and as instruments of its exercise.” (1977: 170). Observations achieve this through “progressive objectification and the ever more subtle partitioning of individual behaviour.” (Foucault 1977: 173).

Observations are not simply visual. Surveillance works with other mechanisms to produce conformity and make individualised observations possible. Most notable in the hostel (and in accordance with the techniques described by Foucault 1977) was the temporal and spatial ordering of inmates through curfews, hostel schedules and rules, release license and sex offender registration requirements. These mechanisms served to separately locate the inmates as they became (if you pardon the Foucauldian parlance) a node caught within a network of symbiotic observational techniques which isolated the individual and made their behaviours subject to directed and individual scrutiny. All of which were recorded for future analysis

and action in the C-sheets: a written record of the occurrences within the hostel and observations of the duty staff for each working shift.

The inmates themselves were aware of this exercise of disciplinary power through these techniques. For example, George was frustrated with the “curb on his freedom” due to the prohibition on going into the hostel garden after dark. As inmates were allowed into the garden even during curfew hours in daylight he argued that this was purely because, despite the garden being covered by CCTV, it made inmates less observable to the staff. Staff confirmed that this was the case (field notes 14-12). Bill, was similarly angry about the restrictions placed on work and visiting his family and home community. He commented on what he regarded as the futility of the stringent control because it reduced personal responsibility. Again, he believed that the underlying reason was to maintain observation of the inmates, and thus control over them:

They just want to control everything I do. They don't seem to realise that they will have to let me take responsibility for myself because I won't be here forever. [...] I don't agree with them. They are just trying to control me. Even work, they don't really like us working because that means that we are not in their control all the time, that's why they don't like me having a car as well. But they can't control me when I leave here.

(Bill, in interview)

Significantly, these frustrations of the inmates focussed on what we may refer to as the extremities of control; namely, the borders of the institution. Hannah (1997) comments that this is a defining feature of semi-closed, hybrid institutions as it is impossible to observe the

inmates constantly, which creates a need for a greater concentration of control at the edges of the institutions' influence.

As noted, in itself the purpose of individualised observation and surveillance was to support the risk management of offenders through their safe reintegration into the community from prison. However, observation and surveillance can only produce a conforming affect if they are acted upon.

Normalising judgements and examinations

Foucault described these two techniques of disciplinary power independently, though explaining that they work necessarily in conjunction with each other and surveillance to create a disciplinary society. Within the hostel they were symbiotically conjoined and so are explored together for this chapter.

In order for the observation of transgressions to lead to punishment or correction a judgement as to the 'wrongness' of the behaviour or manifested attitudes has to be made. This requires a definition of 'normal' and 'abnormal' against which observations of the inmates are evaluated (the normalising judgement), and then examined through a socially accepted ritualised process which formalises the judgement and metes out appropriate responses to those transgressions. In respect to sex offenders, this defining of normal is most publically observable at the point of charge and conviction, in that the behaviour of the individual is judged as constituting criminal (and therefore abnormal) behaviour. This judgement of normality continues through the prison system and into the probation system, most notably through risk assessments and planning. At all points the offender is assessed in terms of the normality of their general behaviour, sexual behaviour and sexual desires; leading to

judgements about their 'ab/normality' which, in risk-based, New Penological criminal justice systems, we refer to in terms of dangerousness or riskiness. Importantly, assessments are based on past and current behaviour in order to make judgements about the nature of the individual and to predict future behaviours. Punishments, management and/or treatment plans are then devised in order to reduce this risk, dangerousness or abnormality (terms which may be used synonymously in this context).

Thus, the process of assessment (or judgement) and response to that are part of the same examination process. For hostel inmates this mainly meant an actuarial risk assessment and the MARAC meetings in which their progress in the hostel, on offence-based programmes and interventions, interactions with staff, family and other inmates were discussed and judged against a scale of 'normality-abnormality' that we refer to as risk levels or scales. The higher the level, the more 'abnormal', risky or dangerous the inmate is considered to be in terms of causing harm and/or reoffending and, thus, the greater the need for disciplinary interventions to produce conformity (or, as we now call them, incapacitative and rehabilitative programmes to produce desistance).

Resisting disciplinary power

Foucault notes that subjects will always resist the exercise of disciplinary power (Cousins and Hussain 1984). Such resistances may take place at group level and/or individual level and require the exercise of power in return by the inmates: they must exercise power over themselves, their personal autonomy and over other individuals to assert their relative freedom (Reeves 2009). It is this capacity to resist that is what differentiates disciplinary power from dominance, oppression or violence (Barker 1998). Despite this Foucault did not explore the ways in which inmates may resist, however, Goffman's work in *Asylum* (1961)

describes a range of techniques employed by inmates to exert their independence and self-identity.

Significantly, both Foucault and Goffman recognised that inmates are subjected to surveillance, judgement and examination in an echelon form of hierarchy in which any staff member can exercise authority over all residents, regardless of the status of either within their peer group (Goffman 1961). This means that the exercise of power by staff over residents is diffused and likely to be exercised, whereas residents have little legitimate recourse to resist. As such Goffman sets out a number of inmate responses to institutions with compliance being at one end of the continuum and a range of adjustments to institutional life leading to the other end of non-compliance. Nielson's (2012) consideration of adjustment and adaptation in Danish prisons notes that the range of responses inmates employ is a result of the complex inter-relationship of their personal circumstances, psychological resilience and characteristics, interactions with other inmates and staff, and the forms and nature of the mechanisms of disciplinary power exerted on them. Inmates adjusted to the challenges of hostel life in a variety of ways: most notably through the informal social organisation of the inmate peer group and the way in which they constructed narratives about their offending behaviours and attitudes. Whilst these are of great significance inmates' *direct* adjustments to the exercise of disciplinary power is the focus of the second part of this chapter.

Adjustments

Though now often used as synonymous terms, adaptation and adjustment may be considered as overlapping but different concepts. Adaptation refers to the cognitive responses by inmates

to help them cope with the challenges of incarceration and may include retreating or withdrawing from social interaction as much as possible (often including drug and alcohol use), accepting the status quo and getting on with it, or endeavouring to ‘play’ the institution rules to their benefit (*c.f.* Crewe 2009). Adjustments, on the other hand, specifically refer to behavioural strategies employed by inmates within the context of their cognitive adaptations to manage their daily lives.

Goffman characterised inmates’ responses to institutional structures of control and disciplinary power as being either primary or secondary adjustments. Primary adjustments refer to compliance with staff demands and institutional rules, and the subsequent production of conformity. Primary adjustment may be a mechanism of self-protection within the hostel by marking time quietly until release (Goffman 1961). In Crewe’s (2009) detailed exploration of adaptations to prison life, this may be regarded as akin to an enthusiast response whereby the inmate engages with the work and aims of the institution. Such wholehearted engagement in the system was not noted or expressed amongst the inmates. More commonly responses conforming with Crewe’s (2009) categories of pragmatist or stoic adaptation were observed amongst the sex offender inmates. These responses are characterised by either an acceptance of, or resignation to, the dominance of the institution and a desire to simply get through their time in the institution compliantly. This response to hostel life was exemplified by William:

There’s no use me trying to buck the system. There’s no use anyone trying to buck the system, it’s like I’ve said all along, there’s only one winner. You’ve just got to get on with it; get your head down; you’ve done something wrong - make amends for it. You know, put it right.

(William, in interview)

Staff noted that on the face of it this sort of compliance was a common tactic of sex offenders, as one probation officer commented of a sex offender they managed: “He is a very standard sex offender: he is very compliant.” (MARAC 12). But, of course, staff were wary of accepting compliance at face value and “not being lulled into a false sense of security” (Probation Officer, MARAC 7), despite it being a cornerstone of discussions around the risk management of offenders. For example, in the MARAC discussions around Guy (a sex offender inmate) his apparent compliance within the hostel was first noted: “[Guy] is doing ok at the moment.” (case probation officer), “[There’s] no indication of any risky behaviour.” (John, both in MARAC 8), however, then the discussion turned to explore the meaning behind a letter that was intercepted between Guy and a prison acquaintance:

He wrote a letter (police have a copy) written to a friend in [prison] which says things like “I’m trying to blend in”. Probation think he is playing a game. But he also wrote a list of aims, all were positive e.g. not to smoke cannabis or drink. Not sure if this is planted or not, but otherwise is being compliant in the hostel.

(Field notes from MARAC 8)

Of course, hostel staff fears were sometimes well-founded. Al explained his frustrations with sex offender treatment programme facilitators (‘psychologists’) and what he perceived as their gullibility:

I just think that the psychologists can get it wrong though. I mean, they could have one person sat there: first time offender, upset at what he’s done. And another: repeat offender who’s been through the system so many times. The courses don’t work on

them but they know what they should say, and they say it. But then the psychologists say they are working well, but they might not be so positive about the first time offender who is genuine, but not saying the right things.

(Al, in interview)

Because of this uncertainty hostel accommodation was often regarded as a “good idea, as then we can see if he really wants to co-operate or if he’s just pretending.” (Hostel manager, MARAC 8). This scepticism of inmate compliance is echoed in throughout prison research considering not only sex offenders. Nielson (2012: 140), for example, in her ethnographic study commented that she regarded compliance as “impression management implemented as opportunistic and pragmatic attempts to pursue personalised end.”, noting that compliance is judged too much on behavioural rather than moral or normative responses.

Secondary adjustments, on the other hand, are actions and behaviours that breach or circumvent the hostel rules. As Goffman explains:

Any habitual arrangement by which a member of an organisation employs unauthorised means, or obtains unauthorised ends, or both, thus, getting around the organisation’s assumptions as to what he should do and get and hence what he should be.

(Goffman 1961: 172)

In Crewe’s (2009) typology of adaptation to prison life, these forms of secondary adjustments may be utilised by any inmate, but most commonly by those that employ a ‘player’ adaptation: inmates that display compliant behaviour whilst secretly resisting organisation

rules and norms. Whilst they can be disruptive to the order of the institution, the main forms of secondary adjustments observed within the hostel were not and, because of this, were often accepted or ignored by staff. There were two primary categories of secondary adjustment: use of goods and services, and social space. Both of these aspects of total and hybrid institutions are highly controlled and regulated (Matthews 2009), and the subversion of these elements of hostel life for the benefit and aims of the inmates are central to strategies of resistance. Each of the categories will be explored in turn.

1. Secondary adjustments through the use of goods and services

These forms of adjustments can be thought of as the use of legitimate items for illegitimate means. For the most part these were minor rebellions against hostel control through infractions of rules and regulations. One of the most commonly observed was the use of drinking cups for ashtrays in areas designated non-smoking (and so ashtrays were not provided). However, at the more serious end of the continuum was the use of high street chain store children's clothing catalogues as pornographic material and the use of pool cues as weapons.

Battles for control tended to take place at the points of intersection: where staff and inmates most interacted and where inmates have the most amount of flexibility in their behaviour, again indicating the importance of exerting disciplinary power at the boundaries of control. In particular were meal and medication times. This account of a conversation took place between myself and two members of staff, Sam and Ben:

Sam: "They [inmates who have committed sexual offences against children] tend to wait until the very end of the designated time. Most residents come to get their

meds as soon as the hatch is opened, but there is usually one or two that wait until the very end of the half hour so that the staff has to wait just for them and cannot close up early and go back into the office.”

Ben agreed. He says that both he and Paul [another RSO] often tell the residents to wait for a couple of minutes when they go to the hatch just so that they are retaining control over them. They do this whether they are busy or not. He says that they have to always make sure that they are showing the residents who is in control. He says it is noticeable that the sex offenders, although they are always polite and compliant, if you make them wait for something, or refuse them something, then they go off in a bad mood which lasts. This is not violent, but is in the form of not speaking to staff and complaining to other residents and staff members.

He relates how Tim [a previous sex offender inmate] use to control little things in the hostel so that he was gaining power in small ways over the staff. When meds are given out the staff member puts the correct medication for each person into a small cup which is emptied into the hand of the resident. Normally people would hold out their hand cupped ready to take the pills but Tim holds out his hand straight [flat] so that the staff member cannot just empty the cup into his hand. After a couple of seconds or so he cups it, but in this way he is controlling the behaviour of the staff for that time, even if it is in a minor way. Ben says that it took the staff ‘ages’ to see what was going on and after that they tried to make sure that they were aware of what he was doing and took back control by holding back his medication until after he had signed the book [to say he’d received the

medication] and then going to pour his meds into his hand whether it was cupped or not. He had to react to the staff then.

(Field notes, 12-9)

Inmates echoed this battle of control:

Jason (recent inmate): It's all about power and control, I'm sure.

CR: Do you really think so?

Jason: Oh yes. You can tell straight away, I don't even know who they [the staff] all are and you can see it. They play games ignoring you, making you wait for everything, they don't respect us at all. That's what it is. They think they're Someone and we're just not....yeah, they don't respect us at all.

(Field notes 31-10)

2. Secondary adjustments through the use of social space

“Space is [...] never neutral” (Matthews 2009: 26). Hostel space is controlled and continually the domain of staff, predominantly enforced through the gaze of surveillance. However, not all space in the hostel is as subject to this gaze as others. Free places are areas of the institution that provide inmates with relief from the surveillance of staff (Goffman 1961).

Whilst they can be used for illegitimate activities they may simply represent freedom through escapism, being spaces in which inmates can cognitively distance themselves from the institution (Cohen and Taylor 1992). Due to the value of these spaces for inmates they

become 'owned' by different groups of inmates, with ownership denoting higher social group status within the institution.

In all closed and semi-closed institutions there are two basic groups differentiated by their exposure to the outside world: inmates and staff. However, within these groups, sub-groups also form. The inmate groups in the hostel form through a 'fraternisation process' based on social exclusion, shared experiences, attitudes and proximity to each other (Goffman 1961; Nielson 2012; Reeves 2013b). Within the hostel the inmate sub-groupings formed primarily around two distinctions of offence category and age: particularly the sex offender group and 'others', and younger offenders under 40 years and older offenders⁴. These groups can have territory in the hostel which they protect and which defines their group membership. The main spaces that were used in this way as a resistance to control were the foyer, smoking and non-smoking lounges (retaining these names after the smoking ban in the Health Act 2006 came into effect) and garden polytunnels. The majority of these spaces were 'owned' by the sex offender group due to comprising the majority of inmates (around 66-75 per cent of hostel inmates at any one time).

The polytunnels situated at the far end of the garden and not readily observed by staff or the CCTV coverage was the space most akin to Goffman's free places. Despite this, most residents did not want to spend time there and actively avoided it because the space was synonymous with older inmates convicted of sexual offences against children:

Julie was talking about her like for gardening in prison. I asked her if she did not want to keep it up in here, she said no "not here, I'd have to go down the bottom of

the garden with the sex offenders.” Liam: “it wouldn’t be safe for you anyway.”

Julie just nodded.

(Field notes 8-5)

Younger sex offender inmates tended not to utilise the polytunnels either, mainly because they wanted more entertainment and because the number of sex offenders in the hostels was so large that they often spilled over into other areas, particularly when the weather was inclement, so making the garden unattractive. Thus, the sex offender group also occupied the foyer and non-smoking lounge. The non-smoking lounge, while observable by staff if they deliberately entered the room (which they rarely did), was not covered by CCTV either. As this room was also used for staff meetings it was well-kept being clean and bright, which the older inmates in particular appreciated. The preference for this room by the sex offender inmates, and the lack of use by others was such that it had entered the cultural language of the hostel, being commonly referred to as ‘the nonce’s lounge’ by both inmates and staff alike (other, non-sex offender inmates tended to use the smoking lounge). Members of the same group often occupied the waiting area within the foyer and became known as “the gentleman’s club, though they are not so gentlemanly!” (Sam in field notes 19-9).

The foyer was of particular interest as this space had value to inmates not because of freedom from surveillance that it conferred on its occupants but rather because of the reverse. The foyer was located immediately inside the main door to the hostel and was directly observed from the main staff office. Inmates in the foyer were able to observe everyone who entered or left the hostel (and where they were going as inmates had to inform staff), also they were able to overhear inmates’ phone calls, as the payphone was located in the foyer and they were able to observe and overhear staff in their office. In short, the foyer

was a prime site for inmates to acquire knowledge. Space, therefore, is used by inmate groups to denote and maintain their group membership and also to control the flow of information about themselves and of others. In interview Joe and Simon commented that they and other inmates gathered most of their information about staff and their views on inmates by standing near open windows to the staff offices. Notably I observed this myself on occasion when staff were discussing sensitive issues in the office when inmates were sat immediately under the window, apparently raptly gazing across the car park, deep in contemplation.

Conclusion

The probation hostel explored in depth in this research complied with Foucault's theory of a total institution and Goffman's concept of a hybrid institution; being the exercise of disciplinary power in the pursuit of changing inmates to conform to socially acceptable (non-criminal) states of behaviour and thinking. The techniques of disciplinary power described by Foucault provide a useful framework for understanding the essential nature of the interactions of staff with inmates, as does the work on adjustments by Goffman to appreciate the responses of inmates to the exercise of that power. Through analysing the staff-inmate relationships in this way the great significance of small, mundane daily actions and reactions of all those resident and accommodated in such institutions can be understood in terms of being the battleground for personal control over inmates' self. Through appreciating their impact and using this knowledge to make themselves more aware of their own behaviours and work practice, staff may be able to become more effective in achieving the aims of hostels and wider probation work to manage the risks of sex offenders in their charge and support inmates' processes of desistance.

Further recommended reading

For an introduction to a range of prison issues and concerns including, prison culture, coping in prison, effects on family and different groups of prisoners, see: Crewe, B. and Bennett, J. (2012) *The Prisoner*. Abingdon, Routledge.

For further exploration of extracts from seminal works, including Foucault's *The Body of the Condemned* and Goffman's *Asylums, essays on the social situation of mental patients and other inmates* as well as Cohen and Taylor's *Time and Deterioration* see Jewkes, Y and Johnston, H. (2006) *Prison Readings: A critical introduction to prisons and imprisonment*. Cullompton, Willan.

Matthews, R. (2009) *Doing Time: An introduction to the sociology of imprisonment [second ed.]* Houndmills, Palgrave Macmillan is an accessible consideration of the sociology of imprisonment including space, time, control, adaptation and culture.

For a more detailed and thorough analysis of prison culture, adaptation and adjustment Crewe, B. (2009) *The Prisoner Society: Power, adaptation, and social life in an English prison*, Oxford: OUP is an exceptional account of research and also develops on the key works discussed in this chapter, which of course are also recommended as further reading for any student of this field of study:

Foucault, M. (1977) *Discipline and Punish: The birth of the prison*. London, Penguin.

Goffman, E. (1991) *Asylums: Essays in the social situation of mental patients and other inmates*. London, Penguin.

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⁴ For further discussion of the formation of these groups and the impacts of group membership for the members see Reeves (2013b).

⁵ Extended licenses are part of an extended sentence for public protection introduced in the Criminal Justice Act 2003 in England and Wales. They can be given to an offender over the age of 18 years for a specified violent or sexual offence if the court, at point of sentencing, judges the offender to pose a significant risk of harm to the public and a life sentence is not available or appropriate. In essence the judge determines the appropriate prison term and adds on to that an extended license period to be served in the community for up to a further 8 years. This can total no more than the maximum sentence allowed in statute for that offence.

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