THE UNIVERSITY OF HULL

Uncomfortably Numb: an exploration of affective carceral strains through the lens of the depersonalising young male prisoner

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by

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Abstract

The aim of this study was to examine depersonalisation as a dissociative coping response among male prisoners (aged 18-24). Its central focus explored how young adult males might employ depersonalisation, as a coping mechanism, when they feel unable to negotiate the negative emotionality of carceral strains through conventional coping strategies. As a learned coping response, that is rooted in pre-prison vulnerabilities, depersonalisation raises challenges to carceral well-being and adjustment to prison life. Narratives of depersonalisation experiences, before, during and after imprisonment, were gathered over an eight-month period using an Interpretative Phenomenological Approach (IPA). Due to the Covid-19 pandemic restrictions, it was not possible to carry out interviews face-to-face, so a research methodology comprising on-line semi-structured interviews, personal drawings and a story-board narrative of script-driven imagery was employed. Twelve former prisoners, currently on licence in the community, along with two prison officers and two prison healthcare workers were selected using a volunteer sampling framework. This was supplemented by email and telephone correspondence with organisations linked to the Criminal Justice System and the charity *Unreal*. The resulting data was initially coded into broad themes before being analysed using NVivo12 software. This study was motivated by the current paucity of literature into prison dissociation, particularly in how depersonalisation as an avoidant coping strategy, among young adults, is impacted by imported vulnerabilities, and the emotionality of the carceral environment (Viková & Bejgarová, 2021). Analysis of the results demonstrated that the former prisoners, believed negative emotionality around carceral strains, had led to wide-ranging depersonalising experiences, impacting both their well-being and adjustment to the prisoner society. Although not exclusive, the most common emotional carceral strains that were identified by the interviewees, included the loss of social support, prison boredom, the lack of security and the uncertainty of self-governance.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Overview

It has long been known that imprisonment creates pains or deprivations (Sykes, 1958). Through the removal of individual liberty, incarceration exposes the prisoner to adverse conditions that include, overcrowding, victimisation, uncertainty and boredom (Goffman, 1961). This results in negative emotional states being experienced such as anger, frustration and anxiety. Chronic and repeated exposure to these negative emotional states, will cause prisoners, to employ a range of coping resources to help deal with these unpleasant feelings (Mirowsky & Ross, 2017).

The aim of my study was to explore prisoner adjustment and well-being through the lens of young men (aged 18-24) who employ depersonalisation as a coping response. In this context, well-being was viewed as the inmates' ability to cope with imprisonment (Brown & Ireland, 2006). The study was guided by general strain theory (GST) whose empirical support originally derives from research into adolescent and young adult samples within the general population (Jang, 2020: 1608). Recently, this theory has been applied more broadly to include young offenders who experience strain within the criminal justice system including prison (Leban, 2016; DeLisi, 2011; Tewksbury, 2014). A range of carceral strains and coping responses to these strains have been explored, but there is currently a paucity in the existing literature in understanding how dissociative coping responses, including depersonalisation, may impact wellbeing and adjustment. The central tenant of my theory is that young men are the most likely, within the prison system, to alleviate strain-generated negative emotions by employing depersonalisation as a primary coping response.

Empirical support for this view comes from wide ranging quantitative research from community and clinical settings (Hillman et al., 2020; Haferkamp et al., 2015; Braehler, 2013;

Armey et al., 2008; Brown et al., 2005; Apter et al., 1997). In these studies, a strong negative relationship has been found between negative strain, depersonalised coping, and low social support among young adults. Millman et al. (2021), for instance, demonstrated in their study, how university college students would experience debilitating depersonalisation episodes during their examination season, leading to negative feelings of anxiety and panic. The students reported on one of the most common symptoms of depersonalisation, the feeling of not being present, and the inner turmoil that this causes. Such research also found that social support mediated their dissociative behaviours, helping to reduce negative affect, by providing context to their feeling states. Described as a distorted perception of the self, body and the present (Ruiz, 2008), depersonalisation represents a form of emotional numbing and cognitive detachment, which makes the individual feel like they have lost their touch on reality and sense of autonomy. A conscious awareness that their emotional and physical responses to the surrounding environment have become foggy, as though their head is wrapped in cotton (Ray et al., 2021). All of which results in a significant loss of agency in day-to-day functioning (Harrington et al., 2021).

Despite the relationship between dissociation and strain being widely studied in community and clinical settings, it is currently understudied in prison affects research. In fact, the few studies into dissociation that have been carried out, have focused on quantitative measures of frequency, duration and severity. These studies have suggested, however, that depersonalisation as a coping response is more common among prison populations than previously believed (Benton, 2020; Garofalo, 2017; Day, 2009; Akyuz et a., 2007; Brown et al., 2006). A view that has led Chaplo et al. (2015) to argue that it may be the prevailing coping strategy employed by young adult male prisoners. The reasons for why this should be are explored in my study, but according to Bales et al. (2012), prison is a place where a range of negative emotions, inherent in carceral strains, will not only challenge the young man’s assumptive worlds, but will also test their maturity, resilience and coping ability to the

emotional dissonance that they will feel as a result. To explore this further, I have set out three questions:

1. What are the characteristics of young adult male coping responses in prison?
2. How does the emotionality around carceral strains impact the employment of depersonalisation as a coping response among detained young males?
3. How do imported vulnerabilities impact the employment of depersonalisation as a coping response among detained young males?

From the outset, this study recognises that imprisonment is not uniformly devastating or inevitably damaging to young men. It also recognises that not all young prisoners will experience psychological deterioration with the same intensity and modality (Dye, 2010). However, for those where it does, there remains a duty to better understand the interaction between carceral strains and imported vulnerabilities, in preventing young men from successfully negotiating their adjustment to the prisoner society (Martin, 2018). This may go some way in helping to explain why young adults continue to have the highest recorded reconviction rates of any other age group (House of Commons (HOC) 2019), as well as representing some of the most resistant to penal initiatives including rehabilitation and resettlement interventions (Sharma et al., 2016).

A starting point for this exploration, is the widely accepted belief, that despite prisons being full of emotionality, young men feel unable to express their emotions openly through support seeking behaviours (Luke et al., 2021; Gonçlaves et al., 2021; Piper, 2019; Laws, 2019). A situation, according to Hemming et al. (2020: 1) that can lead to a debilitating, "build-up of emotional overload or an absence of prison emotions altogether". As Luke et al. (2021) argues, seeking social support may not only help to mediate the emotional negativity of imprisonment, by providing a conduit for releasing pent up feelings, but may also act as a buffer against future distress. There appears, however, to be an ingrained reluctance by

young men to emotionally ‘open-up’ or share feeling states. Instead, they tend to rely on masculine banter or superficial chit-chat (Laws, 2019). The reasons for this are varied, but are frequently generated, by the expectation that young prisoners’ may be exploited by appearing to be weak in front of other inmates. Piper (2019) also suggests that there may be a fear of coming across as needy to prison staff who may interpret this behaviour as attention-seeking or attempting to gain favourable treatment. The result is that young adults effectively turn their back on seeking social support within the walls and come instead to rely on outside support through family and loved ones (Cochran et al., 2017; Hutton, 2016; Bales & Moors, 2008).

This strategy, however, according to Pleggenkuhle et al. (2018), can at times prevaricate adjustment problems, because of institutional barriers and petty rules, which might prevent meaningful social interactions from ever taking place. Gonçlaves et al, (2021) for instance, has shown how social interaction between visitors and young prisoners can be stress inducing as well as stress buffering. Especially when relationships have become strained through enforced restrictions on visits, or rules around the amount of physical contact and intimacy permitted in the visiting hall. Inmates may experience more distress after the visit, than before, as they come to be reminded of their prison isolation, loss and estrangement. Dixley & Woodall (2012) also argue that besides visitation, other communication channels, such as telephone calls and letter writing, might prove problematic, because prison staff often place security above privacy and emotional intimacy.

As Schmid (2000) argues, prisoners will often require substantial social support at the beginning of their sentence as they face the emotionality of entry shock. Laws (2019: 6) believes that this is because entering the prison estate for the first time is characterised by a fear of the unknown. Over time this will recede, however, and be interspersed with long periods of boredom instead. The fact that further negative emotional challenges will continue to arise throughout the young adult’s prison sentence, will mean that the need for social

support is unlikely to diminish. He will come to learn, for instance, about the arbitrary nature of prison rules, and how they appear to shift and change continuously from prisoner to prisoner (Martin, 2018). The Incentives and Earned Privileges (IEP) system is often espoused to encourage individual responsibility and self-governance but has also been recognised as a formal sanction against breaking prison rules. A situation that raises considerable affective tension when 'grey rules' appear to underpin incarceration. Poor food, inadequate ventilation, and the absence of appropriate treatment interventions, will all add to the young man's affective discomfort, presenting credence to the view that carceral emotionality will become overwhelming and all-consuming at times (Hemming et al., 2020).

Given these realities, the emotionality that surround carceral strains, are likely to challenge the faculties of even the most adept at adjusting. For the emotionally immature young man lacking in resilience and control, however, these challenges will test to the full his ability to use effective coping strategies in negotiating these emotions. A situation that will prove even more arduous to achieve if he comes to rely on previous maladaptive coping behaviours (Shulman & Cauffman, 2011). Compounding this as Price (2021) argues, is the fact that beyond 18 years of age, young adults continue to develop neurologically. This impacts both behaviour and cognitive reasoning and means that their actions and responses are already going to be quite different from those who have reached adult capacity.

Brown & Ireland (2006) have suggested that the presenting barriers for young men to share feeling states, combined with their relative lack of emotional intelligence, is one of the main reasons why they rely on maladaptive coping responses. A view supported by Laws & Crewe (2016: 534) who found that young prisoners often cope with incarceration by suppressing rather than opening up to their emotions, so as to "decrease the visible display of interior feelings". The externalising effect of this suppression is often characterised through periodic 'bottling-up' and 'lashing-out' behaviours in the same vein as Freuds (1923) notion of strangulated effect. A hydraulic metaphor whereby feelings are kept in check until

the pressure exceeds the capacity of the person. Jenzer et al. (2020) noted that the young prisoner may also seek to cope by engaging in forms of emotional annihilation through substance and alcohol misuse or self-harm. Such forms of psychological escapism represent an integral part of the prisoner society, by assuaging negative emotional states, and acting as a survival strategy, which aims to transcend the walls of the prison by creating imaginary feelings of being on the outside. Other inmates may participate in types of edgeworks as a coping response, where risks such as instigating fights or smuggling contraband are used to elicit a temporary sense of control over their environment (Lyng, 1990). Ibrahim et al. (2015), found that young inmates would often combine these activities with adaptive avoidance strategies such as extended periods of sleep or daydreaming to escape their emotional dissonance. Rocheleau (2015) also found that some may at least be able to use their restricted resilience as a buffering agent, to engage in more adaptative forms of coping, including goal-orientated involvement in prison activities and programmes.

The extant literature suggests that young male detainees will use a range of coping strategies that may incorporate elements of some or all of these. However, there is also persuasive evidence that they are likely to continue to employ maladaptive dissociative coping long after more adaptive strategies should be in place (Kerig et al., 2015; Bennett et al., 2014) Wadsworth & Berger, 2011). This, according to Lainidi (2021: 3) is because prison environments are characterised as emotionally depriving, traumatic and subordinated, and therefore, "likely to trigger the psychopathological traits accompanying dissociation, resulting in a worsening of their dissociative symptoms". Carrion & Steiner (2000), for instance, found that 68.3% of 16–24-year-old offenders, in their study, displayed an identifiable dissociative disorder. They also found that not being 'present' had unwanted consequences which seriously compromised the young prisoner's ability to adapt to the prisoner society. As Vuk et al. (2019: 2) argue, "the level of adaptation [to prison] will influence how inmates occupy their time while incarcerated". So, the young man's continued reliance on depersonalised coping, resulting in a low level of adaptation to prison, is likely to lead to even more

draconian forms of coping, including self-injury and suicidal ideation (Harrington et al., 2021; Altintas & Bilici, 2018; Vaughn-Coaxum et al., 2018; Ruchkin et al., 2007). Although not being present, through the employment of extreme avoidance coping, may appear to be an undesirable state, it still represents an improvement on the affective damage that the emotionality of the carceral environment is imposing. The paradox is that any conscious attempts to suppress these emotional states can lead to its maintenance (Lanius, 2015).

Gresham Sykes, in his seminal book *The Society of Captives* (1958: 64) presented prison pains or deprivations as being “deliberately inflicted on inmates or as planned or even unavoidable aspects of incarcerating large groups of criminals”. Comprising the removal of liberty, autonomy, goods and services, interpersonal relationships, and security, these pains were cast as the main factors affecting adjustment to incarceration. Since that time, however, further contemporary pains have been forwarded through prison affects research that have included the emotional impact of carceral loneliness, boredom, victimisation, deteriorating mental health and uncertainty (Benton, 2020; Crewe, 2018). Laws (2018: 7) believes that the young male prisoner is likely to be, “disproportionately affected by the emotionality” inherent in these modern carceral pains, because of their relative lack of emotional maturity, and the deleterious impact of imported vulnerabilities that they may have brought with them into the prison setting (Fenimore & Jennings, 2021; Slap, 2020; Facer-Irwin et al., 2019; Slotboom, 2011; Ruiz et al., 2008).

This is a view long held by importation theorists, who argue that an inmate’s eventual level of adjustment, is more likely to be influenced by factors external to the prison environment rather than within it. Irwin and Cressey (1962), for instance, suggested that adaptation to imprisonment is a reflection of the lifestyles and other pre-prison characteristics of prisoners (Dhami, 2020). So, the fact that young inmates tend to behave more anti-socially in prison, is due to them finding it harder to adjust to prison life, which means that they will engage in more aggressive behaviours as a coping strategy. Age, in this instance, is the imported

factor that will influence the young adult to behave in this manner whether in a prison setting or any other setting. More recently, developmental and life-course criminologists have widened these importation factors by exploring the impact of early relational disturbances and deleterious poly-victimising experiences among those who become involved with the criminal justice system (Fenimore & Jennings, 2021; Slap, 2020; Facer-Irwin et al., 2019). Ruiz et al. (2008), for instance, found that there was a clear relationship between experiencing adverse childhood experiences (ACE's) and dissociative disorders among forensic populations, suggesting that the origins of dissociative coping may lie in adversity that precedes imprisonment, but is likely to be employed and maintained as a learned coping response within the prison setting.

This lends credence to the argument that an explanation combining both deprivation and importation models may best explain prisoner coping and adjustment for young men. This still leaves unanswered, however, a long running debate as to whether these influences are likely to be experienced as a short or long-term phenomenon (Slotboom et al., 2011). An important consideration when much of the prison effects literature has presented a view that prison 'pains' tend to be short-lived and most often associated with 'entry shock' which all inmates cope and adjust to over time (Liebling, 1999; McCorkle, 1993; MacKenzie et al., 1985; Wormith, 1984). Incarceration has been considered as not unlike a 'behavioural deep freeze' (Zamble and Porporini, 1988), where despite a temporary period of disorientation, and anxiety around the absence of family and friends, inmates will be able to settle into prison life without much adjustment and then resettle back into community life upon release (Bolton et al, 1976). This process of prisonisation, first coined by Clemmer (1958), will lead the inmate through the first weeks of their sentence and re-position them as members of the prisoner society. In so doing, adaptive rather than maladaptive coping strategies will eventually come to frame the young man's adjustment to imprisonment (Piper, 2019).

There is evidence, however, that young prisoners may lack the resilience and emotional maturity to realise these adaptive coping strategies, and that maladaptive coping behaviours may frame their whole prison sentence. Gonçalves et al. (2021), for instance, found that there was no observable decrease, for young men, in adjustment problems over time, despite a range of coping behaviours being observed. Similarly, Vuk et al. (2019: 3) found that younger inmates appeared to pass through their sentence by alternating between passive prison coping (i.e., spending hours in mindless television watching) and more maladaptive avoidant dissociative coping responses that did little in helping the inmate to assimilate into the prison culture. In this way, the young man came to rely increasingly on strategies that did little to aid integration, and in fact presented competing barriers to prisonisation ever taking place (HMI Prisons report, 2021; T2A, 2018; House of Commons Library Report, 2018; Howard League, 2017). According to Martin (2018), the process of prisonisation can only ever take place once the inmate comes to realise that imprisonment is not going to change but their appraisal of the situation can. The employment of passive or avoidant coping responses, therefore, is going to do little to help this realisation (Haney, 2007). It may be true that depersonalised coping can prove functional in the short-term, by temporarily numbing their emotionality from a particular carceral strain. But as Grabe et al. (2000) argues, it is also likely to contribute to the prisoner's stress, because of feelings that they have become trapped in the dissociative fugue of which they have little control. As it is maintained, it deprives the young inmate of the possibility to reflect cathartically on their feelings or move towards integrating them into a more coherent representation of their prison reality. The use of dissociation, therefore, becomes a form of self-harm, that emotionally removes the young prisoner from his reality and prevents acceptance into the prisoner society. It is within this context that my research sets out to explore the deprivation, importation synthesis of coping through the lens of the depersonalising young adult male prisoner.

In the second chapter of this thesis, I will review the existing literature, beginning with a discussion of the nature of emotionality within the carceral setting, along with how young men manage their affective dissonance through the employment of specific coping responses. Alongside the original pains of imprisonment cited by Sykes (1958), a disaggregated approach has been presented to highlight how contemporary carceral strains may disproportionately impact on the young male prisoners' well-being and prison adjustment. These carceral strains are set out as the erosion of social support, the proliferation of prison idleness, the loss of conjugal relationships, uncertainty of self-governance and the fear of victimisation. A further discussion will then explore how these carceral strains may be mediated by depersonalised coping responses. Finally, the origin of dissociative coping is examined by reviewing current research into early attachment disruption and subsequent complex-trauma experiences commonly referred to as the school-to-prison pipeline.

Following on from the literature review, the methodology chapter (chapter 3) will begin by restating the studies main aim and research questions. It goes on to define depersonalisation, coping and adjustment in the specific context of young adult male prisoners', and explores the reasons why Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was used as the main research instrument. Next, how I gained access to and recruited the research participants, along with the sampling technique employed will be discussed. The interview schedule, process for capturing participants drawings, and storyboarding using script-driven imagery will be outlined along with how the data was transcribed, initially coded into themes, and then analysed using Nvivo12 software. A consideration of the ethical issues involved in this study is set out. Finally, the challenges of employing online forums as a valuable source of research gathering will be examined. The subsequent chapters cover the findings of this study, supported by quotes from the participants.

Chapter four explores the characteristics of the young adult males coping responses to imprisonment, thus addressing the first research question. It begins with participant first-person accounts of the coping styles that were employed during their prison sentences and how successful they felt each to be in terms of maintaining well-being and adjusting to the prisoner society. An exploration is then undertaken of what it was like to experience depersonalisation in prison and the general impact this coping response had on day-to-day functioning and adaptation to prison life. The chapter concludes with participant accounts of how depersonalisation affected their cognitive, behavioural and emotional functionality along with how episodes of depersonalisation might be triggered and maintained, and the strategies employed to end the dissociative state.

Chapter five examines participant accounts of how the emotionality around carceral strains impact the employment of depersonalisation as a coping response. This addresses the second research question. It begins by exploring the five pains of imprisonment forwarded by Sykes (1958) but in the context of young adult male prisoners. Subsequently, five contemporary strains are identified and examined. These comprise the erosion of social support, the proliferation of prison idleness, the uncertainty of self-governance, and the fear of security and safety. Each of these strains are explored in relation to their impact on depersonalised coping.

Chapter six explores how imported vulnerabilities impact the employment of depersonalisation as a coping response in prison, thus addressing the third research question. It begins with participant accounts of their early childhood attachment experiences with caregivers and childhood coping responses. Looked-after experiences are also examined. It subsequently moves onto to explore narratives around the education-to-prison pipeline including educational achievement, employment histories, neighbourhood influences including gang membership, and other forms of victimisation growing up. Each of these imported influences are explored in relation to their impact on depersonalised coping.

The concluding chapter draws together the main themes of prison deprivation, importation and depersonalised coping to demonstrate how this synthesis can made a unique and significant contribution to current criminological thinking. It continues by reflecting on the present dilemma faced by policy makers when confronted with a particular cohort (young adult males) that appear not to respond to prison in a way that will lead to recidivism or successful resettlement back into community life. The affective strains of incarceration are re-visited in the light of how the prison estate could re-shape present barriers to emotionality and the positive impact that these small but crucial changes would make. Recommendations are then advanced. The chapter ends by examining the strengths and limitations of the present study and provides several suggestions for future research directions into depersonalisation among prison populations.

Justification for the present study

Whilst there is a wide body of literature that acknowledges the vulnerability of juvenile offenders in prison, it is only recently that the needs of young adult prisoners (aged-24 years) have begun to attract critical attention (Price, 2021). This is despite the detrimental impact of age on prison adjustment being known for some time (Ireland et al., 2005). One of the consequences of this omission, is that specific institutions[1] that house young prisoners, currently only accommodate 6% of the 18-25 years population. The remainder being dispersed among the wider adult prison estate (HM Inspectorate of Prisons, 2021). A situation that has attracted stern criticism because of the immense challenges that the criminal justice system faces in dealing with young males in main-stream adult prisons (T2A report 2012[2]; Farrington et al., 2012).

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[1] Examples of YOI include Feltham, Aylesbury and Deerbolt.

[2] Transitions2Adulthood: Pathways from crime report (2012).

Born out of their youth and immaturity (HMI Prisons, 2021[3]; Prior et al., 2012) young men have the highest recorded reconviction rates of any other age group (House of Commons report, 2019[4]) and are less likely to successfully engage in offender rehabilitation programmes (Sharma et al., 2016). Young men are also more likely to enter custody with poor mental health histories, often because of early relational disturbances, which are compounded by ongoing poly-victimising experiences into adolescence and beyond (Prison Reform Trust, 2019). Evidence for this comes from a government-led review into self-inflicted deaths in custody among those aged 18-25 by Lord Harris (2015)[5]. It concluded that all young people in custody are vulnerable because of poor mental health from trauma histories, and the corresponding poor coping behaviours that these traumas have brought about. A view that is further supported by longitudinal evidence[6] that has clearly shown how trauma exposure acts as a primary predictor for lowering levels of adaptive coping (Jenzer et al., 2020). Depersonalisation as a coping response has, therefore, been linked to early relational disturbances and poly-victimising experiences in several studies (Wolff & Sanchez, 2019; Altintas & Bilici, 2018; Ruiz et al., 2008; Moskowitz et al., 2004; Platner et al., 2003; Spitzer et al., 2003). However, it is still largely unknown how these imported vulnerabilities may interact with the emotionality of carceral strains in impacting prison adaptation patterns. Also, though, it is accepted that many older prisoners may have also experienced these same pre-prison vulnerabilities, the added disadvantage of psychosocial immaturity has previously not been explored.

[3] HMPI Report: Outcomes for young adults in custody (2021).

[4] House of Commons Justice Committee Report: Young adults in the criminal justice system (2019)

[5] Harris Review. Self-inflicted deaths in custody (2015)

[6] The Minnesota longitudinal study of risk and adaptation.

The ongoing debate around dissociation

There is clear empirical evidence that depersonalisation among prison populations is a common phenomenon (Geng et al., 2022; Zavattini et al., 2017; Aküz et al., 2007; Mitchell, 2006). It is also the case that there are greater levels of dissociative experiences among prisoners compared with community samples (Zavttini et al., 2017; Espirito-Santo & Costa, 2013; Moskowitz et al., 2005; Dietrich, 2003). Walker (2002), for instance found that 37% of his juvenile offender sample demonstrated pathological dissociation, whilst Ruiz et al. (2008) identified a 50% dissociative rate among a sample of 1515 young adult offenders. Figures that compare with community prevalence rates averaging between 1-3% (Lee et al., 2012).

Despite these findings, there continues to be a dearth of research literature that is willing to explore the qualitative dimension to dissociation in prisons. The reasons for this, are open to conjecture, but it is not helped by the concept of dissociation not being clearly perceived by the scientific community (Laindi, 2021). Controversy about what dissociation represents, how it manifests, the nature of its pathology, and whether it exists at all, has been debated since the beginning of modern psychiatry (Loewenstein, 2018). This is despite, as Brand (2016) argues, significant research into its prevalence, severity and heterogeneity, being complemented most recently by the employment of more structured quantitative measurements such as the Dissociative Experiences Scale (DES). Part of this problem is that dissociative disorders continue to represent semantically open terms that often lead to conceptual confusion, uneven diagnosis, and a perpetuating mystique for clinicians (Brand, 2016). A confusion that has led critics such as Lawrence Patihis (2021) to not only question whether dissociation can ever be considered a singular construct, but whether it in fact correlates with trauma in the way that it is often portrayed in academic literature.

Historically, the causes of dissociative symptomatology have been poorly understood and variously described as resulting from demonic possession, hysteria, and varying forms of

neurosis (Telles-Correia et al., 2018). Although Pierre Janet (1886) is widely acknowledged as coining the term (LeBlanc, 2001), his methodology for studying dissociation, was roundly criticised because of its unscientific nature. Janet's assertion, for instance, that dissociation constitutes the simultaneous existence of more than one consciousness in the same individual, was based on experiments in post-hypnotic suggestion conducted on Lucie, a 19-year-old who was prone to daily hysterical attacks that often lasted for several hours. Critics quickly claimed that she may have merely been a highly suggestible women, and that most of her hysterical symptoms may have originated from demand characteristics within the social setting (Mchugh, 1992). A criticism that was also voiced against Charcot's (1884) patients (Maehle, 2017: 197). Part of Janet's legacy, however, was in his assertion that traumatic experiences are central to dissociative phenomena; a view that would eventually give rise to the widely accepted but still contentious trauma model of dissociation (van der Hart & Friedman, 1989).

A good deal of the debate around dissociation is often crystallised in the dissociative condition of Multiple Personality Disorder (now dissociative identity disorder). DID is characterised as a trauma-led pathology where a person presents with more than one distinct personality, and in many cases several, that exist to serve the individual when faced with varying stressful situations. Unlike, schizophrenia, the sufferer has no conscious awareness of the differing alters that he or she possesses and can only trigger them as a coping mechanism when the dominant 'alter' or personality feels unable to cope. Critics such as Nicolas Spanos (1994) contests this view, and instead, suggest that these multiple identities are rule-governed social constructions, which are created, legitimated, maintained, and altered through social interaction. Using a socio-cognitive formulation, Spanos contends that sufferers learn to construe themselves as possessing multiple selves and reorganise their personal biographies to make it congruent with their understanding of what it means to have the condition. Not only do therapists then serve to provide legitimacy to these differing alters, but the media falsely portray multiple personality disorder in a 'Jekyll and Hyde'

scenario where good and bad personalities compete for supremacy. In so doing, they have created a mystique and exotic myth around dissociation that subsequent books, films and documentaries have played up to (i.e., The Three Faces of Eve; Voices Within; The lives of Trudie Chase; Frankie and Alice; Waking Madison). As Lilienfeld (2015), Piper (2004) and Lynn (2010), have each argued, once a syndrome is labelled, there is no shortage of 'experts' who are willing to identify it and treat it. Any scepticism or controversy that may subsequently arise about the condition is then met, not with its rejection as a scientific folly, but renaming it, as in the case of Multiple Personality Disorder to Dissociative Identity Disorder.

The damage done by both therapists and the media throughout the 1980's and 1990's has served to undermine the credibility of dissociation, and led to the ongoing debate that has persisted up to the present, despite substantiated research evidence that it is a genuine phenomenon. Scientists, for example, have carried out brain imaging studies using various neuroimaging techniques, including structural magnetic resonance imaging (sMRI), positron emission tomography (PET scan) and single photon emission computed tomography (SPECT) and found that the brain of those with dissociation is functionally different to those without the disorder (Reinders et al, 2003, 2006; Sar et al, 2001, 2007). In one of the largest studies, Vermetten et al (2006) looked at volume levels within the hippocampus and amygdala, where it is believed dissociative symptomatology may originate, and found that hippocampal volumes were 19.2% smaller and amygdala volumes 31.6% smaller in people with DID compared to those without DID. The researchers suggest that the hippocampus and amygdala are smaller in DID patients due to their histories of abuse, which further supports the trauma model of dissociative identity disorder. The formal inclusion of a dissociative subtype of PTSD (PTSD-D) in the DSM-5, has at last started to reflect the burgeoning clinical and empirical evidence that dissociation is a highly salient feature in those individuals who have experienced complex trauma histories (Hyland et al., 2020).

However, despite these robust and sophisticated measures for pathological dissociation being available, there remains a legacy of distrust around the nature of dissociation.

Scepticism about prison depersonalisation

Currently there are no screening services for dissociative related disorders in UK prisons. This is despite a recent HMI Prison report (2021: 10)[7] stating that it is vital to, "understand any vulnerabilities [of prisoners], by having a custody and rehabilitation officer (CARO) assigned early to carry out a full assessment on arrival to prison". This lack of screening for vulnerabilities mean that any underlying dissociative behaviours, are unlikely to be picked up on unless the prisoner himself comes forward (House of Commons report, 2021[8]). A situation that often proves problematic because many prisoners are either unaware that what they are experiencing, is in fact dissociation, or are reluctant to report their symptoms, through a fear of not being believed, or that they may be feigning their symptoms to gain favourable treatment (Loewenstein, 2018). Part of the scepticism towards prison dissociation is that the frequency, causation, and symptomatology for depersonalisation can differ widely based on individual differences such as age, gender and race (Lyn et al., 2012). Current epidemiological research in communities, for instance, indicate that females are nine times more likely to experience dissociation than males (Spitzer et al., 2003) and that this should be reflected within prison populations (Sar et al., 2007). However, this appears not to be the case. There are far fewer young adult female detainees than males[9], so it is difficult to draw parallels, but one reason for this, may be that female prisoners are more likely to be serving

[7] HMI Prison Report: Outcomes for Young Adults in Custody (2021).

[8] House of Commons Justice Committee Report: Mental Health in Prisons (2021).

[9] In 2022 96% of the prison population was male. Among 18-24 years old, there were 11, 369 of which 411 were female: UK Prison Population Statistics (2022) – House of Commons Library.

shorter prison sentences than males[10] and so are not faced with the same adjustment strains that may trigger depersonalised coping responses (Liu et al., 2021). It has also been shown that female prisons offer better social support systems including enhanced opportunities for keeping in touch with loved ones, especially for those inmates who have children (Wolf et al., 2019), a key characteristic in prison adjustment. One further reason may be that female prisoners are more likely to exhibit normative rather than pathological dissociative symptoms because female prisons allow for a greater sharing of emotions and feeling states (Spitzer et al., 2003). A meta-analysis carried out by Piper et al. (2019), for instance, suggests that female prisoners mix more freely together and older inmates often become surrogate mothers to younger female prisoners allowing them to be more emotionally open (Liu et al., 2021; Wolf et al., 2019). Thus, the opportunities for creating and sustaining personal relationships among female prisoners have a positive influence on adjustment that is absent for the young male, who is required to hide his emotionality behind a veneer of toughness, self-reliance, and independence within the hypermasculine prison culture (Jewkes, 2005).

[10] On average female prisoners serve less than six months confinement compared to males which is eighteen months.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Overview

> When stress strikes, depersonalisation may function as an experiential airbag, allowing the individual to deal with perceived dangers which would otherwise become overwhelming. Sometimes these protective mechanisms become stuck, and the person can become trapped outside of themselves, unable to inhabit their own experiences, feelings, and thoughts (Claunica, 2021: 153).

The young male prisoners' first experiences of dissociation are unlikely to be in a prison. As van der Kolk (2014: 149) contends, depersonalisation may represent, "a hidden epidemic that ends up filling our jails", but its origins are to be found in histories of childhood neglect and trauma. Despite this relationship between dissociation and trauma attracting considerable research attention within community and clinical settings (Downey & Crummy, 2022; Pfluger et al., 2022; Wang et al., 2021; Dye, 2018), the extant literature is particularly patchy when it comes to examining the same relationship within the criminal justice system. Similarly, although researchers have explored how dissociative coping may be linked to offending behaviours (Fenimore et al., 2021; Briere et al., 2016; Cerniglia et al., 2014; Dmitrieva et al., 2012; Carrion & Steiner 2000) the extent to which this coping vulnerability may play a role more specifically in prison adjustment remains undiscovered.

Brown & Ireland (2006) have argued that a combination of pre-prison adversity and age is likely to mediate at least to some extent the type of coping responses found in the carceral setting. They suggest that unlike younger inmates, older prisoners will find the transition from entry-shock-to-adjustment-to-acceptance more accessible as they have developed the emotional maturity to cope. A transition that is more challenging for young inmates who have distinct emotional and social vulnerabilities borne out of youth (Skowroński & Talik, 2018). This means that the young adult is less likely to be able to draw upon adaptive coping

strategies when dealing with the adult pains of imprisonment. A differential effect, according to Rossesser et al. (2021), that goes unnoticed in current prison effects research due to its primary focus on adulthood. Walker et al. (2017) argues that this results in little focus on how lived trauma, coping and age as imported characteristics, may impact on the young prisoners' ability to successfully negotiate the emotionality surrounding carceral strains. Limitations that the present study will explore through the following questions:

1. What are the characteristics of young adult male coping responses in prison?
2. How does the emotionality around carceral strains impact the employment of depersonalisation as a coping response among detained young males?
3. How do imported vulnerabilities impact the employment of depersonalisation as a coping response among detained young males?

The importance of exploring these dynamics becomes clearer when considering a recently published report by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons (HMIP): *Outcomes for young adults in custody* (2021: 5):

> *"In general, the outcomes are poor for young adults when compared with those for older prisoners (those aged over 25). Young adults have worse relationships with staff, are less likely to be motivated by the behaviour management schemes and are far more likely to be involved in violent incidents. They are also more likely to face adjudications, to be placed on the basic regime and to self-harm. They report more negatively on day-to-day life, including relationships with staff, the quality of the food and the cleanliness of their wing. In addition, young adults have worse attendance at education and work".*

The report went on to highlight how the chronological age of eighteen should not be seen as representing a sudden departure from childhood into adulthood, but instead be considered a maturation stage of emotional development that can last until a person's mid or late 20's. A

view supported by Cox (2011: 608) who found within her study that young men struggled to negotiate the strains of incarceration because as she put it, "part of the difficulty lies in young people's inability to either demonstrate change or be changed by interventions"*.* Assimilation into the prisoner society requires the inmate to utilise appropriate coping strategies in developing and maintaining friendships, and successfully negotiating prison rules. It also requires a desire to engage with prison programmes and having the emotional intelligence and resilience to accept their prison fate (Shenton & Smith, 2020). Paterline et al. (2016) doubts whether males so young can do this. Using general strain theory, he argues, that for those whose pre-prison lives have been marked by affective instability and adversity, the stress of imprisonment will lead to negative emotional states, such as anger and resentment, which will actively prevent acceptance ever taking place. Despite an outward appearance that they may be doing so. As Harvey's (2007: 37) study demonstrated, "the introverted, withdrawn but notionally obedient young prisoner may come across to prison staff as just doing their time, but this may be masking a prison life full of isolation, fear, shame and helplessness"*.*

The fact that most young men caught up in the criminal justice system have experienced trauma prior to imprisonment, is likely to interact negatively with the prison pains that they are going to have to negotiate as they pass through their sentence (Altintas & Bilici, 2018). Baglivio (2014) suggests that this is because there will be many carceral strains that will elicit similar negative feeling states to those that the young adult will have had to have confronted in their formative years. Without the emotional resilience to tackle carceral strains adaptively and the emotional intelligence to move towards acceptance, the resulting affective dissonance, causes the young man to have to resort back to those coping behaviours that proved to be successful in the past. As Laoide (2018: 515) argues, "this is because once a protective coping mechanism such as dissociation has been learned it can become habituated and automatic, predominantly occurring unconsciously and most often in times of stress".

Amirkhan & Auyeong (2007) maintain that coping responses are shaped by the situational demands of the environment in which the person finds themselves, along with the context of how they got there. Löffler et al. (2020), however disagrees, by showing that this represents adaptive coping responses only, where there is flexibility in how coping strategies may be employed. Maladaptive coping tends to be an instinctive learned response that is employed even if it is self-destructive. As Bennett et al. (2022) argues, the stress-response under these circumstances becomes one of avoiding the threat rather than confronting it. Thus, there is a clear delineation between past and present affective strains and the dissociative response that is employed to deal with them. When faced with a carceral strain that elicits similar feeling states to previous strains in the past, the dissociative response past and present becomes the same (Benning & Lahm, 2016).

2.2 Sykes pains of imprisonment

Sykes prison deprivation model was developed in his 1958 book: *The Society of Captives,* in which he identifies five key characteristics of prison life. These comprise the deprivation of liberty, deprivation of goods and services, deprivation of heterosexual relationships, deprivation of autonomy and deprivation of security. Presented as the main pains of imprisonment, Sykes was fully aware that by the time of his writing, prisons had moved away from the barbaric, physical assault on the individual that once framed incarceration (Haggerty, 2020). In its place, punishments aimed at a psychological level had appeared, that bring on negative feeling states, such as helplessness, anxiety, and isolation. Although attacking the prisoners' ego and sense of self-worth rather than their physical bodies, Sykes (1958: 64) nonetheless thought that "attacks at the psychological level (…) and the destruction of the psyche was no less fearful than bodily affliction". A view reinforced by Goffman (1961: 43) who spoke of the ritual psychological humiliations of the "loss of self-determination, autonomy and freedom" that bring about a mortification of the self. Or as

Foucault (1977) supposed, incarceration to be the 'detestable solution' where punishment is targeted at the soul rather than primarily of the body. The importance of this psychological context of prisonisation has subsequently been widely endorsed through empirical research. Milgram's (1963) study into obedience, for instance, concluded that under "certain circumstances, it is not so much the kind of person a man is but the situation in which he is placed that determines actions" (Craig, 2006: 130). Similarly, Zimbardo (1971) found that the behaviour of psychologically normal participants was dramatically altered when they were placed in a simulated prison environment.

Despite Sykes (1958) work being considered seminal in understanding prisoner adjustment, it has not gone without criticism. Harris (2015)[11], for instance, has argued that one aspect that can be questioned, is the uniformity with which he treats the prisoners in his study. That he presents his participants as an undifferentiated group of male prisoners', each facing the same pains of incarceration and experiencing them in roughly an equivalent manner. As Harvey (2006) suggests, through this uniformity, he never explored how differences in, for instance, mental health vulnerabilities may have a bearing on how the psychological pains of imprisonment are differentially experienced. A further criticism that has been laid against Sykes (1958) work is that he ignored how adjustment to prison life may be influenced from factors outside of the prison walls (Jouet, 2021; Horowitz & Stermac, 2018; Jiang & Fisher-Giorlando, 2002; Irwin & Cressey, 1962). A point that may be particularly pertinent to young adults who will bring age-related immaturities as well as trauma histories into the prison setting with them. By treating prisoners as a homogenous group, according to Jouet (2021), it misrepresents not only those marginalised from the mainstream prison population, but also impacts on policies that may be implemented within the criminal justice system that help support those prisoners' who have specific vulnerabilities and needs.

[11] The Harris Review: Changing Prisons, Saving Lives: An Independent Review into Self-inflicted Deaths in Custody of 18–24-year-olds (2015).

Lynch (2012) for instance, argues, that although young adult offenders have some of the highest rates of offending, and lowest levels of recidivism, there appears to be a sense of policy denial in treating them any differently than to the mainstream prison population[12]. A situation that is in stark contrast with those offenders under 18 years of age, where there exists a valuable opportunity for meaningful intervention, before they become career criminals. For child and juvenile detainees, (Smith et al., 2019), rehabilitation and resettlement intervention come under the auspices of Youth Offender Teams (YOT's) who use 'Asset Plus', a trauma-informed assessment and intervention framework. Its purpose is to allow assessments to be holistically followed through from the young persons' initial entry into the youth justice system to resettlement on release. A framework that has not only been widely highlighted as good practice, but specifically mentioned in a House of Commons Justice Committee Report[13] (2016: 17) which raised the question as to why the same provision is not also being provided for young adults. More recently, a report by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons (2021)[14] has continued this theme, by reiterating how the initiative to focus on 'growing-out' criminal behaviour for those under 18 years of age sets a positive agenda, whilst there still appears to be a policy vacuum for those young adults aged between 18 and 25. The report went on to point out that a considerable majority of young adults who have gone through the juvenile justice system, will find that the support networks that they had previously relied upon, would almost over-night disappear[15]. A view that the

[12] There is currently no system-wide statutory provision to differentiate the treatment of young adults in the criminal justice system from that of older adults.

[13] House of Commons Justice Committee Report: The treatment of young adults in the criminal justice system (2016): https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201617/cmselect/cmjust/169/169.pdf

[14] HMIP: Children in Custody (2021): https://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmiprisons/inspections/children-in-custody-2021-22/

[15] Young adults are currently held in 65 prison establishments, in a mixture of facilities: five are dedicated to 18- to 20-year-olds, others hold 18- to 24-year-olds, and the remainder are integrated with adults.

T2A Alliance[16] has been campaigning on since 2018, by arguing, that the sudden move from a young offender's institution to a mainstream adult prison at the age of 18, straddles a distinctive period of development which many young adults are not cognitively or emotionally prepared for.

There is an acceptance that not all prisons are operated in the same heterogenous way, and, in fact, there are some good practices that have evolved around giving special consideration to young adults needs (HMIP, 2021). This may include, for example, extended periods of time spent on the reception landing at the beginning of their sentence (Luke, 2021) or the assigning of a peer mentor who will look after the young prisoner in the first few weeks of their stay[17]. However, a Barrow Rowntree Trust report (2014)[18] found that despite these limited interventions, young inmates are unlikely to thrive in an environment that requires a level of moral reasoning and emotional resilience that is simply beyond them. A situation that in no small part is due to a carceral environment where blame attributions and the refusal to take behavioural responsibility, often seen in the cognitively immature young man, is likely to be continuously punished (Lahousen et al., 2019).

2.3 The Young male prisoners coping response to the pains of imprisonment.

Shammas (2014: 108) maintains that Sykes original prison 'pains' quickly became a "conceptual toolbox to critique penal institutions and a demonstration in how incarceration

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[16] T2A Alliance: Pathways from crime report (2012): https://barrowcadbury.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/T2A_Pathways-from-Crime_online-ver2.pdf

[17] HMIP Peer mentoring scheme (2021): https://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmiprobation/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2021/04/Academic-Insights-mentoring-and-peer-mentoring.pdf

[18] Barrow Rowntree Cadbury and Restorative Justice Report: Restorative justice for young adults: factoring maturity facilitating desistence (2014): https://barrowcadbury.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/m589_untapped.pdf

produces harm". That it achieves this aim is beyond reproach, however, one aspect that is neglected is in the variety of coping resources that prisoners employ to help deal with these harms. The importance of having an array of coping responses is highlighted by Armstrong and Jefferson (2017) who argue that prison pains will quickly cause illness, both physical and psychological, unless the prisoner maintains a constant cognitive and behavioural effort by being primed in adaptive coping resources. Although prisoners will experience the same carceral strains, it is how the prisoner appraises these strains and then uses their coping resources that is important. As Warr et al (2016) argues, it is for this reason that young men may be at a disadvantage, because when prison adjustment becomes conditional on the ability to perceive and react adaptively to carceral strains in a way that meets coping resources acquired over time, many young men are left wanting (Warr et al., 2016).

The bodies usual response to stress is to cope through a fight or flight response, something that is not possible, without severe recrimination, within a prison setting. Therefore, inmates must learn to adapt their physiological responses as best they can as they move through the various stages of their prison sentence (Frydenberg, 1997). This can be seen most clearly in support, acceptance, emotion, and avoidance coping behaviours that characterise the gradual adjustment to being a member of the prisoner society[19] (Reed et al., 2009). According to Cox (2011), the recently incarcerated prisoner will often react to entry shock at the beginning of their sentence by emotionally attempting to minimise their distress through affective denial, distraction, or suppression. In these early days, coping strategies tend to be defensive, detached and confrontational, as the young man attempts to understand their new lives. A reaction that is motivated through a fear of the unknown and the emotional climate of distrust and isolation that epitomises the carceral setting (Picken, 2012). Laws (2019) also found that there are frequent episodes of avoidance coping, where the inmate

[19] Prisonisation refers to how the inmate will first enter prison as an outsider but gradually through cognitive acceptance will become assimilated into the inmate culture.

will dissociate their feelings temporarily through periods of emotional numbing as the enormity of their situation starts to become realised.

After a while the disorientation of entry-shock starts to decline as they move into a new phase of engagement coping where the inmate will seek support from other prisoners and staff. They will begin to access prison services to gather information to protect themselves (Rocheleau, 2015) and accept institutional offerings such as activities and programmes that can be achieved within and outside of their cells. Rossesser (2021) believes that in order to move onto the final stage of their prisonisation there is a requirement that the inmate accepts, through cognitive readjustment, that prison is not going to change but they can. Crewe et al. (2017: 517) maintains that for most prisoners' this means "a shift from a form of agency that is reactive to one that is productive, as they learn to 'swim with', rather than against, the tide of their situation". Gradually, they will acquire an insider's perspective of prison life and modify their behaviour accordingly, by suppressing thoughts about the outside world, and creating survival niches that allow them more activity, safety, emotional feedback, and freedom within the carceral setting (Ferrer et al., 2010). For a minority, according to Tyler et al (2019) out of this process comes the opportunity for post-traumatic growth[20], where the prisoner will rationalise where they have gone wrong in their lives, and start to plan around long-term objectives, like parole. In so doing they will seek to develop the skills necessary to resettle back into community life. Although it is only to be expected that prisoners' will at times, regress back to previous coping responses, they will do so in the context of acceptance and adjustment to the prisoner society.

With respect to younger prisoners, Haney (2008) contends, that there is little reason why they shouldn't be able to adapt to prison life in the same way, by practically gaining knowledge about prison rules and schedules and socially interacting with staff and inmates. DeVeaux (2013) doubts, however, whether the young man has acquired the level of

[20] Post-traumatic growth is characterised by an acceptance with life as it is but a yearning for new possibilities.

resilience and emotional maturity to first get him through entry-shock, and then be cognitively flexibly enough to accept and adapt to the changing demands of the carceral setting. A view supported by Gallo and Ruggiero (1991: 285) who argue that many young male prisoners will instead seek ways out of their perpetual state of "constant anxiety, through disengagement in forms of psychological absenteeism". As Chung et al. (2005) found in their research, even after a considerable length of time in prison, the young male appears not to have moved away from their initial emotional crises because they do not want to accept the reality of their imprisonment or the world that they are being forced to join.

Harvey (2007: 41) in his book: '*young men in prison: surviving and adapting to life inside',* believes that this situation is not helped, because many enter incarceration in a very vulnerable state mentally, which then becomes compounded by the carceral strains that they are emotionally ill-equipped to deal with. He went on to describe how "psychologically, they continue to be swamped with excessive thinking, plagued by feelings of uncertainty and a debilitating fear of continually being locked in their cells" (59). He found that there was an overall feeling that they were not in control of their thoughts and emotions but instead at the mercy of them. Emotions that would subsequently trigger cyclical avoidant coping responses preventing the young man from ever reaching a point of prison acceptance.

Edgar & Tsintsadze (2017) found that this sharply contrasted with older inmates who become open to approach coping where the prisoner seeks advice and emotional comfort from others within the prison walls. Conversely, for the young man, there comes a belief that prison is not a place where it pays to be emotionally weak and so become affectively stifled by their powerlessness and fear. Brown & Ireland (2006) believe that in the absence of an alternative prison culture to aspire to, or even an option to reject the only one in place, the young inmate is forced to mask inmate distress through a hypermasculine veneer whilst slowly removing themselves emotionally from their environment. As DeVeaux (2013) argues, in so doing, they walk an affective thin line between hiding their real feeling states from other

prisoners' and staff whilst attempting to deal with them through varying coping behaviours that have a moderating effect on their carceral reality. The emotional catalyst of prison life, therefore, becomes one of young men who are dealing with carceral strains on the surface, whilst underneath fragile egos and complex vulnerabilities, constantly trigger the depersonalised response (Cox, 2011).

2.4 Revisiting the pains of imprisonment: a disaggregated approach.

The preceding sections all paint a picture of how young male prisoners not only represent a marginalised group, but also how they have become a lost voice to how imprisonment may differentially be harmful to them. A reality that has become exacerbated over the past few decades by a social policy shift away from prison rehabilitation and resettlement towards one of social control and containment (Laws, 2019). As Bullock & Bunce (2020: 111) maintain, "rehabilitative interventions are [now] perceived to be self-serving in rationale (…) ill-resourced, superficial in approach and unlikely to engender change". In its place has arisen a form of 'soft power' where rational choice coupled with token economies has created an expectation that a compliant prisoner is a model prisoner (Brazëo et al., 2018). A philosophy achieved through instruments such as indeterminate sentencing, the distancing of the prisoner-officer relationship, and the much-maligned 'Incentives and Privileges Scheme' (IEP). Subsequently, the modern young prisoner not only has to negotiate Sykes (1958) original deprivation of the loss of liberty but has also to deal with making the 'right choices' amid the uncertainty inherent in soft power which comes to dictate how much freedom the prisoner has within the walls. Similarly, alongside their loss of autonomy, the young prisoner now finds himself mindful that self-governance is unforgiving unless he remains pro-active in managing his own prison sentence, and that the IEP system will inevitably operate 'grey rules' that will need careful navigation.

‘Soft power’ has been lauded as a positive intervention because it gives prisoners’ the opportunity to earn additional privileges and shorten their sentences[21]. The Howard League for Penal Reform (2019), however, believe it to be a political agenda, pushed by successive governments attempting to outcompete each other in terms of being tough on the causes of crime. An agenda that has led to a dramatic increase in prison populations despite central funding being ‘frozen’, impacting both staffing levels and resources within the prison walls[22]. Consequently, the young prisoner is faced with not only having to manage the fear of safety that comes from this overcrowding but is also confronted with the indirect consequence of prison idleness due to resources becoming increasingly depleted (Vuk & Doležal, 2019).

These contemporary carceral strains do not make Sykes (1958) original pains any less visible but have merely added an additional layer of emotionality that the young male will find disproportionately difficult to negotiate (Luke, 2021). Prison boredom, uncertainty and the erosion of meaningful social support, creates a dysphoric ruminating strain of negative thoughts and emotions that the young man finds increasingly decentring (Nolen-Hoeksema et al., 2008). Instead, in a desperate attempt at avoidance, depersonalisation often becomes the catalyst for their maladaptive coping response (Morrison & O’Connor, 2008).

[21] Criminal Justice Hub: https://www.criminaljusticehub.org.uk/task/what-is-the-incentives-and-earned-privileges-scheme-ieps/

[22] The prison population of England and Wales quadrupled in size between 1900 and 2021, with around half of this increase taking place since 1990: Prison Population Statistics – House of Commons Library.

The loss of intimate social support

The first deprivation that Sykes (1958: 68) wrote about was the loss of liberty, which removes the inmate from the wider society. Western et al. (2015: 1516) argues that although "separation from the community may remain the fundamental fact of incarceration, it does not represent the only pain that this deprivation brings about". An unintended aspect of the loss of liberty is the slow erosion of meaningful social contact with family, loved ones and friends. As young men are unlikely to seek social support with fellow inmates or staff within the prison walls, those outside, play a crucial role in helping to negotiate for the young man the transition from community to imprisonment. (Dhami et al., 2020; Cox, 2011). Hobbs et al. (2000), for instance, found that young prisoners were only willing to interact with prison staff at an instrumental level, by asking them for practical support in completing forms or other administration matters. They rarely approached staff about emotional difficulties in coping. Alongside this, young men were also wary of forging friendships with other inmates because of a fear of being seen as weak within a hierarchy of power which is organised around an inmate code of hypermasculinity (Gonçalves, 2021). Social support from prison visits, therefore, assists the young man to accept prison life by helping him to develop a positive identity and optimistic attitudes.

As Crewe (2021) argues, adjusting to the role of an incarcerated individual, whilst finding their place within the prison hierarchy, all contributes to the stress of imprisonment. This means that young men may have to glean as much meaningful social support from outside of the walls as they can if this strain is to be mediated (Wolf et al., 2004). Yet many prisons limit this outside social contact (Mjåland et al., 2021), despite Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons (2021: 10) clearly recommending "that family ties are kept strong for young adults". A key objective because visits clearly correlate with greater emotional security and more settled levels of prison adjustment (Kirkpatrick et al., 2018). Instead, as Shammas (2017) found, institutional barriers preventing or curtailing intimate contact between the young

prisoner and loved one, can be found at various levels, and all impacts its cathectic properties.

Critics of catharsis theory suggest that although it may sound elegant, there is little scientific evidence to support a view that aversive emotional states such as frustration, anger and aggression will dissipate just because it is expressed cathartically (Bushman et al. 1999). In fact, cognitive neo-association theorists, posit that certain affects may actually contribute toward the onset of aggressive feelings or behaviours because aversive events may automatically stimulate responses associated with the fight or flight response (Berkowitz, 2012). In this sense, fight associations will give rise to rudimentary feelings of anger, whilst the flight association will lead to rudimentary feelings of fear (Bushman, 2002: 725). The act of venting, therefore, rather than cathartically reducing negative emotional states, will instead tend to give rise to further feelings of anger and frustration (Anderson & Bushman, 2002). Furthermore, this anger and frustration may well trigger a spiraling situation that exacerbates feelings of aggression that are then often displaced onto the source of the aggression including other individuals (Lawrence & Andrews, 2004). It has been suggested that venting doesn't work even among people who believe in the value of venting, or among those individuals who reported feeling better after venting (Berkowitz, 2012). This is because as Bushman et al (1999: 368) contend, a common misconception about catharsis is the view that just because it feels good, then it must be healthy. In the same way that people may feel good after taking drugs, this does not mean that the behaviour is a healthy one.

The fact that most prisoners have little opportunity to physically fight or flight from their adverse environment, means that rumination often comes to exacerbate negative affect leading to increases in anger and aggression. Lawrence & Andrews (2004), for instance, observed how prison crowding affected inmates' perception of aggressive events. The researchers found that prisons with higher crowding positively correlated with inmates' stress, as they came to interpret events or behaviours within the prison setting as

aggressive. As Crewe (2012) found, the venting of anger and frustration of prison overcrowding through aggressive acts, such as smashing up cells or starting fights on the prison landings did little to discharge pent up adverse emotions as suggested by catharsis theory. Laws (2019) however, found, that catharsis requires that the prisoner first interacts with the emotion rather than just venting it. Step one of catharsis is feeling what you feel, whilst step two is then finding a way to release it often through giving it a voice. Using the metaphor of a pressure cooker, Laws found that many prisoners initially attempted to deal with the buildup of steam by suppressing their emotions. The problem with this approach was that the pressure cooker was likely to explode periodically, leaving the prisoner facing infraction charges and still hiding from their negative affect. A second approach was to periodically siphon off some of their steam through distraction tactics such as substance misuse. A tactic that in the short-term may prove effective but may leave the prisoner having to face the full wrath of their emotions once they have returned to the status quo. A third approach was to turn down the flame of the heat through mentally reframing and coming to accept their situation. In this sense, catharsis can be achieved by ‘feeling’ through their emotions during prison visits (Mieles, 2019), letter writing (Curci et al. 2021) or journalling (Pemebaker, 1997). In more progressive prisons, participating in events such as psychodrama where prisoners can ‘act’ out troubling events from their past might also prove cathectic (Testoni et al. 2020). Even simple behaviours such as employing humour within the carceral setting could help prisoners to face up to and release emotions (Sanberg & Tutenges, 2019).

It is perhaps ironic that getting closure requires opening-up, even though there is a good chance that this will make the prisoner feel worse before it makes them feel better. Dissociation comes into play when legitimate avenues for cathartically releasing emotions becomes stifled or blunted in some way. In these instances, as Geng et al, (2022) found, depersonalised coping quickly becomes a maladaptive alternative to any diminishing level of

social support, a means of numbing absorption to the maelstrom of emotions that the young men are experiencing.

Cochran et al. (2013) argues that despite good intentions from prison staff, there remains a considerable heterogeneity of prisoner rights around visitation that may affect inmate behaviour, coping and adjustment. In particular, far too often the visitation experience is judged as an event that happens or not, rather than one that may vary in quality and quantity. Tartaro and Lester (2009), for instance, have found that visitation quality is often diluted because the prison is significantly over-stretched, in terms of human and structural resources. They also found that some prisons may invoke arbitrary and indeterminate rules centring around privilege levels, sentence status and visitor demand. Overcrowding in one prison, may mean that the young male is moved at short notice to another prison many miles away, leaving family, friends and loved ones with a considerable travel and financial burden if they want to visit regularly (HMI Prisons Report, 2021: 9). Paterline et al. (2016), also found that many prisons, such as HMP Full Sutton, are in rural areas, which makes it difficult for visitors to access using public transport. Further restrictions on visitor numbers mean that the inmate is often not able to see his whole family together and is therefore forced to make decisions about who should visit and when. Marder (2013) also found that low-level operational challenges are often used as excuses to cancel visits or shorten their length. Pernicious practices such as not allowing a visit close to an inmate's release, or restrictions around physical contact and emotional privacy within the visiting hall, all adding to prisoner frustrations. Monahan et al. (2011) concluded that whether restricting physical contact by placing tables between chairs in the visiting hall or refusing to allow a married couple to cuddle or hold hands except briefly at the beginning and end of the visit, the prisoner is denied an emotionally cathartic 'safe space' by which he can express his true feelings.

This deprivation of meaningful contact is likely to cause the distress intolerant young male to harbour intense negative emotions of anxiety, frustration, and sadness, which they are then

faced with dealing with alone (Geng 2022). Unable to divulge any meaningful intimacy during the visit, the young prisoner is reduced to general 'chit chat' that does nothing to purge the suppressed and numbed emotionality bubbling away inside (Laws, 2019; Crewe, 2011). As Toch (1989: 70) argues, the importance of these forms of communication cannot be underestimated as "the absence of these points of contact can often become the 'weathervane' of an "individual's emotional instability".

Unfortunately, penal frustrations are not just restricted to visits. As Gill et al. (2016) argues, prison is created not only to keep people in but also to keep undesirable influences that might upset the order of things out. For this reason, prison management must control to an extent the circulation and passage of letters, telephone calls and other objects across the walls. However, a fine balance must be forged in terms of the extent to which these restrictions are enforced, and privacy maintained. Shabazz (2014: 582) considers the exercise of writing letters, for instance, as "essentially a spatial act where through this liminal space, prisoners can circumvent prison walls and create a more porous and less total environment". That is, it dissolves the distinction between prison and community life, and acts as a form of emotional venting. Armstrong and Jefferson (2017) believe, however, that many prisoners are denied this simple, but important pleasure, because of petty restrictions around how many free letters they can send, or the fact that they are frequently not allowed to have the original copies. Instead, inferior quality black and white copies of photo's, cards and letters, are given to prisoners' which all but remove any intimacy that the originals may have provided (Laws and Crewe, 2016). As Ferguson (2018) maintains, letter writing is not just about the writing and reading from a sheet of paper but interacting intimately with an actual material object that had once been held by their loved ones. The exchange of letters cements bonds and allows the prisoner to share a bit of themselves intimately on paper; to express their fears, frustrations, and anxieties without having to let them fester inside. As Bales (2019) suggests, letter writing may help to prioritise problems and track symptoms day-to-day, so that the inmate can recognise triggers and learn better ways to control them.

Most important of all, letter writing provides an opportunity for identifying and releasing negative thoughts and behaviours, without which, the young man may distance themselves through self-destructive numbing and avoidance behaviours.

This perceived violation of intimacy that prisoners experience through the vetting and defacement of written correspondence is also, unfortunately, often replicated in telephone conversations. In-cell telephones have still to be rolled out in most UK prisons, despite the technology being widely available, so calls must be made using the phone booths situated in the recreational area of each wing. As an HMI Prison Report (2016: 22)[23] points out, since most prisoners on the wing have "association at the same time, these phones quickly become overwhelmed with long queues often forming". This not only results in intimate conversations being almost impossible but more widely amplifies the perception that there is little point in using telephone conversations to help manage feelings (Geverde, 2014). Aggravating this lack of privacy are the other constant sources of noise pollution on the landings, including shouting among inmates, and the playing of loud music which distract and frustrate in equal measure (Shammas, 2017). Because of the queues for the telephone, the young men cannot say exactly when they might be able to call, which makes it difficult for those receiving the call, and frequently association times are switched at short notice or cancelled all together which means access to the phone booths are denied (Bales, 2019). For the young man used to instant methods of communication on the outside, this situation impacts acutely and creates enormous frustrations. Thus, the loss of liberty may be the intended pain of imprisonment, according to Sykes, but it is the unintended emotional strains of this pain that is likely to instigate the dissociative coping response.

[23] HMI Prison Report: living in prison (2016).

The proliferation of prison idleness

The second deprivation that Sykes outlined was the loss of goods and services. On entering the carceral setting, prisoners very quickly realise that they do not have the right of ownership, and even though their basic needs are met, they are forced to live in what Sykes (1958: 68) describes as "a harshly spartan environment". The simplicity of lifestyle that prison entails, replaces the consumer market that the young prisoner was used to on the outside. Instead, they quickly realise that material representations of status are not readily available and what may have been considered as a 'given' no longer exists. Bengtsson (2012) argues, that this deprivation from goods and services, takes on an added affective dimension, for young adults, because it removes the very technology that on the outside, they relied upon for much of their stimulation. As Crewe (2020: 346) found in his study, "many prisoners' referred specifically to the sense of disorientation that resulted from the inaccessibility of mobile technology – the inability to use Google, and the jolting reminder of not having a phone by their bedside on waking each morning". As Fischer et al. (2017) argues, the internet represents a huge source of entertainment, connectedness, and vocational efficiency, which becomes the fulcrum around which many things that are meaningful to the lives of most young adults are grounded. There is a considerable risk, therefore, that prisons are disproportionately over-punishing young men because of this deprivation. A situation that has been allowed to arise despite a recent report on introducing technology into prisons (2020: 2)[24] concluding that "prisoners and staff perceived that the accessibility of in-cell telephones, self-service kiosks and laptops would be a significant improvement on previous arrangements".

Eastwood et al (2012) refers to the resulting loss of stimulation that arises from this technological absence as a cognitive void, or unengaged mind. A situation in which the

[24] Ministry of justice: evaluation of digital technology in prisons (2020).

young man is no longer able to successfully mediate attention or seek motivation in environmental stimuli. Craig (2006: 175) found that prisoners referred to this situation as "pulling time, as if it were a weight", highlighting the stark contrast between vacant, empty prison time and the intense rhythm of normal life outside of the walls. As O'Donnell (2014: 176) put it, "time descends in your cell like the lid of a coffin in which you lie and watch it slowly close over you". To fight the negative feeling states of estrangement, anger, anxiety and loneliness that arise from this condition, the young prisoner adopts a depersonalised coping response to find relief from their catastrophic thinking (EP: IC, 2021; Allison et al., 2017). As van Tilberg et al (2011) suggests, the continuation of prison idleness will quickly merge into hyper-boredom where the sense of emptiness, meaningless and paralysis of agency, forces the young man to depersonalise for longer and more deeply.

Despite prison boredom not being a recent phenomenon, overcrowded prison conditions, now result in chronic understaffing and a significant cut in resources which has meant that prisoners are no longer guaranteed employment or training opportunities. Instead, they must spend longer periods sitting around in their cells doing nothing (Dharmi et al, 2020; Crewe & Laws, 2018; House of Commons Committee, 2017). A recent HMIP report[25] (2021: 25), for instance, highlighted the fact that many young adults spend less than two hours out of their cells on a typical weekday. As a 21-year-old Morris (1995: 203) wrote in his diary of prison life, "for me, and many like me in prison, violence is not the major problem; the major problem is monotony. It is the dull sameness of prison life, its idleness and boredom, that grinds me down".

Eastwood (2011) argues that this empty but continuous void of prison time stretches out into eternity and runs contrary to the young man's psychosocial disposition to live moment-to-moment. Depersonalisation becomes a survival response to monotonous and purposeless prison living, which is devoid of novelty or excitement (Howard League, 2017; Transition2

[25] HMIP Report: Outcomes for young adults in custody (2021)

Adulthood, 2016). In this way, according to Bengtsson (2012), modern prisons have brought about a contemporary version of Goffman's (1961) 'total institution' where inmates, who once, would have paid for their keep in terms of productivity, now find that one day merges into another as idleness, boredom and monotony shapes their existence. It slowly ebbs away any goals or drives that the young man may have come into prison with, and the future becomes ever more impossible to contemplate as tomorrow becomes as irrelevant as today (van Tilberg & Igou, 2008).

Shalev (2008: 14) found that prisoners in this situation would begin to find reality and their own ruminating thoughts hard to distinguish between, and that for many, the absence of external stimuli becomes so great that they create their own fantasy worlds in which to escape. She reported how one prisoner would attempt to regulate emotions by regularly leaving the "body and travelling in the outside' world". This was not as a daydream, but an out-of-body depersonalised experience which the prisoner found increasingly difficult to come back from, "I would go up and out of prison and fly over the beaches and mountains (…) sometimes it was really, really hard to come back'. As Liebling (1999: 107) concluded in her prison studies, "empty time accounted for much of the difference between suicide attempters and other prisoners', with inactivity the central variable in the context of prison suicide".

The loss of conjugal relationships

The deprivation of heterosexual relationships is the third of Sykes' pains of imprisonment. An involuntary celibacy which represents, he argues, a figurative castration, which is both physically and psychologically debilitating. As Goffman (1961) suggests, it arises from one of the key features found in a 'total institution', the barriers that exist preventing social and sexual intercourse between the inmate and the outside world. Such barriers are an expected

consequence of incarceration, but for the young male prisoner, it is the “physical rather than sexual intimacy that these social interactions afford that proves to be the most depriving aspect of prison life” (Anderson-Nathe, 2008: 56). As Haney et al (1997) argues, the absence or loss of such physical contact, effectively deprives the young male of his most meaningful and sympathetic social interactions and removes a key tool in accepting his prison reality. Martin (2018) suggests that this deprivation of meaningful contact may cause the distress intolerant young male to harbour intense negative emotions of anxiety, frustration, and sadness, which they are then faced with dealing with alone. In the absence of approach coping skills, the young man, inevitably ‘bottles-up’ his emotions until eventually they are vented in frustrated aggression (Malik & Wittkowski, 2015). The resulting loss of privileges and spells of solitary confinement, caused by these infractions, will instigate internal states of depersonalisation as a means of avoiding their perceived helplessness. Through this dissociated state, the young prisoner becomes increasingly dispossessed from both the prison environment, it’s culture and those on the outside, until he comes to ‘feel’ nothing at all.

This lack of intimacy is most keenly felt in the absence of privacy. As Meyer et al (2017) maintain, despite UK prisons continuing to prohibit privacy between loved ones, wider literature based on models adopted in other countries, show its potential benefits in reducing violence (including sexual violence), promoting rehabilitation, and maintaining family life whilst inside. Mitchel et al (2016) also believes that the impulsivity which leads to these negative conduct behaviours are likely to be dampened if privacy visits were to become attached to an earned privilege system, as in other countries, which can then be revoked if needed.

Uncertainty of governance

The fourth pain of imprisonment is the deprivation of autonomy. Sykes (1958: 75) pointed out that the way in which inmates are denied self-determination, or the ability to make choices, “infantilises them into becoming ever more reliant on the institutionalised structures that have been enforced”. Coyle (1994: 27) went on to suggest, that this is often achieved through a series of public humiliations and forced acts of deference which consequently mean that prisoners become “to all intents and purposes a passive player to whom things [are] done”. This type of loss of autonomy represents a prison system that has now largely vanished. Replaced instead with what Crewe (2011) refers to as ‘soft power’ where prisoners’ through self-governance and individual responsibility are given more freedom to shape the decision-making process governing their sentence.

Soft power may appear to be an appealing alternative to what went before. But as Taly et al (2020) maintain, this prisoner empowerment may in fact create new emotional strains, for the young male prisoner, that does not necessarily improve overall their lives and their membership to the prisoner society. In fact, what Giddens (1991) refers to as ontological insecurity, has increased rather than decreased affective strain, as the young inmate is now tasked with self-policing through a myriad of ‘grey rules’ that effectively mean they become “the agent of [their] own incarceration” (Crewe, 2011: 519). As Harvey (2007) found, every prison has 500 rules, of which they will enforce 50 of them at any one time. But the prisoner never knows which rules they will decide to enforce. An ethos that many young adults are neither able to comprehend or invest in. Under these circumstances, the only rational choice for the detained young man, becomes one of opting out. As a HMIP report[26] (2021: 17) found, “prisoners aged 18-24 were significantly less likely than those over 25 and over to be placed on the top level of the IEP system because they are less motivated by these types of

[26] HMIP Report: Outcomes for young adults in custody (2021).

behaviour management schemes and do not respond to them in the same way as older prisoners".

The physical degradations and humiliations that once reinforced the power relationship between inmate and guard, and which Goffman (1961: 11) referred to as the 'mortification of the self', has been slowly replaced by power brinkmanship, where inmate compliance requires self-discipline, and a willingness to participate without question (Butler et al., 2018). As King and McDermott (1990; 81) explain, "the relationship between prison staff and inmate has been relocated in the bureaucracy of paperwork, which shapes sentence lengths, privilege levels, re-categorisation, and employment opportunities". As one prisoner in their study explained, "they don't beat us anymore – they don't have to. They can win by using bits of paper. It's all a mind game now" (King and McDermott, 1990: 373). This shift to self-determination has resulted in a buffer zone being created between the prisoner and the traditional physical restraints of incarceration. But in so doing, has increased the affective uncertainty of imprisonment because of the arbitrariness and indeterminacy arising out of the 'grey rules' that prevail (Crewe, 2011). As Guadalupe (2021) argues, this power relationship instigates an uncertainty that plays on emotional vulnerabilities. Through increases in stress, anxiety and negative rumination, the young prisoner attempts to reconcile feelings of not-knowing set against a backdrop of punitive consequences for getting it wrong. As Taly et al (2020) suggests, the uncertainty of self-governance correlates negatively with the young man's developing psychosocial maturity. As a result, they come to no longer trust in their tacit assumptions about how to behave because of a constant fear of getting it wrong. It creates 'Marmite' justice where either you are accepted by prison staff or rejected with nothing in between. As one of Crewe's (2011: 513) study participants explained, "they let one man do one thing, but the next man they say no". In this way, as Hanna-Moffat (2000: 523) argue, rather than empowering the young prisoner, "individual responsibility and self-governance uses obliqueness as a tool of social control".

Cox (2011: 599), found that contemporary prison governance created an emotionally stifling environment. Most young people in her study, ended up engaging in incentive programming purely because it was seen as a chance to be "released sooner" rather than realising long-lasting behavioural change. The expression "fake it till you make it" was often used by staff and young people to describe the ways in which this was performed (Cox, 2011: 597). Similarly, Halsey (2008: 218) found that those young prisoners' demonstrating an "unwavering respect" for authority and yielding to the institutional regime, were in fact just "playing the system" and displaying no more than a form of learned helplessness. Despite an appearance, therefore, at outwardly supporting the prison regime through docility and compliance, the young male is in fact engaging in distress tolerance (Leyro et al., 2010).

The ambiguities inherent in the uncertainties of self-governance, strongly motivate young men to manage their affective dissonance by either reaffirming their allegiance to prison norms and accepting its regime (van der Bois, 2009), or to keep not knowing through emotional avoidance and detachment. As Crewe (2011: 59) put it, "some prisoners choose to live highly ascetic existences, rejecting privileges including televisions and sometimes mattresses, in order to avoid dependence and sidestep institutional power". The most common coping strategy, however, is to display a surface persona of appearing to be responding positively to the institutional regime through levels of compliance, but at the same time psychologically resisting them through the depersonalised coping response (Shalev, 2008: 20).

The fear of victimisation

Sykes (1958: 78), refers to the loss of security as the "prisoner [being] continually anxious about their own safety". Haney (2007) extends this definition to the young male prisoner by suggesting that he either feels vulnerable to potential physical attacks and lives in constant

fear because of it, or may not feel physically vulnerable, yet still worries because of the risk of being coerced into doing things against his will. As a result, most young men never feel completely safe in prison because, even though, they may only encounter occasional violence, the intimidation and victimisation that often precedes this violence is an ever-present reality (Van der Helm *et al.,* 2011). Teasdale et al (2016) found that the anticipation of being a victim of violence and intimidation far outweigh the actual levels found in prison, however, this still doesn't console the frightened young male who is forced to maintain an alertness through hyper-vigilance (Blitz *et al.,* 2008). A situation that is not helped by their relative level of immaturity. As Gonçalves (2021) points out, the young prisoner may find emotional difficulty in ignoring provocations such as pejorative jokes, criticisms, and insults without resorting to lashing-out retaliatory behaviours.

Prisonisation coerces the young inmate to develop an outward emotional and behavioural prison 'mask' that conceals internal feelings and reactions (Morse, 2017). As Haney (2012: 14) puts it, "many young men develop an impenetrable, defensive shell to prevent anyone from ever truly knowing them, because prison is a place where others readily exploit such knowledge to manipulate or harm or threaten to do so". Consequently, as Jewkes (2005: 56) found, prisoners emotionality waxed and waned due to the "exacerbated demands of the performative masculine culture which effectively blocks all pathways to help-seeking". This hypervigilance brings on an emotionally exhausting dimension to prison life. The young male must express a masculinity that rejects any notion of weakness or vulnerability (Murray, 2020) and be prepared to constantly appraise their surroundings with an almost forensic mind (Haney, 2012; Lynch, 2012). As War (2016: 590) puts it, "every inmate must be aware of every interaction, conversation, bodily movement, glance, laugh, smile, and even yawn to ensure it is not causing offence, being taken out of context or rendering the prisoner vulnerable in the eyes of peers". Piper et al. (2019) documented the detrimental psychological impact of this, by citing both frightening and unsettling emotional strains that demoralise, debilitate and which bring on constant ruminating worry and panic. A view

supported by Haney (2009) who argues that such affective pressures lead to a blunting of affect for the young prisoner, as they reject direct forms of support, and manage their fear through a fragile manufactured veneer of hypermasculinity. The banality of prison violence means that acts of victimisation are deeply ingrained within the prison culture. Laws (2019) suggests that most inmates do not even believe them to be particularly exploitative and are often played out purely to create a temporary atmosphere of excitement and distraction.

Under these circumstances, it is not surprising that the young adult finds himself involuntarily confined and isolated to his cell through fear of what might await on the landings (Morse, 2017). But as Harvey (2007) contends, even here respite is not guaranteed. So called, “window warriors” intimidate by shouting out names or cell numbers and ordering forfeit tasks to be carried out (Archer, 2002: 27). Others, intimidate through the constant and relentless banging of water or heating pipes or the screaming of hate obscenities that can be heard throughout the day and night from one wing to another (Rice, 2016). This excessive and incessant noise creates mental fatigue that impairs judgement, reduces morale, and triggers physiologic stress responses bringing on sleep deprivation and further journeys into depersonalised numbing behaviours. As one prisoner explained, in Charrier’s study (1970: 354), “it’s depressing to hear men shouting, weeping, or moaning for hours or even days on end (…) thanks to my wandering amongst the stars it was very rare that I ever had a lasting despair. I got over them pretty fast and quickly invented a real or imaginary voyage that would dispel the black ideas”.

Rice (2016) found that most young men quickly learn to find safety in social invisibility, by becoming as inconspicuous and unobtrusive disconnected from others as possible. This self-imposed social withdrawal and isolation meant that they retreated deeply into themselves, trusting no one, and maladaptively living this prison fear by leading isolated lives of quiet desperation. In many instances, especially when combined with prisoner apathy and the loss of capacity to initiate behaviour on one’s own, the pattern evoked the

dissociative response. As Taylor (1961: 54) wrote, the prisoner comes to “show a flatness of response which resembles slow, automatic behaviour of an extremely limited kind, and he is humourless and lethargic. He has given in and responded by deciding to take his mind elsewhere”.

2.5 Imported vulnerabilities and depersonalisation as a coping response

To understand why young prisoners, lack the resilience and emotional maturity to assimilate successfully through prisonisation, and feel it necessary to resort to dissociative coping responses, it is important to explore their pre-prison lives. The deprivation model posits that incarceration is a unique and negative experience that demarcates prisoners’ current and future lives from their pre-prison ones (Slotboom et al., 2011). Haggerty (2020) disagrees with this view and instead suggests that by focusing only on what happens within the prison walls, it denies imported influences on prisoner adjustment. A view forwarded by Clemmer (1940) in his book: ‘*The prison community’* (1940), in which he argues that the prison culture is encapsulated in the beliefs, attitudes and behaviours that inmates bring with them into prison from the streets. John Irwin and Donald Cressey (1962) in ‘*Thieves, Convicts, and the Inmate Culture’* explored how these attitudes and behaviours are influenced through the urban and lifestyle influences that help shape prisoner adjustment (Lahm, 2009) and from this, other importation theorists have gone on to focus on specific influences that may cross the prison walls. Wright (1987), for instance, has explored educational exclusion as an importation factor, finding that not only are individuals who do not go beyond high school more likely to be imprisoned, but they are also more likely to carry out disruptive infractions whilst in prison. Similarly, Fin (1995) reported that lives lived in fragmented communities are positively correlated to crime, imprisonment, and subsequent higher rates of disciplinary infractions. Gillespie (2003) found that prisoners who had been unemployed prior to imprisonment or were from a racial minority background struggled to cope with prison

adjustment, whilst Toch & Adams (2001) found similar experiences with those prisoners with a history of alcohol, drug use or homelessness.

Early caregiver attachments

From the 1970's an emerging field of developmental and life course criminology attempted to widen the importation debate (Fenimore & Jennings, 2021; McGee *et al.,* 2021; Mazerolle & McGee, 2020; Hutchinson, 2018). Using social support theory (Cullen, 2011), comparisons were drawn between attachment experiences, social support infrastructure, and social control. According to this theory, families and social networks not only function as sources of informal control that discourage delinquent behaviour, but they also provide instrumental, informational, and emotional supports that may protect individuals from other risk factors for delinquency (Umberson, Crosnoe and Reczek, 2010). Agnew's (2006) general strain theory suggests that this social support fosters resilience and legitimate coping behaviours in the face of strain by promoting prosocial adaptations. Adolescents with conventional social support are in a better position to manage strain in a nondelinquent manner because these supports offer a way to avoid or navigate strain and encourage nondeviant coping mechanisms. Consistent social support, therefore, has multiple benefits, including promoting self-control, lowering levels of anger, and forming strong social bonds, which in turn contribute to prosocial behaviour and fewer problems with mental health and criminal behaviour. Where this social support appears to break down, and is at its most disruptive, is when the child and later adolescent has faced adverse early attachment experiences and ongoing poly-victimisation.

Despite differences in life histories, one factor that unites the backgrounds of most young male offenders, is in the profound instability issues they have experienced because of loss, insecurity, or neglect during developmentally critical periods (Sascha et al., 2019). A view

supported by Silvern et al. (2012) who found in their study that 81.9% of young offenders who had been sentenced to a prison term had been exposed to childhood maltreatment and neglect. A census carried out by the *Youth Justice Board* (2008) of every child and young adult imprisoned over a 6-month period in England and Wales categorised how this neglect was distributed. They found that 76% of those in the study reported having an absent father, whilst 47% had on at least one occasion (most multiple times) attempted to run away or abscond from the family home or care facility because of abuse or neglect. A further 39% in the report were subject to a child protection plan because of actual or allegations of neglect, and 13% had experienced the death of a parent or sibling (Schofield et al., 2012). Bob (2015), in his study, found a disproportionate number of young offenders had witnessed domestic violence; whilst Mazerolle & McGee (2020) highlighted a significant increase in parents with alcohol or substance misuse among young adults within the criminal justice system. Further research by McElvaney et al. (2016) found that one in three young males attending child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS) had been in looked-after care and had subsequently been in contact with the justice services. Findings that highlight the considerable overlap between young people in the care system, child and adolescent mental health services, and the criminal justice system.

Giesbrecht et al. (2007) found that even those children who have documented histories of physical or sexual abuse, rather than emotional neglect, have experienced inconsistent and contradictory care-giving behaviours, a prerequisite for the formation of dissociative coping responses. The American Psychiatric Association (APA, 2018) for instance, believe that up to 90% of those with a deposition towards a dissociative disorder have developed this as a maladaptive coping response to early attachment maltreatment often resulting from unpredictable, uncertain, or absent parenting. Research by Ansbro (2008) has furthered this argument by establishing a clear relationship between offending behaviour, early disorganised caregiver attachments and the onset of depersonalised coping. He used Liotti's (1992) founding proposal that the dissociative response is a result of a fear-without-solution

paradox that becomes inherent in dysregulated interactive strategies between the caregiver and child. Ansbro's research went on to show how often, frightening approach and avoidance behavioural signals given off by the caregiver, causes the child to become confused by how they should respond (Mazerolle & McGee, 2020; Lyons-Ruth et al., 2006). According to Mazerolle & McGee (2020), this affective inconsistency brings on intolerable distress for the child because of an emerging perception that the external environment and people within it cannot be trusted. Unable to fight-or-flight, the child is forced instead to stifle their agency by avoiding these paradoxical interactions as best they can. And so, begins the dissociative process as the child attempts to reconcile the affective dissonance that they are experiencing by emotionally numbing and detaching their feeling states (Grimshaw et al., 2011).

According to Hesse & Main (2006) this fear-without-solution paradox manifests when parents of disorganised infants engage in frightening interactions with their children, thereby presenting them with the view that the parent is both a source of threat and a source of protection. Whilst the caregiver is employing approach-seeking behaviours, the child will continue to emotionally use the caregiver as a source of protection and comfort. During retreat behaviours, however, he or she will realise that they can no longer rely on the caregiver for emotional support, and so will withdraw their own emotions through numbing and detachment responses. Much of this maladaptive caregiving behaviour, manifests in them displaying confusion about how they should respond to their child. In so doing, they present contradictory affective communication errors such as appearing emotionally distant one moment and then emotionally expressive the next (Downey & Crummy, 2022). This happens because for many young parents, an obsessive focus on being a full-time parent is often combined with a simultaneous anger because they believe they must sacrifice every other aspect of their lives, thus creating a deep resentment. This confusion is often exacerbated when feelings of failure as parents might emerge, especially when they receive contradictory information from professionals about how they should respond to their child

(Zulueta, 2011). Parents with addictions, age-related emotional immaturity, or having been maltreated as a child themselves, all appear prone to having this characteristic deficiency in developmental empathy towards the child. It is not abuse or wilful neglect in the truest sense, because there is no clear intent to harm the child, but the interaction between the caregiver and child becomes openly deleterious (Lyons-Ruth et al., 2006).

The challenge faced by children caught up in disorganised attachment relations is how to integrate a care-givers paradoxical behaviour. Behaviour, which appears to swing aimlessly between becoming frightened when the child becomes upset, to emotionally distancing themselves altogether by leaving the child to cry themselves to sleep (Mosquera et al., 2014). As Lyons-Ruth (2006) argues, these disorganised patterns of attachment will inevitably bring about, in the infant, a fight-or-flight response that they are unable to fulfil given their dependence on the caregiver. Fear-without-solution leaves the child with little choice, therefore, but to employ freezing behaviours that come to manifest as dissociative coping. In this way dissociation becomes a habitual response to unpredictable or contradictory affection given off by the caregiver. What Freyd (2005) refers to as 'betrayal blindness' perpetuates this dyadic relationship because they will perpetuate feelings of guilt by blaming themselves rather than their caregiver for what is happening to them. By taking the blame, being bad and keeping the caregiver as an idealised figure in their mind, they retain a sense of control in the face of otherwise unbearable helplessness (Freyd, 1997). In the end, the child's survival is better ensured by being blind to the betrayal and emotionally isolating the knowledge of the event, thus remaining engaged with the caregiver.

This is a controversial view because is assumes that traumatic memories can be repressed in a manner where the individual remains unaware of them even though they affect everyday living (Patihis et al., 2014). A view suggesting that dissociation keeps the young brain in survival mode, because it cannot endure the constant state of fear and acts, therefore, as a protective 'bubble' by keeping the individual unaware of the distress that the caregiver is

placing on them. More of interest, is whether these memories of emotions become 'visible' in adulthood, or as Levine (1997) suggests change as current cognitions change. Patihis et al. (2019: 1126) for instance proposes that, "as a memory trace of an emotion fades over time, a person relies on current cognitive appraisals of the past situation when reconstructing the memory of how he or she felt". This would suggest that dissociative coping patterns do persist into adulthood and are therefore likely to be imported into prison. As Garrett (2010) argues, when a child is belittled sarcastically by a parent, they may develop feelings of inadequacy and shame, which will trigger their dissociative response. As an adult in prison, similar situations where inadequacy and shame arise once again will trigger the same coping response because more adaptive coping strategies have never been allowed to develop. In this way, depersonalisation does not simply disappear quietly into some hidden corner of the mind but continues to actively play out the state of self, constantly testing tolerance to direct experiences (Golshani et al. 2020). As Gentile et al. (2014) argues, even when the threat has passed the brain is still saying danger. This is especially the case within the emotional cauldron of the carceral setting where controlling, inconsistent and paradoxical behaviours among staff and prisoners replicate patterns of contradictory approach-retreat attachment relations that were first experienced as a child (Fennimore & Jennings, 2021). Without the ability to fight or flight, the young prisoner resorts to the same freezing behaviours once employed as a child.

In contrast, young adults entering custody with secure attachments, can use their developed store of resilience and adaptive coping resources to cognitively adjust and reach out for social and psychological support (Lyons-Ruth et al., 2006). As Fonagy et al. (2020) argues, this is the reason why many young adults can successfully negotiate prisonisation and refrain from reoffending on release. They will be able to regulate their thoughts and emotions to manage the initial 'entry shock' of imprisonment, and then over time use adaptive coping strategies to adjust to prison life. Haggerty (2020), however, contends that young men who do not experience this consistency in early attachment relations are instead likely to import a

weaker level of emotional intelligence and resilience into prison, and be over-reliant on previously employed maladaptive coping strategies. The shock of prison entry triggering the young inmates 'freeze' coping responses once more, which then become perpetuated as he faces more affective dissonance.

Despite a large body of evidence supporting the disorganised-depersonalisation hypothesis, it has faced sharp criticism, because of its deterministic approach (Altintas, 2018; Cook et al., 2016; Bennet et al., 2015). The fact that many detained young adults have experienced early disorganised attachments but do not have to resort to depersonalised coping, lends credence to the view that other mediating factors may be present (Braehler, 2013). Cherie (2012) identified for instance, that even when a child has experienced disorganisation, a secure attachment forged with a significant adult figure later in the child's life, will help to mitigate against the impact of early adversity by restoring a sense of safety and emotional stability. As van der Kolk et al. (1996) asserts, intervention up to and sometimes beyond adolescence may help the young person to reframe their sense of self-hood and identity, as long as they are placed in a pro-social environment that goes on to nurture links with school, community, and neighbourhood. According to Brazão, et al. (2018) it seems therefore, that only those children who have initially experienced early attachment disorganisation, but then go on to face further exposure to poly-victimising experiences, are most predictive of maladaptive dissociative coping in early adulthood. A view that has support from a large-scale longitudinal study[27], that found exposure to disorganised attachments in childhood, to be a significant predictor of maladaptive dissociation, but only if the individual had both experienced attachment disorganisation, and subsequent intervening (complex) traumas in later childhood and adolescence.

From this research, Jenzer et al (2020), concluded that the genesis for pathological dissociation may lie in early attachment disorganisation, but its maintenance through

[27] The Minnesota Longitudinal study of parents and children (1975)

adolescence and into adulthood, is founded through more complex adversities involving social and educational marginalisation, fragmented neighbourhoods and gang involvement. A life course theory that Slap (2020) has termed the school-to-prison pipeline.

Educational marginalisation

Literature debating the relationship between academic success and offending history has primarily focused on individual variables such as gender, race, and ethnicity. More recent research by Wolf et al (2013), however, has begun to explore the impact of early relational disturbances that may leave children with long-lasting trauma histories, and a resulting deficit in crucial psychosocial coping skills including empathy, altruism and resilience. Without these coping skills, children are likely to struggle to keep up academically with the challenges of school life, because they do not have the perseverance or resilience to return to tasks that they have initially struggled with (Maniglio, 2013). Its absence means that self-awareness, self-control and flexibility in behaviour is likely to be compromised, leading the child to become withdrawn and prone to avoidance rather than employing help-seeking behaviours. Gemeda (2014) further argues that trauma histories are also likely to affect emotion regulation and impulse control that the school child will need to negotiate around the classroom. The transition to school from homelife is a difficult process for most children, but the complexities inherent in trauma histories often compound these challenges psychologically, socially, and academically (Dube & Rishi, 2017). The low educational achievement and the higher chance of exclusion that result, have been identified as an important risk factor for offending behaviours (Farrington, 2015). As the Timpson review into

school exclusions[28] found, a causal relationship exists between being excluded, crime and custody.

Consequently, educational underachievement among young males, is highly prevalent among those caught up in the criminal justice system. According to an Office for National Statistics[29] report in 2022, over a third (36.9%) of young adults in custody, had also a correlating lower level of educational attainment in English and Maths. A large share of those young adults, were identified as vulnerable during childhood, leading to more than half (52.9%) being persistently absent during schooling, and three quarters (72.2%) having been excluded from school at least once (many multiple times). This compares to just 9.0% of those without a criminal conviction. As Goldson (2005) argues, both socially and emotionally, these young men represent one of the hardest cohorts to reach educationally in terms of ill-discipline, motivation, and anti-social behaviours.

Benjamin (2015), believes part of the problem for this, lies in preconceived expectations by the young men, borne from previous attachment issues, that adults, including teachers, should not be trusted. This causes them to become risk-adverse, displaying little enthusiasm for educational success because of a fear that it may subsequently be negatively reinforced through arbitrary praise or criticism (Goomany et al., 2016). Hale et al. (2019) found, for instance, that disenfranchised males are often hypersensitive to anything that may appear to evidence their deeply negative self-image, and quickly become frustrated at even the easiest of tasks, finding it unbearable to be wrong or make mistakes. This reinforces and exacerbates their existing low self-esteem and low sense of worth and leads to a belief that they are 'rubbish' at everything they do. That, it is not worth trying, no matter how positive

[28] Timpson Review of School Exclusions: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/807862/Timpson_review.pdf

[29] ONS: https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/educationandchildcare/articles/theeducationandsocialcarebackgroundofyoungpeoplewhointeractwiththecriminaljusticesystem/may2022

the encouragement from teachers (Myers, 2018). This is then represented by sudden outbursts of aggression, followed by prolonged periods of withdrawal and detachment, which mark their stalling educational journey. Subsequently, such behaviours are often interpreted by teachers as anti-social behaviour, which lead to further segregation and exclusion (Lindsay et al., 2006). In this way, the emotional stunting caused by early attachment disturbances appear to transition seamlessly into the classroom.

Social poverty and ’problem’ neighbourhoods

Segregation and exclusion from school will mean that the young person ends up spending more of their time on the streets. Although not all young people who become involved in the criminal justice system are from ‘problem’ neighbourhoods, research does support the view that these are the areas that attract the most delinquent, anti-social and offending behaviours (van Ejik et al., 2012). Airaksinen et al. (2021), for instance, argues that growing up in ‘problem’ neighbourhoods, mean that young men quickly become aware that they have little in the way of social capital to offer, and therefore become lost to poverty which in turn attracts them to gang life. As Massey (1996: 395) suggests, this state of anomie becomes the “undesirable corelates of poverty” as joblessness, crime, family dissolution, drug abuse, alcoholism, disease and violence take hold. Forrest & Kearns (2001) argue, it is important not to blankly stereotype young people in ‘bad’ neighbourhoods as being unable to maintain crimeless lives, however, the absence of family support and protection often provides the narrative backdrop and dystopian view of the neighbourhood as a place of conflict, disorder and fracture.

Consistent with social disorganisation theory, structural and compositional characteristics of the neighbourhood, including poverty, abandoned and derelict infrastructure, and crime is likely to hinder any community pride or sense of belonging (Markowitz et al., 2001). Kingston

et al. (2009), for instance, argues that in communities primarily comprised of single parent working families, there may be less time to form relationships with neighbours, and therefore fewer adults to supervise young people, increasing the likelihood that youth may be exposed to anti-social influences. Consequently, the extent to which neighbourhoods affect adolescent behaviours, and resulting coping responses, may depend on the nature and identity of the neighbourhood itself (Boxer & Sloan-Power, 2013). As Cicognani (2011) found, youth who report moderate to low levels of disorder and crime but strong social ties within their neighbourhoods, exhibited higher levels of emotional well-being; a construct closely related to coping. Youth that perceive their neighbourhoods as higher in cohesion and collective efficacy, may have more positive interactions with residents and stronger interpersonal ties to their community (Steiner & Wooldredge, 2008). This will result in the young person being more likely to engage in more positive coping strategies, because they potentially view their neighbourhoods as less threatening (Brenner et al., 2013).

Conversely, youth who live in neighbourhoods characterised by higher levels of poverty and violence, and who perceive their neighbourhoods as lower in cohesion, may have a more negative outlook, and engage in avoidant coping including drug/alcohol abuse, vandalism and graffiti crime, because this reflects the disparate and fractured environment around them. Living in these anomic neighbourhoods, hinder the development of self-worth and identity, because of the social stigma of being part of a community that has become fragmented through family dissolution, unemployment, inadequate social housing, poverty, and disease (Putrik, 2019). This neighbourhood stigma affects all realms of existence, and reinforces the residents perceived lowly-status and lack of legitimate opportunities. Therefore, the concentration of poverty in these neighbourhoods goes hand in hand with crime, so that perceived disorder and fear of crime promotes fewer social ties - as neighbours become mistrustful of each other (van Ejik, 2010). As Sampson (2009: 313) argues, this mistrust breeds contempt as all members of the community become viewed as “possessing the moral liability of the neighbourhood itself”. Wacquant (2008) observes that

the areas where many young offenders live contain wide and diverse ethnic populations, which means that this loss of community is felt even more keenly, through cultural and religious segregation, despite the rich and vibrant culture that minority groups bring with them into these areas. Such neighbourhoods are considered as having low status because of the perception that they have become 'dumping' grounds for those from outside, which then tend to reinforce in the young male that they only deserve to belong to these areas (van Eijk, 2010). Youth who witness frequent community violence and live in very disadvantaged neighbourhoods, characterised by unemployment and poverty, will eventually become desensitised to their surroundings. Bennett et al. (2022), for instance, argues that consistent with adaptation models of development and stress inoculation theories, regular exposure to violence and disadvantage, may provide the opportunity for youth to develop maladaptive emotion and regulatory coping skills as well as 'pushing' them toward alternative sub-cultures such as gangs.

Gang membership

In the absence of a stable family structure, it is unsurprising that the vulnerable adolescent will turn to gang membership as a form of counterculture (Tonks & Stephenson, 2019). Especially, as Watkins & Melde (2016) suggests in urban neighbourhoods, characterised by significant socio-economic deprivation, where delinquency and gang membership may be considered as a status symbol. Often drawn into gang involvement because of the prior affiliation of an older sibling, the gang is instantly seen as an alternative 'family' with gang leaders as surrogate 'fathers' (Rosenfeld et al., 2021). Research by Fitzgibbon et al (2013) found, for instance, that two thirds of gang-involved young offenders in their study were from families headed by a single parent, and that these families frequently encountered poverty, overcrowding, mental illness, domestic violence, imprisonment, alcohol, and substance misuse within their surrounding communities. As Harris (2013) contend, although many are

pushed towards gang affiliation, due to these adverse societal and community factors, there is also a strong pull factor for young males who want to feel that they belong and want to escape the inconsistencies of their home life.

Gang involvement provides a sense of belonging, interpersonal protection, and status, that they have been denied either at home, school or in the community (Wood et al., 2002). It also provides opportunities to enhance criminal learning (Young and Gonzalez, 2013). Within disadvantaged and fractured communities, gang membership, represents a rebellion against feelings of futility, frustration, and disempowerment, which in turn, leads to the young male cutting away from family ties and previous pro-social peers (Kagan, 2020). This is often reinforced through a process of 'knifing off' where over time, gang-affiliated young people, come to have complete dependence upon the gang (Kennedy, 2007).

Most gang members have experienced a range of adverse events before joining (Melde & Esbensen, 2013), and there is research to show that as their gang assimilation deepens, there becomes an increased risk of existing maladaptive coping responses becoming more pronounced (Wood et al., 2017). Kerig et al. (2015: 648), for instance, found gang-related youth, exhibited significantly higher levels of emotional numbing and dissociation, because they were having to deal with a range of negative affective feelings including anger, guilt, rumination, and shame. A situation that was due to not only their perpetration of violence but also their victimisation as well (Moran, 2015). Vasquez et al (2012: 89), for instance, demonstrated how gang membership was associated with "repetitive thinking about adverse events, including provocation" and how this angry rumination combined with fear, brought on higher levels of anxiety. Although traumatic childhoods may raise the risk for dissociative coping, this is likely to be exacerbated by triggering exposure to gang violence (Listenbee et al., 2012; Begle et al., 2011). Pyrooz et al (2014), for instance, believe that gang members may be considered as not unlike child soldier victims, because adolescents who experience traumatic events at crucial periods in their life development, may be increasingly susceptible

to suffering developmental trauma. As Kerig et al. (2013: 635) argues, perpetration-induced trauma, is often caused because “youth in gangs are compelled to perpetrate violence against others as part of their initiation rites, turf wars, or ongoing gang-related activities”. Through their research, they found participating in these forms of violence presented post-traumatic stress symptoms, which included dissociative detachment responses. Bennett (2014) also found that alongside perpetration-induced trauma, gang members may also feel shame or guilt because of their involvement in such violent acts but are reluctant or unable to express such emotions during their membership, due to fears of being ostracised from the gang. Subsequently, gang members may experience continued emotion dysregulation in the form of dissociative symptoms even after leaving (Melde & Esbensen, 2013).

2.6 Depersonalisation as a coping response: a synthesis of deprivation and importation theory

As part of its ‘Out of Trouble’ programme, the Prison Reform Trust (2012)[30] conducted one of the biggest surveys ever on more than 6,000 juvenile and young adults in custody (Jacobson et al, 2010). One of their main findings, was that for most detained young adults, a double punishment was being administered. First, they had experienced exceedingly difficult pre-prison life histories, characterised by loss and disadvantage, which they had imported as vulnerabilities into prison with them. Second, being locked up in an adult environment, without suitable support systems, and having to face a myriad of carceral strains, tended to amplify these vulnerabilities. A combined model of imprisonment that integrates both the psychological risk to which prisons expose inmates, and the effects of the characteristics of the inmates themselves (Slotboom et al., 2012). As van der Hart (2021) argues, prisons represent the concrete and steel embodiments of suffocating traumatic and

[30] Prison Reform Trust: Old enough to know better – A briefing on young adults in the Criminal Justice System (2012).

paradoxical relationships that they have already experienced through neglectful early attachment and abusive upbringings. It is little wonder, therefore, that they react to incarceration with extreme coping responses such as violence, detachment, self-harm, and suicidal ideation. Such behaviours provide a semblance of mastery or control over their environment, a protective distraction and disengagement from their feeling states, as well as a level of tolerable acceptance to their prison lives (Ó Laoide et al., 2018)

As Willow (2011), in her book '*Children Behind Bars',* argues, prison transports the young person back into the same paradoxical relationship that they experienced with their early caregivers and wider psychosocial acquaintances. Without the mental resilience to escape the emotional reality of their situation, they come to feel the full force of the harsh, punitive, and uncaring nature of the criminal justice system. Harvey (2007) found that in these instances the young prisoner is emotionally dragged back to previous occasions in their life when feelings of helplessness, fear and panic abounded. The result is that they emotionally respond in the same way as they once did, by numbing their senses so that they come to feel 'dead' inside. Baldwin (2013) found that there becomes a disconnection to time and space, which detaches the young adult from their reality, so that they come to view their lives as an outsider looking in. The transition from induction wing to prison cell characterised by automatic behaviours and robot-like responses entrenched in learned helplessness. Haney (2008) found that the once cocky, overconfident demeanour that was present on arrest and during the police interview is long gone, having now been replaced with a frightened child that occasionally lashes out in anger, but sits quietly and responds to questions and requests with glazed eyes and a catatonic posture. As Bennet et al. (2015) puts it, once on the prison wing the counterculture of prison life throws these maladaptive coping mechanisms into sharp relief and becomes even more acute as they reel against their new reality.

Berelowitz & Hibbert (2011) argue that the subsequent challenges faced by these young males in adjusting to prison life is overwhelming. This is because they are likely to feel extremely isolated, mistrust strangers, and having employed maladaptive coping skills both inside and outside of prison, will be prone to derailing interventions, even for those specifically designed for them. Lacking the emotional maturity and resilience to react in the reasoned and disciplined manner that prison is requiring of them, they become alienated and made to feel even more marginalised and worthless. As Shammas (2007) says, some become depressed by this realisation, some angered. Prison excels in confirming and entrenching this hopelessness. Before long, they find that they have created a permanent and unbridgeable distance between themselves and others within the prison estate. Many, for whom depersonalisation becomes especially thick in prison, find that the disincentive to engage in open communication with others, leads to withdrawal from authentic social interactions altogether. As De Zuluta (2009) argues, emotional detachment and numbing behaviours may at the beginning of their sentence have served a range of diverse and important protective functions for the young prisoner, including avoiding exploitation from other prisoners, keeping a clean record for parole, protection from behavioural scrutiny from officers, and buffering fears and self-capitulation. But this has now caused the young man to become stuck in a toxic cycle of reduced responsiveness to their prison existence.

Recognising the synthesis between carceral strains and imported maladaptive coping responses such as depersonalisation is important because it highlights additional psychological components of the pains of imprisonment that has specific relevance to young male adults. But it also highlights the possibility that this avoidance coping, without intervention, will manifest in more deleterious behaviours such as self-injury and suicidal ideation (Zavattini et al., 2017).

2.7 The link between prison depersonalisation, self-harm, and suicidal ideation

Self-harm and suicidal ideation are a leading cause of morbidity among prisoners (Favril et al.*,* 2022; Hemming et al., 2020; Harris, 2015) and although a wide range of risk-factors have been identified, the mechanisms linking dissociation and self-harm are complex and not always clear. Among young adult prisoners', self-harm often manifests as deliberate damaging of the body surface through self-cutting, pinching, scratching, burning, and head-banging which will often leave scars and welts (Horowitz *et al., 2018).* This contrasts with suicidal ideation which tends to be passive in that they will have morbid thoughts about death and wanting to die but don't have any plans to commit suicide (Stoliker *et al.,* 2020).

Self-harm and suicidal ideation in prison is thought to be mediated by the dissociative response (Schauer *et al.,* 2018; Swanell *et al.,* 2012) with two competing theories being forwarded. The first suggests self-harm may be used to purposefully trigger a dissociative episode, enabling avoidance of intolerable affect (Calati, 2017; Schauer & Elbert 2018). The second states the opposite, that self-harm is a strategy used to end a period of dissociation due to the distressing experience of feeling unreal or disconnected. In this way, self-injury may therefore help to generate feeling and reduce the sense of detachment (Ćernis, 2019; Klonsky 2007). Despite these competing explanations, it is reasonable to surmise that the combined effect of dissociation and self-harming, among prison populations, is likely to produce an even more deleterious effect because the relationship between dissociation and self-injury is so clearly linked with environmental strains. In a prison study by Golshani *et al.* (2020), for instance, it was found that the most prevalent type of self-injury involved self-cutting and self-soothing head banging and was linked directly to attempts to regulate affective stressors through the dissociative response. Although this study found that it often preceded a dissociative state, there was no unambiguous evidence that self-harm was being used as a mechanism for retreating from the dissociative fugue, despite this being the most accepted view (Ćernis, 2019; Klonsky, 2015). In this way, self-harm acts as a way of

overcoming dissociative states of numbness and detachment from reality. Emotion and physical stimulation generate the feelings of being alive so that the young prisoner trapped in a dissociative fugue will use pain to bring on affect and effectively remove themselves from the dissociative trance (Scalbrini *et al., 2017).*

The importance in recognising the relationship between prison dissociation, self-harm and suicidal ideation centres on its impact on general well-being and ability for the young inmate to adjust to the prisoner society. Dissociation and self-injury among young prisoners' can be linked to a range of daily functioning negative affects including social and emotional avoidance, negative problem solving, rumination and suppression (Briere, 2016). This often manifests in symptoms of perceptual distortions and hallucinations, massive free-floating anxiety, and acute confused states The cyclical and deepening nature of prison dissociation comes about because in relieving emotional tension it can elicit further stress due to the cognitive impairments and altered state of consciousness that it brings about. According to Briere (2016), for instance, dissociative symptoms can lead to further traumas when prisoners become more vulnerable to victimisation due to reduced vigilance.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 The justification for employing a qualitative approach.

It was decided early in the planning of the study to employ a qualitative approach. This was because there already exists a wide array of quantitative studies that have explored frequency, severity and duration of dissociation within the criminal justice system (see for example: Benton, 2020; Garofalo, 2017; Day, 2009; Akyuz et a., 2007; Brown et al., 2006). Although this data provides an interesting overview of how often or how many prisoners experience dissociation, it is unable to explore the 'why' – an omission that this study was keen to resolve. A mixed method approach of semi-structured interviews alongside observations were originally planned, but the Covid-19 pandemic meant that direct access to prisoners became impossible. It was therefore decided to use interviews, prisoner drawings and a script-driven storytelling technique for gathering the data.

The process of organising and evaluating the data was carried out using interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) and Nvivo12 software. IPA is considered one of the best methods for providing a lens through which a detailed, in-depth examination of the personal lived experiences of a participant can be gathered. It was felt that as a qualitative research approach, IPA would allow for the young men's experiences of depersonalisation to be captured without distortion. This, as Smith (2015: 41) contends, is because it aims to produce an account of lived experience in its own terms rather than one prescribed by pre-existing theoretical preconceptions. In IPA, the researcher is simply trying to make sense of the prisoner trying to make sense of what is happening to them (Alase, 2017). It was also considered preferable to other qualitative methodologies, such as grounded theory, because IPA uses a structured method of data analysis. This guides the researcher through a series of increasingly sophisticated coding stages of induction that can analyse raw data in a powerful and purposeful way.

Currently there is little qualitative literature into prison dissociation, so it makes sense to employ a research tool that will provide a more nuanced examination of a phenomenon that is currently widely misunderstood, complex and emotionally laden. As IPA is idiographic in its commitment to examining the detailed experience of each case in turn, the smaller sample size enables the micro-level reading of the participants accounts (Eatough & Smith, 2019). Smith (2013: 145) refers to this inquiry as, “sharpened by its inductive, interpretative analysis providing an illumination of what is presented but importantly grounded in a close examination of what the participant has said”.

Nvivo software was chosen to provide another layer of understanding because unlike most statistical software, its main function is not to analyse, but rather to aid the analysis process. In this way the researcher remains in control of the analytical output. Nvivo can also be time saving because it instinctively draws out themes from textural data including transcripts, field notes and wider data sources including articles and government reports.

3.2 Research Aim and Research questions

The aim of this study was to explore the emotional impact of carceral strains on prisoner adjustment and mental well-being. Specifically, it addressed the question: how does depersonalisation as a learned coping response help or hinder the young prisoner’s ability to adjust to the emotional carceral environment.

To meet this question, three sub-questions were addressed.

1. What are the characteristics of young adult male coping responses in prison?
2. How does the emotionality around carceral strains impact the employment of depersonalisation as a coping response among detained young males?

3. How do imported vulnerabilities impact the employment of depersonalisation as a coping response among detained young males?

3.3 Defining prison depersonalisation, coping and adjustment.

Although there are a multitude of definitions that describe the terms depersonalisation, coping and adjustment dependent on sociological, criminological, and psychological contexts; in the present study, it was important that any definition would be contextualised to the young male's lived experiences leading up to and within the prison setting. The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (2013: 6) defines depersonalisation as "experiences of unreality, detachment, or being an outside observer with respect to one's thoughts, feelings, sensations, body or actions"*.* More aligned to young male offenders who have experienced significant childhood adversities, a trauma informed definition of depersonalisation proposed by Pruin et al. (2018: 7) contends "depersonalisation to be a disconnection between a person's sense of self and personal history normally triggered through stressful or traumatic events". For the purposes of this study both these definitions were combined so that prison depersonalisation was defined as 'a cognitive and somatic disconnection between a prisoners' sensory experience, thoughts, sense of self, or personal history and motivated by the avoidance of stressful triggers in the carceral environment'.

Prison coping is often described as an inmate's well-being and resilience in dealing with the strains of custody. These strains may be real or perceived, but the resulting coping strategies that follow will constitute similar approach, emotional or avoidant behaviours used to protect the individual from negative physical or psychological consequences (Allison et al, *2017*). Whereas, approach-coping is widely recognised as a healthy coping strategy, both emotional and avoidant coping behaviours can become maladaptive because they fail to address the root cause of the strain (Taylor & Stanton, 2007). In the present study depersonalised coping was contextualised as a 'habitual learned coping response orientated

towards emotional numbing and detachment behaviours for dealing with strains in the carceral setting'.

Similarly, adjustment to prison life has been defined in different ways. Earlier studies focused on the concept of 'prisonisation' as the "assimilation in greater or lesser degree of the folk ways, mores, customs, and culture of the penitentiary" (Clemmer, 1958: 299). It infers that through this process of prisonisation, inmates segregated from mainstream society, will come to embrace distinct prison cultural values, norms, and beliefs. Harvey (2007: 10) extended this definition by referring to adjustment as a "process whereby the individual moves towards reaching a cognitive, emotional and behavioural equilibrium" - an important transition in psychologically surviving prison and preparing for release back into the community. More recently, Gonçlaves et al. (2021: 368) has suggested that adjustment to prison can be defined as "a process whereby behaviour or subjective experience alters to fit in with the new environment"*.* That prisoners' will have a need to modify, alter or change their thoughts and behaviour to fit into the prisoner society. Matthews (1999:55) contends that each prisoner will identify with a particular adjustment coping style although this is likely to change throughout the prisoner's sentence:

1. Cooperative – in this mode of adaptation prisoners will aim to keep out of trouble and do their time with the minimum degree of conflict and stress.
2. Withdrawal – this can take several different forms, including physical separation from other inmates and prison staff, engaging in minimum degrees of prison programmes including work and leisure and emotional withdrawal through avoidance and suppression strategies.
3. Rebellion and resistance – this may involve engaging in riots or disturbances at one extreme, and forms of physical resistance or non-cooperation at the other.

Cooperative coping is aligned most closely with the process of prisonisation whilst rebellion and resistance tends to be sporadic and instigated by perceived unfairness within the carceral setting. Withdrawal as a form of coping is widely seen as being at the root of developing mental health vulnerabilities as well as a reluctance to accept the prison culture Laws & Crewe, 2019).

3.4 Ethical considerations

The internet has opened new research possibilities and has quickly become what Eynon et al. (2008) refers to as a huge social science laboratory offering both rich data and a wealth of first-hand accounts and experiences. The use, therefore, of traditional ethical guidelines when conducting online research is contentious because it has proven difficult to operationalise existing guidelines for research using the World Wide Web (Grinyer, 2007). Online research has created new challenges for ethical committees and institutions as well as for researchers, and as Ackland (2013: 43) points out “ethical guidelines for use of digital trace data are a moving target”. In the light of this, both the British Psychological Society (BPS) and the British Society of Criminology (BSC) have updated their guidance to include online research, which considers the problems that may arise from legal and cultural differences across jurisdictions, online rules of contact, and the blurring of boundaries between public and private domains (Hammersley and Traianou, 2012). More specifically, these new digital online spaces have forced ethical committees and researchers to rethink established ethical principles of informed consent, privacy, anonymity and harm (Burnap et al., 2015). As Kozinets (2006) contends, ethical considerations using web-based research should fundamentally be no different than that which uses more traditional research tools of data collection, if the researcher continues to fully disclose their presence, affiliations, and intentions to online community members.

The process of implementing ethical guidelines in the present study began with receiving approval from the University of Hull's ethical committee. The submission for approval was informed by current and previous research with ex-offenders and the British Psychology Societies (BPS) enhanced ethical guidelines for carrying out research into online communities. The ethical application outlined how I would implement adequate informed consent controls, protection from harm strategies, and assurances that both privacy and confidentiality would be maintained throughout the research process and beyond.

Because of the vulnerability of participants involved in the study, informed consent was approached as a process rather than a one-off event. This meant that the robustness and effectiveness of the given informed consent would be monitored actively throughout its implementation up to the point of analysis (Manti & Licari, 2018). This began by ensuring that all the participants were given sufficient prior information. It was made clear that participants were freely agreeing to take part based on a clear understanding of the rationale for the study, and that there would be an open-door policy for volunteers to ask questions and seek reassurances (Nijhawan et al., 2013). During the pre-consent meeting, the participants level of literacy and subsequent capacity to obtain, process, and understand research information was carefully considered. This included the possibility for misunderstanding or miscommunication through factors including language barriers, cultural differences, and emotional vulnerabilities (Moser *et al.,* 2004). Through this process of information-disclosure and observation three volunteers were eliminated before the study commenced whilst two decided that they no longer wanted to take part.

Participants were informed that they should not expect a reward (other than taking part) and that they would not experience any disadvantage to volunteering. That, participation or non-participation would not affect either positively or negatively on the participants relationship with the researcher or online community that they were a part of. It was decided not to provide a financial incentive for taking part in the study because payment could serve as an

undue inducement for participation. Despite this, however, I did recognise that the participants may still perceive volunteering as having an intrinsic reward value. Many volunteers, for instance, had a genuine interest in dissociation because of their involvement in the online forums and wanted to learn as much about themselves as possible. Others admitted volunteering because they were simply bored and longed for excitement or as a change in routine from their everyday lives (Soule et al., 2016). As Castillo et al., (2012: 83) points out, these informal benefits may also include “a sense of empowerment of being involved in research that raises awareness and an incentive to want to make their own lives more fulfilling”. Because of this, it was important not to raise false hopes that the research would bring about fundamental changes to the penological landscape or might benefit the participant personally. It was stressed, therefore, on several occasions leading up to and as part of the study that the research was likely to have only a modest impact initially on those most close to the research area.

To ensure that any potential deception was minimised, each participant was encouraged to ask questions or seek clarification on any aspect of the research design, procedure or how data would be used. Each participant was informed that the study would focus on their unique subjective lived experiences, so that their contributions would be as valid as any others. Participants were also assured that they could withdraw or refuse to participate in some or all aspects of the research up to the point of data analysis. Volunteers were then asked to electronically sign an informed consent letter that summarised the main aspects of the research design, procedure and data collection (Campbell, 2002).

Integral to an ethically acceptable study is the commitment to protect participants from potential distress or harm that may be caused through the research process. This includes them being exposed to pain or danger, or through the potential adverse consequences of their participation, such as unfavourable treatment once they resume their lives (Vanclay et al., 2013). Rosenfeld et al *(*2021) for instance, found that one potential risk factor among ex-

offenders involved in research, is that family members, friends or gang members may mistake willingness to volunteer as 'snitching' or violating an unwritten code. Therefore, it was important that participants were made aware of this possibility through the pre-consent meeting and be given the opportunity to reflect before agreeing to take part.

Another consideration for potential harm came from the emotional discomfort or psychological triggers that might emerge during the interviews as the participants relive painful experiences. It was explained to participants prior to each interview that any potential short-term emotional stress that they may experience will be dealt with sensitively and with compassion. They were also reassured that they would always have the right to refuse to answer any questions that made them feel uncomfortable or would have the option to withdraw at any point before, during or after the interviews. Any research data, gathered from the interviews, that participants later felt should not be included would also be removed on request up to the point of data analysis. Sensitive questions during the interviews were preceded with a warning that in answering they may experience emotional distress, and so do not have to answer if they chose not to. If a participant did become overly upset, the interview temporarily ended, and the participant was asked if they would like to continue or required any further support. A list of advice and contact support services, widely available in the community, were available for all participants to access. A full debriefing was carried out once the interviews had been concluded which involved reiterating the purpose of the research, how the results would be used, and their right to have research data involving them removed on request (Nijhawan et al., 2013).

A final aspect of the ethical process was a consideration of the participants privacy and confidentiality. Privacy is considered one of the necessary prerequisites for ethical research, and in most circumstances, means the nondisclosure of the identity of the research subject through anonymity and ensuring confidentiality of the specific data collected (Copes et al., 2013). This level of privacy is at times difficult to guarantee because as Kaiser (2009: 111)

asserts, “for qualitative researchers, maintaining respondent confidentiality while presenting rich, detailed accounts of social life presents unique challenges”. Often, this is because the researcher faces a conflict between conveying detailed accounts of the social world and protecting the identities of the individuals who participated in their research. Anonymity, in the present study, was secured by allocating participants a pseudonym only known to the researcher. This did not completely overcome privacy issues, however, as this situation raises the issue of whether a person’s identity will ever be completely anonymous because the participant will always be identifiable by the researcher (Scott, 2005). It is also the case that in a small, enclosed fieldwork setting such as an online forum, anyone closely tied to a particular research project will be able to recognise other participants through deductive disclosure. Tolich et al. (2014) refers to this deductive disclosure as threats to internal confidentiality and is a consistent problem when using online forums and ‘chat’ rooms. Despite these issues, maintaining anonymity is still possible.

Confidentiality refers to the researcher's agreement to manage, store, and share research data in accordance with the general data protection regulations 2015 (GDPR). To ensure this, participant data was stored securely on the University’s OneDrive, with suitable levels of passcode security, and all raw data was disposed of after it had been transcribed. The researcher also ensured that no information provided by participants was passed onto third parties including other participants or individuals known by the researcher.

3.5 Participant sample and gaining access

Participants were obtained from three volunteer sample groups:

- **Sample group 1:** consisted of 12 adult males (aged 18-25 years) who had recently (within the past 12 months) been released from prison and were currently on licence.

- **Sample group 2:** comprised 2 currently serving prison officers based at HMP Hull and HMP Wetherby, respectively.
- **Sample group 3:** comprised 2 mental health support workers based at HMP Leeds.

Ten of the Participants were recruited through the DPself-help online forum by posting a 'volunteers needed' leaflet (see section 3.5). This posting was repeated once a week over a six-week period and then all postings were deleted to prevent potential volunteers from getting in contact after the deadline had been reached. The other two participants were recruited through the Unlock charity by posting the leaflet on their online community pages. The leaflet was removed once the recruitment deadline had been reached.

A volunteer sample was employed primarily so that participants felt that they had freely agreed to be a part of the study and had not been coerced in any way to participate (Jupp, 2013: 323). A volunteer sample is also an easy sample to administrate because the participants come to the researcher therefore cutting down on expense and time. It is a sampling technique that has been criticised for being unrepresentative and biased towards a certain type of participant (Berner, 2012). The study focus, however, was on developing knowledge and understanding of the subjective experiences of each individual participant, rather than attempting to make the results applicable or generalisable to the population, so this was not considered an issue.

Gaining research access to the sample of former prisoners and prison staff proved to be both a difficult and laborious task (see Appendices 2 for an account of this). This was further challenged by the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic which effectively removed the option to carry out in-prison affects research as originally planned. Initial thoughts about suspending my studies for a period became less viable as several lockdowns in succession indicated

that the pandemic was not going to go away any time soon. So, a pragmatic approach had to be taken around where and on whom research could be conducted.

Using information provided by personal contacts and university staff I held telephone conversations with several professionals working within and around the criminal justice system. During one of these conversations, it was suggested by an education and resettlement project worker at the charity 'unlock' that there may be online communities of ex-offenders who would be willing to talk about their prison experiences. A local internet search found several organisations with online support for ex-offenders including the *Bounce back project* and *St Mungo's.* I also uncovered a UK based dissociation self-help website that had active ex-offenders accessing their forums. Through contact with the depersonalisation charity 'Unreal', advice was provided about how to contact online organisations as they run similar forums for their own users. On their advice, I used the self-help forum URL threads and other web search engines to carry out a purposive web search. Using key words such as ex-offenders' mental health dissociation, prisoner mental health depersonalisation, emotional numbing/suppression prisoners, I found three online discussion forums based in the UK that carried threads about prison and dissociative experiences (for a discussion of using internet forums for recruiting participants see Appendix 3).

Two of the three discussion forums were eventually selected because they had public, easily viewable threads but required membership to comment/add posts. This was important because most forums, especially those with high traffic, are tempting targets for illicit online advertisers or 'spammers' who want to promote their product or services. Having a membership required policy meant that requests for volunteers were more likely to be taken at face value (Eun-Ok, 2014).

The two internet discussion forums were:

https://www.dpselfhelp.com/forum/
https://www.mentalhealthforum.net/forum/forums/dissociation-depersoanlisation-and-derealisation.196/

Contact with forum moderators was established to check that my research and request for volunteers would not breach any terms and conditions of their sites. Subsequently, I was given permission by the '*dpselfhelp'* forum to sign up as a member but denied access by the mental health forum. When asked for clarification on this latter decision I received the following message:

> Thanks for getting in touch with us about the possibility of posting requests about your study within our discussion forums. We tend not to sanction this kind of activity in the forums, as in the past we've received a considerable amount of negative feedback from our forum users about such postings, as they feel they intrude on a space where they share sensitive/personal information with other users.

The '*dpselfhelp'* forum moderators permitted the posting of a research recruitment poster and kindly offered to 'bump' this post up the thread list so that it would be more visible. In return, I agreed to help publicise the existence of the forum. A clear example of reciprocity of gain. The first message on the online forum (emoji symbol of a researcher) was posted on 15th February 2021 as a way of announcing my arrival. As Flick (2009: 177) points out, "before pursuing recruitment from an online community, researchers are encouraged to invest some time in observing users' conversations and interactions". Over the next few weeks, users' posts were regularly replied to using simple emoji symbols such as 'thumbs-up' or 'smiley faces' on threads that mentioned topics such as criminal justice, offending etc. I also posted hyperlinks to research articles, newspaper coverage and other internet resources around dissociation that forum users might have found interesting, to raise my profile among the online community as an academic researcher.

3.6 Recruitment of participants

Once my revised University ethics proposal had been approved, I posted a recruitment leaflet on the DPselfhelp forum outlining the study and asking for volunteers to take part. This was accepted under the tag name 'ResearcherMarc' on 3rd March 2021. Having volunteers respond directly to an online request raised two main challenges. First, it was difficult not to appear as though I was cold calling with the intention of attempting to sell a product or service. Unfortunately, I did receive emails asking what it was I was offering, and in one instance whether volunteering would gain access to GP referred therapy. Second, I stated in my initial online messages that I was a PhD candidate at the University of Hull which in hindsight proved not to be sufficient evidence that my research was legitimately sanctioned. In subsequent posts I began to include the University logo and provide a hyper-link at the bottom of the message thread to the University FACE faculty with contact details of my supervisors.

<u>Online recruitment leaflet pictured left</u>

All the research project information was contained in a leaflet as part of a single original post (OP) that automatically distributed itself to threads that I had interacted with on the online forum. Interested members were encouraged to make contact either over e-mail or by private messaging using the forum's own system. The original posts were re-posted once a week over a six-week period as it was found that not all participants who initially showed an interest participated. Similarly, members who appeared less enthusiastic at first eventually became more dedicated to the project as they were provided with further information and reassurances. All correspondence with prospective participants were courteous and professional, even if the messages were

short and informal, in order to build trust between researcher and participant (Vander Laenen, 2019).

Over a six-week period, thirty-nine online members responded to the thread request. A conveniently arranged ten-minute online chat was arranged for each. This provided an opportunity for the volunteers to learn more about what the research would entail and offer a non-committal space for them to ask further questions or seek reassurances prior to formally agreeing to take part. This also provided an opportunity to assess each members suitability for the study. Each volunteer that was accepted was asked to read and electronically sign an informed consent letter (see appendix 4) and provided with information about their right to withdrawal from the study at any point, during or after the research prior to results being analysed (see appendix 5). A biographical overview of the sample is published below:

Name (pseudonym)	**Age** (at interview)	**Ethnicity**	**Custodial period**	**Probation period** at interview	**Type of offence**	**Prison category**
Adam	22	White	18 months	7 months	Possession of class A drug	C
Aaron	23	White	22 months	5 months	Burglary	C
Ben	19	White	10 months	9 months	Possession of class A drug	Young offenders
Daniel	20	White	14 months	4 months	Burglary	C
Elijah	23	Afro-Caribbean	18 months	11 months	Arson	B
Kyle	24	White	27 months	3 months	Possession of a firearm	B
Lucas	20	White	7 months	5 months	Possession of class A drug	C
Liam	22	White	16 months	8 months	Affray	C
Paul	24	White	36 months	2 months	Assault and GBH	B
Ritchie	21	Asian	12 months	7 months	Dangerous driving whilst intoxicated	C
Scott	23	White	19 months	4 months	Illegal downloading and distribution	C
Tristen	20	White	9 months	8 months	Theft	C

Recruitment of prison staff and mental healthcare workers were secured through informal emails and using contacts I had built up during my work as a FE/HE lecturer delivering Professional Development Courses (CPD). Those who agreed to take part were invited to a ten-minute online chat that outlined the rationale and scope of the research, as well as providing an opportunity for them to ask further questions. Their suitability as a participant was also assessed at this point. Participants were asked to sign an informed consent letter and a formal letter of request was sent to the member of staff's line manager if required.

3.7 Pilot study

To assess the validity and accuracy of the interview format, interview questions and the overall methodological stability of the research design, a pilot study was carried out before the main interview schedule commenced. As Lancaster *et al.* (2020: 73) explains, "the pilot study is one of the most important stages in a research project and is conducted to identify potential problem areas and deficiencies in the research instruments and protocol prior to implementation during the full study". Interviews were carried out on two volunteer students at the University. They were required to provide a short answer to each question to check for understanding or ambiguity and provide some additional information about how emotive they found each of the questions. Four questions were subsequently revised. A further aspect of the pilot study was to ask the volunteers about any questions they would have included, which yielded two additional questions which were added to the final script. The pilot study provided a test-run of the procedures and protocol of the interview schedule and helped in deciding that a combination of semi-structured and open questions was appropriate (Hassan et al., 2006). Due to the small sample size, some of the data from the pilot interviews were subsequently included in the results section. This data was not considered any less reliable than the data obtained during the main study because the methods were not modified after the pilot. As Leon (2011: 142) argues, "if a well specified design has been constructed, it is acceptable that data from the pilot study can be used in the larger research data".

3.8 Interview procedure

Semi-structured interviews

Across the three sampling groups, 28 interviews were conducted (excluding the pilot study). Of these 24 were with ex-prisoners, 2 with currently serving prison officers and 2 with mental health support professionals. Each of the former prisoners completed two separate online interviews using Teams or Zoom averaging 60 - 90 minutes each. The interview schedule comprised both semi-structured and open questions (see appendix 5 /6 /7 for question scripts). Examples of the type of questions asked across the four main interview themes included:

- Can you describe a typical day whilst you were in prison?
- What was it like where you lived growing up?
- How would you describe your mental health and well-being during your prison sentence?
- To what extent did dissociative episodes help or hinder your ability to cope and adjust with prison life?

The decision to employ a semi-structured and open question format was informed by advantages cited by other authors of prison research (Laws & Crewe, 2019; Shammas, 2014; Cobb et al., 2014; Copes et al., 2013; Garret, 2010). First, semi-structured and open interviews allow questions to be re-arranged depending on responses that are forthcoming, and so are both more flexible by providing an opportunity for subsequent questions to be asked if the researcher hits on a ‘thick vein’ of information (Gilham, 2012). Through this flexibility, natural conversations are more likely to take place because questions can be based around arising themes and irrelevant questions can be omitted. Secondly, interviews allow for a funnelling effect where initial questions that are general and factual can over time

become more specific and focused (Kennedy, 2014). Interviews conducted with the ex-prisoners, for instance, used an autobiographical approach, as described by Liebling and Maruna (2005), where general pre-prison orientated questions around demography are asked first before moving to specific prison experiences which are likely to prove more emotional. Further, to protect against participants leaving emotionally vulnerable, the last few questions of the interview were designed to be more positive, reflecting on their future aspirations and things that they may be looking towards. An additional advantage of unstructured interviews is that they allow for the researcher to present themselves as warm, non-judgemental, and empathetic who have a genuine interest in the conversation that is taking place (Jewkes, 2014). Using an interview platform, the researcher can answer any questions that participants may have in real-time and be there to reassure participants if they feel uncomfortable at any point (Ponser, 2017).

Asking participants to draw their experiences.

Participants were encouraged to participate in a self-drawing novella exercise. This was introduced at the end of the first interview when participants were asked to think more carefully about their prison experiences and especially how they were feeling at this time. They were asked to take a photo of their drawing(s) using their mobile phone and email it. This was then used as a ‘springboard’ for commencing the second interview. Using drawing techniques as a form of interview is widely used in both therapeutic and research settings (Virole et al., 2022). It allows the participant to organise and express their inner thoughts, whilst helping them to better understand and make sense of their emotions. When complimented with more traditional interviewing techniques, it provides a valuable way of triangulating qualitative data (Cohenmiller, 2017). More specifically, for researching depersonalisation, drawings facilitate greater reflexivity on the part of the participants by prompting their emotional memory for events as well as providing an alternative

communication channel for those who may find difficulty in expressing themselves verbally (Leavy, 2017).

Storytelling as an interview technique

Story-telling narratives were also employed as a further source of data and potential point for triangulation. Participant's during the second interview were asked to read diary entries written by other prisoners and then comment on them using their own experiences. The three script narratives, along with the question asked to the participant are published below:

> "My actual cell itself is not very nice, small and cramped with a toilet at the end of the bed, a small Perspex screen for privacy. When I was placed into my cell at 7.30pm I figured that I would be let out again, but I never were. For those hours I lay on my bunk, thoughts racing through my head, stopping me from sleeping. The enormous burden of prison hit me that first night".

Participant question: What were your experiences of that first night in prison?

> "A lot of people in there had made some really bad choices and were now paying for it in ways unimaginable. A lot were in for stupid things, stealing from shops or gang fights, looking back they must think what a 'dickhead' I've been. Prison has no sympathy for bad choices, it has no sympathy for your 'shit' upbringing or how sorry you feel for yourself".

Participants question: How much of this story resonates / reminds you of you?

> "The guards can decide an inmate can't have something whenever they feel like it. Even if it's something they're being getting and having all the time. I knew what I could have and what I couldn't but no matter, I would stand in line at the window waiting for the stuff mum had sent for me. They would give me the things they wanted to but hold back everything else [be]cause suddenly I wasn't allowed them. The guards would have them for themselves".

Participant question: Did you have any similar experiences to these?

The purpose of using storytelling as a data collection technique is that it gives participants empathetic prompts towards shared experiences. An opportunity to uncover a richness of experiences because, rather than just drawing attention to raw facts, they may begin to see themselves in the same situation allowing them to build connecting emotions. By identifying others' emotions and relating them to their own, they draw upon these feelings within themselves. Not only does the story show that their own prison experiences are shared but that's its psychologically safe to be open even if they feel vulnerable. When someone hears a story, they gain new perspectives, better understand the world around them and expand their ability to contextualise what has happened in their own lives. As Ponty (1964: 228) argues, "story-telling reveals things to us that we know but didn't know we knew". In this way, it allows for shared patterns or themes to emerge that connect prison experiences between different people. More specifically, it may provide a focus of how dissociation may be described by others and thus facilitates the expression of the most meaningful aspects or traits, as well as providing validation for those experiences. As McCall et al. (2021) explain, "storytelling generates more nuanced, contextualised, and culturally reflective information than other qualitative research methods such as interviews alone".

Interviews with prison staff and mental health workers

Interviews with the prison staff and mental healthcare workers were carried out at a mutually convenient time using the web-conferencing platform Microsoft Teams. Each interview lasted for approximately 60 minutes and comprised both semi-structured and open responses split into four main themes:

- Carceral strains that specifically impact on young adult males coping and adjustment to prison life.

- Imported characteristics that may impact on young adult males coping and adjustment to prison life.
- Experiences of dissociation and other maladaptive coping behaviours that young adult males display in prison.
- Prison intervention and the treatment of mental health vulnerabilities in prison.

3.9 Capturing the data.

Various methods were considered in capturing the interviews including taking written notes, using a recording device, or a combination of both (Tessier, 2012). In the end it was decided to record the interviews so that all the information would be captured accurately and there would be no need for the researcher to lose eye-contact with the participant. Recording the interviews proved less intrusive than writing notes but did provide additional work in having to have the recordings transcribed. There was also an initial fear that some participants would refuse to divulge information because their responses were being recorded, so strategies used by other prison affects researchers such as Laws & Crewe (2019), were employed to try and overcome this. First, I attempted to put the participants at their ease by having an informal chat before the recording device was switched on. Second, verbal reassurances were given throughout the interviews that the only person who would be listening back to the recordings would be myself. Third, I dressed casually for each interview, in cords, a shirt and jumper, so as not to come across as too official, and tried to use language in conversation that was grounded in their own life experiences rather than my own. First names were used throughout.

The interviews took approximately seven months to complete. Earlier interviews experienced ‘teething’ problems including Wi fi stability issues and participants who insisted on doing

interviews using mobile phones which meant that it was difficult at times to read their body language. The University library study rooms were used to ensure privacy and confidentiality, but this proved to be problematic as they had to be booked out and twice the interview had to be cut short because of over-running the allotted time.

An unexpected issue that arose from asking questions about depersonalisation was that many found difficulty in explaining their experiences. A common theme emerged where participants would resort to using metaphors to describe their feelings such as ‘fog’, ‘glass’, ‘bubble’ and many found that they were describing dissociative episodes as they had themselves read about them on forums or from other information sources. In the end, an agreed set of descriptors were decided upon including, ‘fog’, ‘zoned out’, checked out’ and ‘numb’. Many instances arose where participants apologised for appearing superficial, confused, or abstract in their descriptions because they struggled to find the right words to describe exactly what they had experienced. All mentioned that they were not used to describing their experiences in such detail and had been frequently misunderstood in previous attempts. As Paul, one of the ex-prisoners said, “this is the first time that I have been asked to give so much detail (…) it’s really hard to describe”.

Alongside the interviews a research diary was maintained that plotted my own personal journey through the research process and which was subsequently distilled into reflections (see appendix 7 for a reflection on prison emotionality). This process was important because within qualitative research and in particular IPA, the effect of the researcher on the research process becomes an integral part of the result. The phrase researcher-as-instrument implies that the researcher becomes an active respondent in the research process (Hammersley, 2020). In gathering qualitative data, the researcher must take responsibility for the context, meaning and the participant-researcher relationship; ensuring that the data is converted into phenomenological representations that can be interpreted into substantive meaning (Greiffenhagen et al., 2015). The field diary detailing my experiences as a researcher and

how my presence as researcher-as-instrument impacted upon participant responses helped me to identify my own biases and assumptions that could be looked out for during data analysis. As Savage (2013) argues, it is a vital reflective tool of the self. It helps to uncover underlying assumptions and biases that I might have, and any expectations, and experiences that may qualify how the research has been conducted.

3.10 Data transcription, coding, and analysis

Over a three-month period, the recorded interviews were transcribed using web-based transcription software available with both Microsoft Teams and Zoom, and then edited by listening to each interview segment and amending misrepresentations, errors in grammar and adding body language annotations. This constituted the first part of the IPA approach and required that any preconceptions were kept out of this process (Rajasinghe, 2020). As Smith et al. (2009: 42) points out, "the IPA approach to data transcription is committed to a degree of open-mindedness, so the researcher will have to try to suspend (or bracket off) their preconceptions when it comes to the transcribing of the data".

Following transcription, the process of coding the transcripts began. This was approached in two ways: through a tri-reading coding method and submission of data through Nvivo12 software. As Yardley (2018: 42) points out, data coding "can be a strenuous, confusing, and time-consuming process even though the procedure for such an analysis is relatively straightforward". The first part of the coding procedure was to read through the interview transcripts and identify common themes by searching for words or phrases that were repeated in participant responses. According to Graneheim and Lundman (2004: 71) this can be referred to as the "meaning units". The next step was to re-read each transcript and listen again to the audio recordings to help provide context to the emerging themes. By reading the transcripts for a third time, it was possible to start to categorise many of the

meaning units through the repeated pattern of responses made by the research participants. Coding was carried out by highlighting and matching, using assorted colours. The colour-coded interview transcripts containing the meaning units were then placed through a further level of analysis so that the central meaning units of the lived experiences that the research participants were conveying could be constructed (Alase, 2016). Each central meaning unit was then put through the Nvivo12 software along with the research questions. I also inputted over 40 articles around dissociation, prison mental health and coping into Nvivo12 to provide a broad background of information from which to carry out the analysis.

In the final stage of coding, I tried to capture the core central meanings of the research participants' lived experiences in short sentences that would be used to inform the results. Creswell (2013: 193), suggests that researchers should “treat each statement as having equal worth, and work to develop a list of non-repetitive non-overlapping statements which will form the basis for the textural description”. This textural description comprised the participants' and researchers' verbatim experiences of prison dissociation, coping and adjustment with coded themed examples to illustrate that experience. Nvivo12 analysis was then used to support these illustrated experiences. From this, a composite description of the phenomenon that incorporates both conclusions drawn from the literature review and the textural experiences of the participants was written into paragraphs. Each paragraph became a verbatim statement that informed the audience of the “what” and “how” of the participants depersonalising experiences along with “why” they experienced the phenomenon. Alase (2016: 88-89) stated that “utilising the tri-reading coding method allows the researcher to break down the participants' responses meticulously and methodologically without diminishing or misrepresenting the core meaning of their responses or lived experiences”. Six drawing novellas were eventually selected to help frame each of the resulting themes.

Chapter 4: Prison Coping Among Young Adult Males

"When it starts, I can feel the things that make me human start to slip away. I lose all sense of emotion, my mind goes blank, and it feels like my head is starting to float away from my body, as though my body no longer is needed …you just feel numb, like all this is happening on autopilot" (Ben).

Figure 1: Self-drawing by Ben

Ben was arrested in possession of cocaine and ketamine and sentenced to 18 months in a young offender's institute. Selling drugs in order to feed his own habit, Ben found that his coping skills poorly prepared him for incarceration and over time he came to rely increasingly on a combination of illegal substances, aggression and dissociative episodes.

> "When I first went inside, well, I was ready to top myself. Everything seemed hopeless, like. I was ashamed of how I ended up, downing anything I could get hold of (…) I was very self-destructive".

Ben's description of the early days and weeks of his imprisonment highlight how various maladaptive coping measures come into play.

> "I had heard bad things about [name of YOI] and spent the first couple of days trying to keep out of people's way. I was in denial and kept thinking that it had all been a mistake and they would see that. Fem [alcohol] was easy to get hold of so I would down as much as I could and then would get angry and kick off (…) in between times I would sit and let the 'fog' come over me".

This chapter sets out to address the first research question of my study: What are the characteristics of young adult male's coping responses in prison? It starts by giving an overview of the types of coping that were employed by the former prisoners, like Ben, before moving onto describing what their prison depersonalisation experiences were like. Finally, this chapter goes on to provide an insight into how the young man's ability to function day-to-day within the carceral setting and integrate into the prisoner society was affected by their dissociative coping behaviours.

4.1 Prison coping among young adult males

The subject participants described a range of carceral strains that they were faced with negotiating during their prison sentence. Alongside those previously cited by Sykes, such as the loss of liberty, security and goods, more contemporary strains described, included prison boredom, the loss or erosion of social support, and frustrations around poor quality food, clothing and bedding. The absence of technology, constant noise and temperature issues, as well as the vagaries around the Incentives and Earned Privileges (IEP) system were also commonly spoken about.

The level of inmate distress caused by these carceral strains varied but did appear to follow Grennan & Woodhams (2007) assertion that the debilitating aspect of each was defined by where the prisoner was in terms of their prison sentence (i.e., at the beginning, middle or end). Daniel, for instance, clearly remembered the "suffocating" fear that took hold when he first arrived at the prison gates, "I were (sic) shaking in the sweat van[31] not knowing what was going to [h]appen (…) you heard stuff on the out, about the violence and that (…) it

[31] G4 security van used to transport prisoners from the court to prison.

screwed me right up". He went on to describe the anxiety and panic attacks that would then cause him to depersonalise as he moved through the initial reception period:

> "I would start shaking for no reason and become short of breath (…) any sounds from the landing would bring down the 'fog', banging doors, other cons shouting across the floor anything like that".

After a couple of weeks this fear gave way to an intense period of prison boredom as the expectation of violence started to subside, "time just seemed to stop, a minute in there felt like forever". As his sentence proceeded, he became more knowledgeable about who he needed to avoid and who could be trusted, and subsequently began to adjust to carceral time by developing routines to help get him through each day.

> "The trick is to break each hour up in chunks so's (sic) you not thinking too far ahead. Press-ups, reading, writing a letter and watching some telly done over and over again in a circle like. Once I were off basic the telly helped a lot [be]cause it gave me something that I could plan my day and night around".

By this point Daniel's depersonalisation was being triggered less often, and he was managing it more effectively through approach-focused coping behaviours including asking the staff for help with applications and working towards gaining privileges:

> "Those first few nights were bad, the 'fog' was always there, making me feel like I was living this dream, that it wasn't me in the hole but some guy on television and I was watching (…) when things calmed down, I just tried to keep myself busy enough to prevent 'trancing' out". Over time things settled down (…) I would still get the trips when things got on top of me, but it weren't (sic) as bad".

For Scott, the prospect of experiencing the violence and intimidation that he had heard about prior to imprisonment, created a fear that resulted in an initial deep slide into withdrawal coping responses, “for that first week I cowered in my pad, straight up …trying to forget where I was (…) most times I were sliding in and out of the ‘zone’ big-time”. Eventually his dissociative coping started to transition as he began to work out that much of the aggression around the landings were inmates “masking up” and just a normal part of incarceration, “the scary part in the beginning is all the screaming and shouting (…) after a while you realise that most of it is just bravado that’s all, and that most of the guys are pussies”. From that point onwards the routinised boredom of prison life started to play out in the same way as for Daniel, “you spend all yours [sic] time trying to think of stuff to do (…) the boredom in there was a killer”. As Slap (2020) argues, fear comprises most of the entry stress of early incarceration, but this slowly diminishes and comes to be replaced by the dull reality of day-to-day prison life. A point reinforced by Liam:

> “You hear that it’s going to be hell in there and prepare for that, that they [other inmates] will come for you, but after a while you get to knowing what’s what which really helps (…) but then it gets to be the grind that gets you down”.

Alongside the realisation that imprisonment is inherently boring, the young men start to also experience the restrictions in personal freedoms that they had taken for granted on the outside. A grumbling recognition of just how impoverished the prison environment was going to be. This began with poor quality prison issue clothing, bedding, food, and toiletries:

> “They bagged up my own stuff and gave me fuckin [sic] shit joggers and a t-shirt to wear (…) the mattress on the bunk was paper thin and yellowing, the pillow was a

> joke (…) I had a smokers pack[32] which lasted [a]bout two days and that was it (…) they even took my watch and rings off me" (Adam).

This theme continued with limited cell space and privacy being reported. Also, restricted access to association on the landings, and inflexible routines centring around when they could shower, make telephone calls, or apply for work detail. As Lucas explained, "the restrictions hit you like a hammer, how the fuck anybody copes with those first few weeks is beyond me (…) there's no escaping the shit, you feel completely trapped like the walls are closing in on you". For Liam, and many of the other young prisoners' these restrictions seemed petty and vindictive and did little to prevent them from employing avoidant and suppressive coping behaviours:

> "When you first go in you got to wait for your wallet[33], you got no job, no status, no visits (…) stuck in your cage 23 hours a day … it sends you mental (…) I were (sic) ready to pick a fight [be]cause of the frustration but who you going to fight?".

Similarly for Ritchie:

> "You were likes [sic] bottom of the pile, nobody gave a fuck (…) you wait hours for the tea urn [be]cause you's [sic] just in the joint so gets [sic] it last (…) on the out I was somebody, but in there you's [sic] a fuckin [sic] nobody".

The emotional coping response to this entry-shock was similar for each of the interviewees. A combination of denial, frustration, anger, fear, and helplessness which brought on avoidant, withdrawal and emotion-focused coping behaviours. As Adam explained, "you

[32] All prisoners are entitled to a smokers or non-smokers pack when they first arrive.

[33] Prison account

don't know how stuff goes, only what you been told or heard before going in (…) it's like an assault on your senses, your emotions are all over the place, you just want to hide away from everybody". Contradictory coping behaviours, therefore, tended to frame those first few days, "one minute I would be lashing out, telling everybody to fuck out of my life and then I would be wanting the screws to help me" (Ben). Many sought avoidances through illegal substances, "my pad-mate had some hooch[34] hidden away in the toilet (…) it tasted like disinfectant but gave me enough of a buzz to calm down a bit" (Aaron). The young prisoners also quickly found that coping styles that had proved useful in the community, were no longer adaptive or available within the prison setting. As Kyle said, "I ran away from problems on the out, but suddenly that wasn't an option in there, you got no choice but to face them as best you can". For Ritchie, his 'hard' reputation used in the community counted for nothing in prison, "you's [sic] had these wannabees yeah, up and close (…) I's [sic] took one of the shitheads out and bang's [sic] I'm fucked over by six of them". Given the emotional rollercoaster of those first few days, it is little wonder that depersonalised episodes were widely reported as a central feature of their incarceration. As Ben explained:

> "You was (sic) careful not to show yourself on the landings unless you could help it, but once banged up I was 'trippin[g]' most of those first few weeks (…) at night you had nothing to do, so's they were the worst times (…) the DP's got really bad".

As the young men began to settle into their prison routines and became more knowledgeable about how things worked, their avoidant and emotion-focused coping started to amalgamate elements of a support coping style. As Adam said, "you start asking questions and realise there are things you can tap into, like the Listener[35] people or the trustees[36]". Visits from family and loved ones, started to become part of their prison routine,

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[34] Alcohol that had either been smuggled in or made in prison.
[35] A peer support service in prison that can provide confidential emotional support and advice.
[36] Long-term prisoners who have been given responsibilities for helping prisoners to settle in.

along with being able to phone home and write letters, "that first visit was the best thing that ever happened to me" (Tristen). As their prison 'wallet' accounts became activated they found themselves able to buy non-prison issue items for the first time and for some at least there was the opportunity to start a prison job and sign up for recreational activities including library membership. In this way, the young inmates began the slow process of assimilating into the prisoner society.

> "You's [sic] get to a point where tings [sic] get a bit easier [be]cause you's [sic] in the know, the joint routine, other slags in there, you gain the knowledge [a]bout how things are (Ritchie).

Laws (2019) argues that one of the most important aspects of this assimilation is the inmate's willingness to develop relationships with other prisoners' and staff. But as Lucas explained, "you are wary about the other guy's motives, you know, what do they want out of being friends with you?". This meant that even after several weeks or even months most remained distrustful. A situation that wasn't helped by the constant turnover of inmates into and out of the prison estate, as well as prisoners themselves being moved during their sentence. This mistrust of other prisoners was also extended to prison staff, "you had banter and all that but there were none [prison guards] I would go to with my problems" (Paul). A situation that contrasted with older inmates in Shulman & Cauffman's (2011) research where they were more willing to engage and take advantage of support from others in the prison almost immediately on entry. For most of the young men, friendships did form over time, but when asked about how much they would open up to another prisoner, the general consensus was that in the hypermasculine environment of the prison setting you didn't.

The result was a low level of acceptance where the prisoner came to internalise their prisonisation and adjusted accordingly. Only Tristen, from all the subject participants, spoke about his prison time as having a positive influence on his life, "prison made me look at

myself (…) it gave me time away from my previous shit life and convinced me that I didn't want to ever go back to it". A process of what has been called post-traumatic growth[37]. For the others, a stubborn reliance on avoidance and emotional coping, rather than approach or acceptance coping, appeared to characterise their ongoing attempts to deal with prison life:

> "You gets (sic) to thinking that things have got as bad as they could and then around the corner something else kicks you in the bollocks (…) visits get cancelled [be]cause of lock-down or a new screw comes on the landings and changes all the rules …you's [sic] never get settled in [be]cause the next shit pie is on its's way" (Scott).

The effect of this according to Luke et al. (2021) is the 'fall-back' hypothesis where initial attempts to cope through social support and acceptance have failed, for whatever reason, and so the young prisoner falls-back on alternative (usually maladaptive) coping strategies. A view that Kyle seemed to support, "I tried to fit in, I really did, but it was too hard, prison wasn't as bad as I thought, but there were too many things triggering me all the while". Stress triggers that brought on a level of denial that proved not only irrational but distorted the young prisoners' perception for events:

> "It is like the little things that shouldn't be a problem but become a problem [be]cause of all the other little 'shitty' things that are also happening [a]round you. They build up so's [sic] in the end you abandon any attempt to face up to them (…) you turn away and refuse to allow them in, that's why you drift off in yer [sic] head".

4.2 General features of prison depersonalisation as a learned coping response

[37] A reference to the way in which an individual finds meaning from adversity and uses that meaning to live their life in a different way.

According to Cianunica et al. (2021), depersonalisation brings about damaging changes to self-awareness that affects low-level sensory and bodily perception, such as feelings of detachment from one's body and the world. It also has the propensity to affect high-level, cognitive processes, including a disconnection from autobiographical memory and a narrative for future planning. Subsequently, the subject participants described how entry-shock into prison would initially involve components of both low and high-level dissociative disruption. It was only as they became more assimilated into the prisoner society that their dissociation would manifest more commonly as lower-level depersonalisation/derealisation (DPDR) states of detachment with only occasional bouts of psychogenic amnesia. As Daniel explained, "when I first went inside it were hard, the 'fog'[38] was constant (…) I kept losing things in my mind, you know, things I knew I knew but couldn't remember (…) I began to lose myself, you know my identity". Similarly for Paul, "it was almost like your brain had given up, I mean, that it had forgotten how to see things for real (…) times when things around me were just weird looking, I was walking on an alien planet". Although the more chronic symptoms of dissociation would start to abate as a superficial level of prison acceptance took hold, there continued to be triggering strains that would invoke extreme emotional responses.

Such strains were wide and varied but ranged from Scott's acute fear of "being raped" to as Tristen observed, "just being there in the background, like a dull pain". A view that was highlighted by Spitzer et al. (2003) who argued that depersonalisation represents more of a syndrome of wide-ranging symptoms rather than a clearly defined disorder. Aaron, for instance, described those times when he felt not, "in control of my body (…) like being a robot controlled by another person". Liam on the other hand, described the exact opposite, "I could feel it was there, you know, but it didn't stop me mostly from being able to get on with

[38] Many of the subject participants spoke about their depersonalisation as a 'fog' coming over them.

my day". In contrast, Scott described his dissociation as, "my body freezing (…) in front of another con (…) not being able to move or think, just frozen to the spot". Whilst Elijah spoke about, "thems [sic] feelings out your body, numb, like you looking (sic) down on yer [sic] self (…) eyes looking through eyes looking".

Regardless of the severity or frequency of their depersonalisation episodes, a contributing factor to the young prisoner's stress was a fear that other inmates or prison staff would be physically present whilst they were experiencing them. As Ben put it, "times I had to stop what I was doing and get back to my pad sharpish and let it runs its course …last thing you need is a con thinking yours [sic] vulnerable". This fear was very real. As Liam put it, "you feel it come on and everything round you goes quiet …you become totally aware that you are feeling and acting differently, so's you don't want to be seen like that". Apart from the fear of being seen, the young prisoners were also afraid that they would be asked to describe what they were experiencing. Having hidden their dissociation away from others for so long, many struggled to describe their experiences because of embarrassment or in some cases shame:

> "I don't want anybody calling me a nutter. When you can't control the trancing (sic) it makes you scared that you will end up that way permanently, stuck inside your own head and not able to get out (…) that you'll end up a schizo" (Adam).

There was a real sense that most had suffered in silence for many years because of a deep-seated fear of not being believed, or that they would be considered as attention seeking, "nobody in prison had heard of the DP's so you kept it to yourself" (Adam). Negative experiences from previously telling parents, teachers, social workers, and probation officers had instilled a negative attitude towards opening up or attempting to describe their experiences. A situation observed by van der Hart (2021), who found that those experiencing dissociation were often misunderstood because of its lack of profile and link to

poor mental health. Timmerman & Emmelkamp's (2001) also spoke about how recounting dissociative experiences could prove to be just as traumatic as the experience of depersonalisation itself. Typical of this was Liam who on several occasions, during his interviews, would stop mid-sentence to clear his throat or look away from the camera, "it feels weird, kinda [sic] strange describing it now (…) like a dream, but it still hurts, you know, inside". For Ben and others, describing their depersonalisation resulted in bringing on new episodes, as an extract from my research journal showed:

> "Then suddenly he stopped talking and looked away from the camera. I thought he had lost his train of thought, but he just sat staring at this point in the distance as though I no longer existed. It lasted for a couple of minutes and then he slowly started to come round. When I asked Ben what had just happed, he said: "this is how it happens, it comes over you (…) like you are underwater looking up (…) everything is silent like you feel dead inside (…) my real self-disappears".

One characteristic shared by all of those who had depersonalisation episodes in prison was preserved insight; an acute awareness that they were dissociating and the disjunction and disruption to their sense of self that this was causing. As Scott said, "that were the most scary thing, knowing that you are going through it but not being able to stop yourself". For Aaron and others, the fact that they knew that these experiences were not real, ended up becoming a stressor in itself, because of the ruminating thoughts that it brought on, "you are telling yourself it's not real, it's not real, but all your senses saying it is anyway …it sends you bat loopy after a while". Vannikov-Lugassi & Soffer-Dudek (2018), argue that intact reality testing has the effect of increasing perception for the environment sometimes to super-human levels, despite the person feeling estranged or detached from the very same environment. As Daniel explained:

> “You got this ‘brain fog’ come over you (…) you have to pretend everything’s cool, but every part of your brain is starting to tune out (…) but at the same time you are super sensitive to everything round you”.

These paradoxes of experiences create enormous barriers to maintaining everyday functioning as Kyle explained, “my thoughts would start racing and get all mixed up, so that I couldn’t understand what it was I was trying to say to people”. Similarly for Ben, “the boss[39] would ask me something and I would babble on not knowing what I were saying (…) they were all convinced that I were on something”. Disorientating the prisoner still further was a third-person element to their depersonalised state, which would cause social interactions to appear as though witnessing events and people through another person rather than their own. Bergouignan et al. (2021) believes that this perspective is often adopted when the actual event is experienced and later recalled in its original form. As Liam observed, “it didn’t look or feel like my body (…) I said to myself, I don’t move that way and don’t speak that way (…) deep down I knew it was me, but it wasn’t me”. At times, these out of body experiences would manifest in a physical paralysis in bodily movement so that, “your body freezes, like you have been shot with a stun gun” (Paul). Van der Kalk (2018) suggests that this paralysis occurs because the mind is not generating the continuous, subtle emotional feedback from everything it experiences, even when nothing of consequence is taking place. Without it, the body comes to feel oblique, without form and unreal.

Büetiger et al. (2020) found these debilitating episodes of depersonalisation to be on a continuum from transient to chronic but would tend to follow a pattern of the sufferer spending many hours or days having normal integration of consciousness before sudden and unplanned episodes of dissociation occurred. Lucas, for instance, described how there was little warning of when his depersonalisation would come on, “summut would happen on

[39] Prison staff

the landing like, you could feel it starting to come over you like a blanket (…) it were (sic) instant (…) you couldn't predict or stop it from [h]appening". For many of the subject participants', this lack of warning would often combine with several dissociative episodes occurring back-to-back before normal consciousness would return. A view that Foote et al. (2008) also found in their study of psychiatric patients. As Ritchie recounted, "those 'DPs' would come over me in waves see (…) you're getting to come out of one and then bang you get sucked straight into another, that's how it would be for hours on end". These waves of depersonalisation episodes become a very disorienting experience of not knowing whether the young prisoner would be entering a fugue, was still in one or coming out the other side, "your second guessing in your mind …is this really real now or am I still in it" (Aaron). This has the effect of a constant feeling of being trapped inside themselves and a realisation that they are slowly becoming more removed from gaining consciousness, "you's [sic] gets to be desperate, panicking and your anxiety is off the charts, but it be dragging you back" (Elijah).

Alongside these depersonalisation episodes, the subject participants also experienced comorbid symptoms of derealisation where they found their immediate environment to be strange and unfamiliar. As Adam explained:

> "You have walked across the landings a million times but then it goes all weird like you have never been there before (…) you can't remember where the phones booths are or how to get down to tuck (…) it all appears alien like you have been transported to another prison exactly the same but completely different".

These derealisation experiences were also observed to cause distortions in recognising facial expressions. As Kyle put it, "everybody would look like shop dummies (…) talking but with non-moving plastic faces". Exacerbating this deficit would be symptoms resembling alexithymia, where there was an inability to recognise or describe emotions (Hemming et al., 2020). As Scott explained, "the boss were (sic) laughing like (…) I watched him laughing and

all I could think was what was happening to his face (…) why was he so different?". This deficit in cognitive awareness would cause some of the young prisoners to misread situations, "they stood waiting for me …I walked straight into their trap, I should have seen what was going to happen a mile off" (Paul). As Daniel put it, "the boss told me to fuck off …but because I didn't realise, he was being serious, I told him to fuck off back like a joke like …big mistake". This inability to gauge facial emotions was a frequently reported observation and acted as one reason why many of the young inmates quickly became socially withdrawn preferring to spend more time by themselves in their cells. As Lucas, explained, "it makes you unable to work out people's intentions which can be very dangerous inside.

Less common, but an exacerbating feature for some of the young prisoners were cyclical bouts of psychogenic memory loss. As Paul put it, "sitting staring at the four walls not knowing where the fuck I was or how I got there". In more extreme cases, this memory loss became total so that the young inmate would report feelings of not existing at all, "I would be in the middle of watching something on TV and suddenly realise I did not exist, no memories, nothing …there was no me (…) a big void where I used to exist" (Aaron). Giesbrecht et al. (2007) found that in these instances, auto biographical and procedural memory became fragmented.

> "It became impossible to see myself as a child again, I lost those memories even though I knew they were still there (…) my mind would be numb and then suddenly without warning they would all come back again, I would remember myself and then it would happen all over again" (Ben).

As Liam said, "I were scared that I had lost myself but were even more scared because I knew that I had lost myself". When asked to explain what he meant by being 'lost', he described a world where his feelings and emotions had become blunted to such an extent that happiness, sadness, and everything in between had become distant and lacking colour,

“things that would have normally excited me like watching football on telly would be dull and distant like I just couldn’t make contact with it”. This blunting of affect was felt as a numbness in body and mind, preventing impulsivity and motivation, “when I first went in, I was wanking almost every day (…) in the end I was having the ‘DP’s’ so badly that the urge just confused me”.

Eight out of the twelve ex-prisoners’ spoke about experiences of dissociative amnesia co-existing alongside their depersonalisation and derealisation. For Scott, this memory loss manifested both in mundane circumstances such as forgetting people’s names to more complex amnesia that involved fragmentation of early life experiences and identity loss:

> “It’s not that your whole memory goes, nothing like that, it’s just certain things get forgotten until you get reminded of them again (…) you have forgotten you have forgotten (…) walking round the landing and you suddenly forget the names of those around me, my mind would just go blank like I was pissed or something (…) it would come back to me later but at the time I would god honest forget the names of everybody who was in front of me”.

Similarly, for Aaron:

> “I knew where I was and what time it was, that kind of thing (…) my concentration would start to get dazed and then I would lose important details of things (…) like this one time I was being moved on transfer and could not for the life of me remember where we were going despite being told just a couple of minutes earlier”.

Similarly, Lucas spoke about past life events that appeared hazy and “not joined up”. When asked whether they had experienced this type of forgetfulness before prison, most said that

they had, and recognised that it normally preceded a triggering incident that they would rather not remember. As Scott put it:

> "my little brother got run over by this milk van (…) I remember like yesterday it coming round the corner and Sam stepping out in the road (…) I was too far away to get to him (…) my body just froze (…) nothing could come out (…) I remember watching the van approach like it was happening in slow motion but then nothing, the rest is just a blank".

These experiences where the young man could without warning forget who they were, who they had spoken to, where they had gone, what they had done, and how they felt was a very frightening experience. Ben for instance, explained that he became frantic and thought that he might be losing his mind:

> "I had been inside for a week or so and I was moved from one landing to another and put in this cell with a guy who obviously had issues (…) he would just sit and stare around the place like he wasn't really there and every now and then would fix his stare on you (…) it was pretty unnerving (…) this one night I was woken by this scratching noise next to my bunk and it was him doing voodoo shit, chanting and all sorts (…) well I just lost it and started to zone out and then literally everything went sideways (…) I couldn't remember fuck all, who I was, where I was, nothing. It lasted for a couple of hours and even though I have had other times when it's happened, it was never as bad as that time".

Golshani et al. (2020) reported that a distinctive feature of depersonalisation is its poly-symptom comorbidity to other anxiety disorders, including social phobias and panic attacks. For Adam, interacting with others became so unnerving that, "you gets (sic) to not wanting to be around people because it's them that's triggering it". These co-occurring symptoms were

a dominant theme throughout the interviews although they did range in severity from mild feelings of panic through to symptoms akin to post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Aaron, for instance, spoke about his acute panic attacks and how this would manifest in not only episodes of depersonalisation but also tinnitus and migraines, “it would build up until it was like a pressure cooker with the lid flying off (…) I’d be ‘zoning out’ constantly and have this piercing sound in my ears, sometimes for days”. Another common presenting symptom, as Adam explained, was hypochondriasis (a persistent fear about having serious mental health issues) which became a constant feature of his prison living, “it feels like you are behind a glass wall (…) you’re watching and always checking yourself out”. This heightened sense of awareness created persistent but unrealistic fears as Ritchie explained, “you’s [sic] start to see muddled signals [a]round you (…) things don’t make sense anymore because they are so unfamiliar, and you begin to get these depressing feelings that you are losing yourself”.

For Adam, marking this exposure of disconnection to the body and surrounding environment would be a distortion in the passage of time, “…it was like I was trapped in a time warp (…) things moving around me so slowly whilst I’m frozen in the middle”. A tendency for temporal ‘slippage’ that was widely reported by Loewenstein (2018), and which appears as a central feature of the dissociative fugue. It was variously described by the subject participants as: “sliding between doors” (Ben), “space travel” (Liam) or as Paul put it, “hitting warp factor 0”. Given that a major hurdle in surviving prison was dealing with the slowness of time, the paucity of its passing during the dissociative episode was particularly debilitating and caused acute stress. As Ben explained, “you feel like you have been fuckin [sic] spaced out for hours and hours then you come too, and it’s only been two minutes”. This feeling of being frozen in time without immediate escape, was such a disorienting experience, that there was a constant inner fight to emerge from the dissociative fugue and then stay out of it, “you say, right this time, focus Scott, stop it from happening, focus (…) it would work for a few seconds and then you have slipped back into it” (Scott).

Underpinning all the characteristics of depersonalisation were, according to the subject participants, negative looping ruminating thoughts that sat alongside the heightened self-monitoring and self-observation. Such ruminations centred around trying to work out what was real and whether they could trust their tacit assumptions about the world which had suddenly become so alien to them. As Adam explained:

> "You feel like you're in a bunker buried just beneath the surface (…) people walk over you without any idea that you are trapped (…) you're screaming for help (…) the terrifying thing is that once out of the trance you know it won't be long before you are scratching on the bunker lid again".

In this way, the dissociative shift came and went in a random fashion bringing with it a deeper and deeper sense of unease and helplessness. Ben summed all this up:

> "You don't know it's happening until it's happening …there's no warning …things that you think will cause it doesn't, then something stupid, like you're shaving and see your face in the mirror and suddenly the brain fog hits you (…) your trying your hardest to snap out of it but the more you do it (…) it sucks you in further".

4.3 The emergence, maintenance, and dissolution of depersonalisation as a stress-coping response

Subject participants were able to provide many shared experiences of how their depersonalisation would begin and end. They were also able to provide an insight into how in the absence of a flight or fight stress response (as happens in the prison setting) the depersonalised response comes to be reinforced and generalised to previously benign events or factors that once caused little stress. As Kyle explained:

> “Times you think that you are coming out [depersonalisation] and then it kinda [sic] drags you further in (…) you gets (sic) to be scared of everything, not just the usual things (…) I got a phobia to toothpaste thinking that it were poisoning me and causing my DP’s”.

Hunter et al (2003) model of depersonalisation, makes clear that episodes don’t just happen, but must be first triggered by an event that the individual considers to be affectively harming in some way. This may be due to emotional stress, or the side effects of this stress, such as sleep deprivation. It may also be influenced by self-induced influences such as the taking of drugs or alcohol misuse. Although all these reasons were cited by the subject participants’, overwhelmingly, it was the perceived emotionality around carceral strains that proved to be the main trigger for their dissociative coping. In this sense the ‘fog’ of unreality that many of the young men spoke about came to represent a barrier that fell between them and the carceral stressor as if virtually ‘freezing’ them from the threatening situation. As Daniel put it, “emotions build up and you panic that you cannot escape (…) then suddenly you feel like you are in a bubble where emotions have been forced out”. Unlike in community life, where stress triggers can often be resolved through flight or fight coping responses, prison prevents that as a possibility. In this way, the depersonalised ‘freezing’ response represents a third way of coping, which allows the inmate to escape or alleviate their negative situation as they once had to in childhood (Zavattini et al., 2017). For Liam, this feeling of being held hostage to stress triggers meant that an emotional ‘space’ had to be created for him to be able to retreat to, “it feels like your brain has been separated and you aren’t attached to your body (…) everything goes dull like a filter has been turned on. You can’t be around people in that state, there’s got to be somewhere you can go”. Ironically, such a state at first may appear adaptive because it helps to stay off intense negative affective feelings. Unfortunately, depersonalisation does little in providing a means of accepting or coming to terms with the

stress trigger, nor helping to deal with the resulting accumulative stress that arises from the internal feelings of unreality. As Lucas put it:

> "Your trapped within yourself fighting to get out (…) when you do get out, the things that caused the DPs in the first place are still there …there's no escape…you end up jumping through the same loop over and over again (…) it's very scary".

The initial experience of depersonalisation, therefore, is an intense feeling of losing control of the present, often brought on by a common but constantly re-triggering carceral strain. For Paul this was a fear that he was being victimised, "he were (sic) leaning all over me, heavy like (…) he wanted to cause a brew[40] but I just walked on …but he kept following me … next thing I've spaced-out and didn't know the fuck what was going on". Alternatively, Elijah found that the cancellation of a family visit triggered his depersonalisation, "you gets (sic) to be looking forward to them coming over and next thing, cancelled (…) that woulds [sic] send mys [sic] anxiety shooting up and then the spacing out would follow".

As several researchers have pointed out, there are some carceral strains that affectively impact the young adult male prisoner more than older inmates (Crewe & Laws, 2018., Cochran et al, 2017., Bengtsson, 2012., Brown & Ireland, 2006., Biggam & Power, 1997). For Paul, this was the idleness and inactivity that marked his prison existence, "getting through each day without going mental (…) through the boredom of it all (…) that's when the fog was at its worse for me". Kyle found that being moved from one prison to another with very little notice had a very debilitating effect on controlling his depersonalisation, "you's [sic] just gets to use [sic] to the rules in one slammer and then they move you and you have to start all over again (…) it tipped me over the edge for a while". Scott spoke at length about how he felt isolated from his family and friends, "that were hard …not being able to speak with them whenever I

[40] Prison term for escalating brawl

wanted". Dmitrieva et al. (2012) found that many carceral strains tend to illicit emotions that prisoners had experienced in their pre-prison lives. Lucas, for instance, made a clear link between his feelings of helplessness in prison and how they reminded him of aspects of his life growing up, "I never seemed to be able to change anything (…) it always felt like I was weak to it". Similarly for Adam, "prison made me insane sad-wise because I felt so alone (…) no one could be bothered in me (…) it was like I was back in care".

Although the onset of dissociation was often sudden and without warning, how long each episode would last appear more reliant on how severe the young prisoners' perception of the effects of the carceral stressor were. As Elijah explained, "you's [sic] aware of yourself, you gets (sic) to tinking [sic] all the time, beating yourself up in yer [sic] head that you don't let your feelings in". Hunter et al. (2003) found that the emotional responses which maintained this dissociative coping included increased anxiety and panic attacks because of the physiological arousal that the young inmate was experiencing. As Aaron explained:

> "Your body is reacting to the stress before your mind does (…) you feel it going into overdrive and as your emotions build up, that's when your head goes into autopilot so it don't (sic) have to think about things (…) you can be in there forever, almost never come out, or come out and see that things have not changed and bang your zoning out again".

This happens because the cognitive response to the stress trigger increases self-monitoring and attention towards the environment. As Lucas put it, "[be]cause your thinking about how you can avoid it, it makes it ten times worse (…) you end up spending all your energy thinking how to stop thinking about it". Dorahy et al. (2015) believes that this cognitive response of self-monitoring is likely to bring on a depth of absorption which in turn reduces the threshold at which symptoms are detected, and therefore increases their frequency. A

view observed by Kyle, “before you know where you are, the smallest things that never used to bother me before are now setting me off (…) it’s like a revolving door”.

In more severe cases the maintenance of the depersonalised state starts to generalise away from the original stress trigger so that morbid worry and rumination become assimilated with other unrelated stressors that may not have been perceived as ‘dangerous’ in the past. These mixed-up distressing feelings of detachment brings on a cyclical phase of recurring thoughts about the nature of reality and the self. As Paul explained:

> “When you feel out of your body, you can’t believe that it’s you (…) you wonder where I begin and end (…) then you panic about stupid things that never bothered you before, like will I be able to make it to the shower and back without ‘zoning’ out”.

For many of the subject participants’ these repetitive and intrusive negative attributions continued to exacerbate and maintain the self-monitoring, triggering further body and environmental distortions, and leaving them vulnerable to other mental health issues. For Adam, obsessive compulsive symptoms that revolved around an intense fear that his family would no longer be there on the outside started to coincide with his depersonalisation, “I would get through a pin card every couple of days, constantly phoning home (…) if nobody answered I would be having the ‘fogs’ all night with horrible thoughts that they were all dead”. Ritchie found that his dissociative episodes were lasting longer and becoming more linked to intense paranoia, “it feels uncomfortable feeling out of place and not quite there (…) it gets you’s [sic] thinking whether your dead …why everything is so blurred”. Similarly for Adam, intrusive thoughts brought on panic attacks about whether life would ever be real again, “when you not spacing out, you still feel parts of you are missing (…) you gets (sic) to thinking that if I’m not real now, can I ever be real (…) that’s how it screws you up”. As Paul added, “you start losing your worldview (…) thoughts pop up asking whether anybody knows you exist (…) are you just existing in your own head?”. These feelings, for Kyle were

exaggerated by episodes of derealisation that made the surrounding environment feel even more alien and unknown:

> "The walls bend and crackle (…) you find yourself staring for minutes, sometimes hours at a crack that's appeared in the wall (…) watch as it gets bigger and bigger …then you blink and it's gone again, like floaters in your eyes".

The maintenance of these cognitive aberrations in depersonalisation are typically found in both non-clinical and psychiatric settings (Foote et al, 2008). However, they became more exaggerated for the young prisoners' because there was little opportunity to gain respite from the stress triggers. Geng et al. (2022), proposed that the main behavioural response to these dissociative episodes would be a heightened level of threat appraisal. The inmate would begin to avoid areas of the prison or social interactions where it was likely that something affectively threatening would trigger a dissociative response. For Ritchie, this meant not being able to use the gym because of an irrational fear that he may be found dissociating, "I don't know what it was about the gym, but soon I was thinking the same about everywhere I's went". As Paul said, "you end up being very frightened about going anywhere there are other cons". For Liam, this meant that he became less able to predict what types of environments would trigger him, so could rarely relax in anticipation of suddenly losing touch with his reality once again.

Despite none of the interviewees being consciously able to stop their dissociative fugues, they were able to suppress its impact to a certain extent, especially when in a public place. The fear of being caught dissociating meant that areas such as the "landings" (Liam) "workshops" (Kyle) and "kitchens" (Paul,) triggered a hyperaware flight response where the young prisoner would immediately flee to the safety of their cells before the fugue became too intense. As Kyle explained:

> "The fear is that your standing there in the workshop trancing whilst people staring at you (…) if the screws get a whiff that you are off your rocker then next thing it's on your plan and you are being watched as a head-banger (…) same with the cons, they get to see you as weak that way and take advantage (…) times a screw[41] would come in my cage and ask what the fuck you always running from".

The end of the depersonalised episode could happen as quickly as it was triggered, or as with some inmates, it became fainter until normal consciousness was gained once again. Daniel likened it to, "a slow lingering headache that you can feel even several minutes after it has left you". Because of the 'wave' like nature of depersonalisation, ending an episode often required an alternative cognitive "agenda" as Scott put it, "if I felt it wasn't going, I would get me-self [sic] in the gym and try and work it out (…) the pain from the presses would help to ease the worst of it". For others, distraction through watching TV or being involved in the elicit economy helped, "it helps to keep your mind on the burners[42] when you have been 'zoning' out. Prisoners tended to use more mundane strategies to break themselves from the dissociative fugue, such as going to sleep. As Danial put it, "you became an expert in creating a fantasy world in your head and then using that to sink into a deep sleep".

An alternative distraction for the young men was through substance misuse including alcohol and drugs, which helped to purge their feeling states, and relieve the depersonalisation. Paul explained further, "you get hold of some fem[43] and drink until you are no longer capable of feeling anymore (…) it's like the DP's except that you don't start scratching around in your head trying to get out". For some, however, the fear of feeling trapped within the dissociative

[41] Term for prison officer

[42] Prison term for smuggled mobile phones

[43] Term for alcohol smuggled into prison.

fugue was so overwhelming that they resorted to varying degrees of self-injury to come back to their reality. Černis et al. (2019), for instance, believes that many young adults self-harm in order to end the aversive experience of dissociation. As Scott explained, “I would screw this fork into my thigh until I felt something again (…) the pain helped bring myself back”. Lucas describes, “the relief of hair pulling (…) just dead for a while and then the pain, I existed again”. For Adam, the banging of his head continuously against the cell door would, “slowly bring me back to myself”. The accumulative effect of dissociation and self-harming, however, was that the inmate would eventually reach an emotional nadir where it became increasingly difficult to gain pleasure from things that may have previously stimulated and entertained. As Lucas observed, “just watching the telly became a chore, I couldn’t concentrate long enough in my unreality”. Often this would spill over into anhedonia, “simple pleasures such as eating a chocolate biscuit had become bland and tasteless” (Ben). Daniel describes, “feeling groggy all the time (…) like I’m hungover and looking at things around me drained of colour and excitement”. Inevitably, under such circumstances an obsession formed around perceptions of permanence, a feeling state where reality appeared transitory and where nothing remained stable but became opaque to meaning. As Scott explained, “it’s like a mind worm (…) negative thoughts insert in yer [sic] head that keeps niggling away at you”. For Aaron, the desire to escape these looping negative and intrusive thoughts was such that he frequently combined his self-harming with drug and alcohol abuse, “you gets (sic) to not caring what you are doing to yourself (…) get wrecked, so you don’t have to think any longer”. But as Daniel summed up:

> “I never had a need to take stuff on the out, but in there, with the ‘DP’s’ hitting me all the while, I just became a spice head (…) trying to stop me thinking any longer …that’s what prison does to you, they don’t just take away your physical freedom, but also the freedom you had in your head as well”.

Unsurprisingly, once the depersonalisation had gone, feelings of hypochondria would start to take over as the young prisoners began to panic that they were finding it more difficult to maintain their presence, especially when around other people. A view supported from research by Ray et al. (2021) who suggests that hypochondria, as part of an anxiety condition will add to the burden of illness. As Liam said, “I was on plating up duty, cons up and close to me (…) I had just had a ‘trip’ but managed to get over it …now I was terrified it would come on again”. Fellow prisoners showed little sympathy. As Ben explained, “prison is not a place you want to be ‘shifting’ [be]cause there is no escape, you do it in the full glare of everyone around you and they think you are an idiot or just weak”. Kyle added:

> “The dread comes from the unknowingness of it all (…) you’d be playing cards and having a laugh and then suddenly without warning you have been dragged from yourself (…) looking at others round the table and having a fucking attack of the Déjà vu’s (…) you have to get away quick like and then end up banging your head against the pad wall trying to get yourself back smartish before anybody realises”.

4.4 The effects of depersonalisation as a stress-coping response on day-to-day functioning and adjustment to the prisoner society

Unsurprisingly, none of the ex-prisoners’ had enjoyed their time in prison. Perhaps more telling, was that few of those interviewed, felt that they had managed to negotiate themselves successfully through ‘entry-shock’ and into the prisoner society. A view that runs counter to much prison research that insists adjustment occurs without incident and will certainly not continue to affect the prisoner on release back into the community (Ginnekin, 2015). The reality, for the young prisoners, was a continued and disproportionate harm from the emotionality of prison well after their release. For Daniel, the carceral strains that brought

on the initial dissociative episodes were still there as he was preparing to leave. In fact, it came to define his very existence in prison:

> "They were some of the worst times, and that's saying something when you know my background (…) from the beginning I seemed to be fighting this feeling I was drowning in my emotions (…) I lost almost everything, my girlfriend, the baby, my sanity (…) I still wake up in the middle of the night sweating that other cons are trying to get to me through the walls".

For many of the former prisoners', incarceration created a petri-dish of potential stress triggers that meant simple day-to-day functioning was constantly threatened as they slid in and out of their dissociative states. Mundane activities, for instance, such as deciding when to use the prison shop or go to the library could suddenly appear menacing and anxiety-inducing. As Aaron explains, "because it [depersonalisation] can come on anywhere, anytime, you are constantly aware of trying to avoid situations that might bring it on (…) it plagues your day". Paul added, "the uncertainty of when it will come on becomes like a depression slowly robbing you of any impulsivity (…) that's why you while a lot of time in your pad away from everyone". In this way the young prisoners observed that they would end up having to engage in an internal conversation continuously about whether they will be able to participate in things such as 'association' or manage to get through a phone call home without them having to make their excuses. As Adam put it:

> "the 'fog' comes down and you want the floor to open up and swallow you (…) its terrifying knowing people are staring or trying to make conversation and you can't talk because you are completely empty in your head".

Golshani et al. (2020) found that because each prisoner experienced their dissociation differently in terms of frequency, duration, and severity, it meant that some were debilitated

more by it than others. Some, for instance, reported on their inability to socially engage with other prisoners and staff. For Scott, this took the form of appearing to other people as distant, rigid, or humourless, “I was considered backward for not being able to hold a conversation (…) the boss was asking whether I was the full ticket”. For Aaron, it meant finding difficulty in focusing on tasks that required more than a minimum level of concentration, “when I was ‘zoning’ out, I couldn’t even watch the telly properly because my concentration would go north”. Elijah, referred to deficits in empathy where the ability to maintain perspective of other’s feelings and intentions was often absent, “you gets (sic) to not knowing, whether they be joking or not (…) reading other cons faces gets to be confusing”. As Guralnik et al. (2000) found, underpinning all these traits, was a general inability to maintain an internal narrative around day-to-day routines. Liam, for instance, described how his depersonalisation would create such out of body experiences that even hygiene tasks were sometimes difficult to carry out, “it became overwhelming …times I couldn’t even look in the mirror or wash myself …when I was ‘zoning out’ it didn’t even look like me”. Adam added, “it were (sic) impossible to escape times (…) it nearly broke me (…) I couldn’t do even basic stuff, like have a shave or do my gym routines without it coming on”. For Scott, catastrophic thinking marked his dissociation which was further exacerbated because he was unaware at the time that what he had been experiencing was in fact dissociation. A situation that Haferkamp et al. (2015) found to be quite common.

Scott spoke about:

> “Thinking I was going crazy (…) I was scaring myself big time, literally my mind kept slipping away from me (…) it was so terrifying that I was [sic] more and more time in my pad because of it (…) I didn’t talk to anyone and didn’t want to be a part of things period”.

This sense of isolation and inability to concentrate was widely reported, “I felt alone, you know, trying to cope with being ‘detached’ but not having anyone around to understand” (Ben). As Kyle pointed out, “I would have these bursts of reality where I felt totally conscious, connected, emotions, feelings everything (…) then the dullness would begin all over again, washing over me “. Similarly for Ben, “you kinda [sic] come totally aware of cons around you (…) panic sets in [be]cause you feel yourself floating away (…) I could sense that I was ‘flidding’ [sic] out, all I could do was sit and wait for it to go”.

For those young prisoners’ who experienced both depersonalisation and derealisation, this sense of isolation and loss of empathy, was compounded by deficits in homoeostasis such as maintaining good sleeping habits or being able to control their level of breathing due to reoccurring panic attacks. As Liam explained, “you start hyperventilating (…) everything round you gets distorted (…) you can sense other guys nearby but you blowing too much to get the words out”. Similarly for Adam:

> “I got this double whammy [be]cause not only did my body not belong to me but then everything around me was lifeless …people start appearing different (…) so I didn’t recognise who was who”.

Liam explained that “it’s like being on another planet where nothing makes any kinda [sic] sense, you’re reading a book one minute and then next the words are all mixed up”. As Scott put it, “you knew your mind was making it up, but your senses are shouting something different to you (…) kinda [sic] living it in supermax”. For Adam, it was the ensuing anxiety that arose from these feelings that became the primary cause of his sleep deprivation and panic attacks:

> “Prison is not a good place to get a good night’s sleep anyways (…) constant banging of doors, inmates screaming and shouting, music played too loud that kind

> of thing, but when I was 'trancing' you couldn't relax or switch off (…) you got tireder and tireder (sic)"

The lack of quality sleep exacerbated their depersonalisation because of the fatigue that built up. This fatigue created feelings of disorientation so that the young inmate came to be even more confused by what was real and what was being imagined. For Lucas, it also made him not only constantly tired but also listless and without energy, "it comes to affect you's [sic] concentration and fuels the fear (…) you's [sic] become jittery and on edge". Daniel, felt that at times he was unsure whether he was dreaming or awake and became overly worried about how his bizarre behaviour would affect his privilege level:

> "You had to be on your guard twenty-four seven to show that you are trying, any issues that involve you could be reported and then your status gets banged (…) when I was having the 'shifts', I was having to literally fake reality until I got back to my cage".

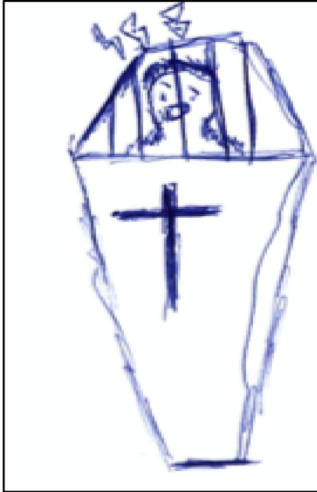
These feeling of being trapped inside oneself, alone, with ruminating thoughts and frightening ideations constantly looped backwards and forwards were constantly voiced in the interviews. It meant that it became more difficult to engage in everyday routines and rituals that marked being a part of the prisoner society. Getting dressed, having a shave, preparing for a visit or writing a letter, could at times become a feat of endurance as the young prisoner became more self-absorbed and affectively detached by their depersonalised state. Hedstrom (2010), who conducted research into clinical patients with depersonalisation found similar deficits in maintaining hygiene and everyday routines. It was also observed by Giesbrecht et al. (2007) among undergraduates experiencing depersonalisation, that there was a general loss of orientation to space and time. For the young prisoners' this manifested in times when it became difficult to know when, 'you were asleep and awake" (Lucas), or "whether I had eaten once or twice that day" (Daniel). As Scott, said: "you get to thinking is it

laundry day today or tomorrow?", or for Liam, "I was up and ready for work detail but [be]cause I was 'zoning out' I didn't realise that it was 10.00pm at night". As Paul summarised:

> "it becomes more and more difficult to stay focused because you are desperately trying to manage the pain of being in prison whilst at the same time trying to stop yourself from the 'brain fog' (…) you start feeling the shift and you are fighting your thoughts to get out again (…) it's like being on a hamster wheel constantly fighting with myself to stop (…) drifting in and out, being loose with myself".

This paradoxical struggle that develops between trying to avoid or escape carceral stressors whilst not succumbing to dissociation becomes one of the starkest features of prison depersonalisation.

Chapter 5: Reframing the Pains of Imprisonment: An Aggregated Approach



"The sameness of it all …day after day the same walls, floor, the same fuckwits shouting through the windows, the same shit food, the same thoughts going round and round …12 hours in this coffin" (Aaron)

Figure 2: Self-drawing by Aaron.

Aaron was sentenced to three and a half years for aggravated burglary of which he spent just under two years in prison. His defence in court was that he owed money to an illegal lender and his family was being threatened with violence unless he was able to raise the thousands of pounds in accrued interest that he owed. Despite having a string of petty convictions, this was the first time that he had spent any time in prison, and by his own admission found the experience life changing. On his release he was admitted to a mental health unit with severe depression and spent two months as a sectioned patient. His journey through the prison system was characterised by alienation, fear, extreme boredom and constant lapses into dissociative episodes that included depersonalisation, derealisation and psychogenic amnesia. His inability to cope with prison life was interpreted by prison staff as non-compliance for which he received periods of segregation and cancelled visits. At one point he was attacked whilst on the prison landing and had acid thrown over him. He still bears the scars from this injury, and it led to him being diagnosed with post-traumatic stress symptoms.

The following chapter addresses the second research question of my study: How does the emotionality around carceral strains impact the employment of depersonalisation as a learned coping response among young males? It uses an aggregated approach to explore how Sykes original pains of imprisonment can be re-framed to specific affective carceral strains, that disproportionately impact on young adult males day-to-day prison living and adjustment to the prisoner society. The carceral strains included in this chapter are not exclusive but represent those that the interviewees themselves identified as the most harmful.

5.1 Social support in prison coping and adjustment

Studies have consistently shown that social support, both within and outside the prison walls, can be associated with better prison coping, adjustment, and a more positive attitude to day-to-day living (Luke et al., 2021; Beckmeyer et al., 2014; Bales et al., 2008). A view echoed strongly by the ex-prisoners in the present study. Tristen, for instance, felt that the social support, he received, from staff, inmates, and his family, was vital in him being able to move away from his initial reliance on drugs and alcohol. He was then able to adopt a more approach-focused strategy, where he could actively engage with prison strains and work to provide solutions to them:

> “before prison I was constantly doing drugs and when I first went inside, the Spice[44] was easy to get hold of, but the drug rehab programme helped and it didn’t take me long to come off it (…) prison gave me a chance to re-set my life (…) the staff really supported me, and visits from Mia [girlfriend] helped me to focus on preparing for the

[44] A synthetic cannabinoid

> out (…) rather than wasting my time with the weed I put my energy in getting a trade instead".

Tristen's, ability to use these support systems, however, contrasted sharply with Daniel's experience where he felt that he had been left alone to deal with his drug problem:

> "There were (sic) nobody I felt I could talk to (…) mam had all but abandoned me and the screws just saw me as trouble (…) I kept myself to myself largely, but it was lonely and made getting used to prison really hard".

From these two accounts, it is clear, how social support during imprisonment can be seen as a key factor in helping to transition through entry-shock whilst becoming fully adjusted to the prisoner society. Unfortunately, for most of the young prisoners, this social support appeared at best sporadic and in some instances almost non-existent. This was due to a reluctance to engage with other inmates or staff within the walls, whilst experiencing problems with maintaining outside contact with family and loved ones. A situation that was not helped by a perverse policy of moving prisoners at short notice from one prison to another.

For Adam, the consequence of these frequent moves was not only the loss of support from the only prison officer that he had managed to make a connection with, but a loss of family support as they were unable to afford the travel costs to visit regularly, "it was the worst of times (…) I felt totally alone (…) it made my anxiety levels a hundred times worse". Similarly, for Ben, whose frequent contact with his long-term girlfriend had managed to curb his panic attacks, until she was unable to visit regularly and then suddenly ended the relationship, "I couldn't blame her really, what kind of life would she have with me anyway? The days and weeks afterwards were tough though, probably the toughest".

Liam, described his experience of being moved at short notice:

> "I were told they needed my pad and next thing I was in a pig van[45] (…) I had just filled up the rota for visits and got some new stuff [be]cause of my IEP (…) fucking two hours in the pig van to a fucking dump stuck in the middle of nowhere (…) they put me back on basic and I had to wait four weeks to get visiting rights again".

Nine out of the twelve interviewees confirmed that they had been moved from one prison to another at short notice, some having multiple moves during their sentence. For Ben, this meant having to readjust to a different prison regime, get used to the new staff and prisoners on the wings, and fill out the same health plan forms to get help with his anxiety and panic attacks. As he put it, "it were (sic) hard being in one prison [be]cause you got cons coming and going, but when you moved around as well, it becomes a fucking nightmare to get to know them so as there's trust". This practice of young adults being sent to a prison far away inevitably caused a financial burden for families in terms of travel costs and time off work. As Elijah explained, "mam was a struggling with money anyways (…) she worked full-time (…) where's she going to get time to take two days off to come see me?".

Mike, (prison healthcare worker) tried to explain that this policy was far from ideal, but prisons had become so overpopulated that an exercise in finding spare capacity was always underway. He also suggested that for young men, who had frequently been involved with gangs before prison, there were good security reasons to have them away from their hometowns and cities. He did concede, however, the impact this might have on the young man's well-being:

> "Little consideration is given to the impact on the prisoners' mental health in implementing this policy, or how it affects them in terms of prison adjustment or maintaining crucial relationships".

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[45] Prison transport

For Liam who had been brought up in looked-after care, the policy of placing him away from his hometown was particularly destructive, “whose going to visit now? …stuck here miles from nowhere (…) it felt like they were punishing me [be]cause I had no one special enough to visit (…) times I felt ‘disconnected’ from myself”. Alan, (prison officer) conceded this was a major issue:

> “For those coming from care it was the worst of times because they don’t have much family to visit anyway (…) you also have lads whose families have alcohol and drug issues and so can’t always rely on them to visit regularly (…) moving them around does nothing for them getting used to prison life I know”.

What became apparent as the interviews proceeded, was that dissociative coping was at its most fierce when the young male experienced strong emotions but could neither rely on support systems within the carceral environment nor support from family and loved ones on the outside to help purge them. When asked to describe the effects of this, Liam explained that it felt like, “being abandoned all over again” and meant that he was unable to get the frustration, anger, and helplessness, “off his chest”. Similarly for Aaron, who explained the importance of visits, “once they had been it was like a big weight had been lifted off my shoulders (…) they knew and cared what I was going through in there because I was able to tell them”. This narrative was also found by Luke et al. (2021) who contended in their study that, for young adults in particular, barriers to seeking social support within the carceral setting, will mean them having to open-up with loved ones instead. A problem that quickly amplifies frustration and anxiety when barriers to maintaining these relationships on the outside are disrupted in some way. Liam for instance, found himself in segregation after a few weeks of entering prison because he was accused of attacking another prisoner:

> “You ain’t got nobody in there who can help or confide in, nobodies visiting, and they refused to give me my letters, so the anger builds up (…) it’s got nowhere to go and

> so I'm thumping the walls with me fists trying to stop myself from 'zoning out' and doing something stupid".

When he was asked why dissociating was so distressing for him, he answered that, "it feels like you's [sic] somebody else, another person is intruding, taking my good thoughts away and planting bad ones instead." A theme that was conveyed many times during the interviews.

Crewe and Laws (2018) found in their study of prison emotionality, that the young distress intolerant inmate will often, through 'masking' and 'fronting', seek to avoid social support systems because of the perceived barriers and consequences of openly displaying feelings that may be perceived as 'being soft' or a sign of weakness. As Scott explained, "you watch your back and not let on how you really feeling (…) [be]cause of the consequences". This insistence on refusing to engage emotionally with other inmates meant that:

> "You become like a pretend person, not able to be yourself, scared to let anything slip (…) you end up retreating more and more into your own mind, living out fantasies in your head until the 'fog' becomes too much, and you don't know what's real anymore" (Adam).

There was a perception that prison staff were not able to provide anything other than instrumental support, "they will leak stuff to other staff that will then be used against you or be put on your plan" (Kyle). Alan's, (prison officer) take on this was simply that, "the young lads keep their emotions to themselves because they are not grown up mentally to talk about stuff (…) that's half the problem".

Within the prison estate, interviewees felt that there were few opportunities or incentives to develop close friendships with whom they could express or share how they were feeling. For some, alternatives were found in activities or programmes that inadvertently allowed for feelings states to emerge. Adam, for instance, was able to use his art class as a way, "to

release a little pressure", whilst Ben, having become a voluntary prison 'Listener' found that he, "was able to open up more because others were doing the same". These proved to be limited instances, however, and generally there was a view that guarding one's own emotions was the right and safest thing to do.

This situation, according to other researchers (Bales et al., 2008; Libeling and Maruna, 2005) was quite different for older inmates who would actively seek out social support systems from the start of their sentence, and then use them to offload frustrations around carceral strains. In contrast, the subject participants, spoke about experiencing a cathectic void that brings about what Gallo and Ruggiero (1991) calls a world of de-communication. An environment where young males in fear of their emotional sanity find little opportunity within the prison walls to vent those fears without having to resort to maladaptive coping behaviours. As Bottoms (1999: 273) argues, 'masking' and 'fronting' becomes an accepted coping mechanism that, "ranks as one of the highest priorities for comfortable survival in the inmate world". But it also means that, "it don't (sic) matter how you were feeling, shit and stuff, you forced it down (…) you did your crying behind your cell door" (Kyle). In this way, masking affective states, becomes such an ingrained aspect of prison life that the only emotional equity available is through family and loved ones. Otherwise, there is little choice but to try and avoid or suppress those feelings. As Scott put it:

> "There was this time when visits got cancelled [be]cause too much Spice was getting through the gates (…) it were [a]bout four, five weeks [be]fore we could have visits again (…) it put me in a bad place (…) most times I was in and out of 'brain fog' (…) trying to numb the desperation I was feeling".

As Daniel observed, "you keep it all in until visiting (…) no showing how you're feeling to the other cons. That would be like an open door for some of the arseholes in there". Maintaining contact was important, but meaningful contact that allowed for emotional catharsis represented a vital link in the young man's mental well-being. As Lucas explained, "I would

get agitated and go into this downward spiral like (…) it would build up, but they were there to calm me down, you know understand where you coming (sic) from". Similarly, for Adam, "I were a hot-head, and it didn't take much to wind me up (…) well you can imagine what it were like for me inside (…) if it weren't for mam, I would have killed someone straight up".

Unfortunately, as the following sections will show, maintaining meaningful and intimate social support from family and loved ones proved far from easy.

Prison visits

It is widely accepted that prison visits enable the young male to adjust more quickly to the prison regime. This is because it helps to support them in starting to rationalise the strains resulting from entry shock and the fearful environment (Bales et al, 2008). It also provides a cathectic outlet for pent-up feelings (Mitchell et al, 2016). A view clearly endorsed by HMP's own service instruction manual[46]:

> "Good quality visits in a relaxed environment makes a significant contribution to the well-being and attitude of prisoners' and generally helps to build better relationships between families and staff to the point where families are encouraged to share sensitive information which may have an impact on the welfare of the prisoner".

Regular, excellent quality visits should be the least that the young inmate can expect (Meyer et al., 2017). The reality, however, rarely turns out to be the case, as most of the interviewees in the present study observed:

> "There's no compassion to it (…) you's [sic] treated as though you's [sic] are in a cattle market, pushed and prodded around with every other con so there's no privacy

[46] (Prison Service Instruction 16-2011, Providing Visits and Services to Visitors).

(…) screws up and close in your business all the time …it wound me right up" (Ritchie).

Different prisons, of course, reflect different practices, and so visitation experiences are not heterogenous. There was a shared recognition, however, among the former prisoners' that prison regimes would often impose insensitive and at times perverse institutional practices. This often would make the visiting experience a poor one. For Liam, this manifested in many visits being cancelled at short notice without explanation, or times when they were arbitrarily cut short, "how does a 2-hour visit get cut to an hour when you only get visited once a month anyways?". Visiting rights, seemed to be routinely removed for small misdemeanours, or due to low staffing levels, or both. For Danial, his last visit before being released was simply cancelled because he was too close to his release date[47], "next thing you told (sic) that they have over-bookings and other cons needing a visit more urgently [be]cause they not going anywhere soon …they don't realise what it means to us". Similarly, Lucas found on one occasion that his visit had been cancelled despite his parents having already arrived and were waiting to be let into the visiting hall, "this jumped-up twat, just out of University, said mam had not completed the paperwork proper and hadn't brought ID to prove who she was …of course they knew, she had been loads of times before".

Consequently, many of the young prisoners' felt that there was a lack of sensitivity around how important these visits were. They also suggested that poor visiting experiences fed into their existing anxiety, helplessness, and disorientation. As Adam described, "I were (sic) having panic attacks, not about being inside but in case they might cancel my visit …how could they do that, just cancel visits (…) they know what it meant to us cons". As Ritchie pointed out, the cancelling or curtailing of the visit went beyond simply not being able to physically see loved ones but removed at a stroke an opportunity to: "get tings [sic] straight in my mind". A much more normative means of getting on and getting out (Bullock et al.,

[47] This policy was confirmed by many professionals working within the prison system.

2018), than having to rely on affective avoidance or angry lashing out behaviours which did little to promote either positive mental health or help to maintain a connection with reality outside of the walls. As Ritchie further explained:

> "Having them's [sic] there in the joint was the bestest [sic] feeling (…) I's [sic] could tell them tings [sic] that I would get beaten for on the wings (…) when they were gone, I couldn't focus on doing stuff anymore (…) it's the isolation, hundreds of guys shacked up together but nobody you's [sic] can talk too".

Such unnecessary frustrations quickly added to existing carceral strains and did little in promoting well-being between family members who were forced to make such choices. A fact that was further tested by a visitor booking system that was both temperamental and not very user friendly, as Paul soon found:

> "It were (sic) online (…) too complex (…) you had to download a form and then upload it again, mam didn't know about such things and ended up having to go to Citizen's Advice (…) there were loads of complaints about it crashing halfway through or getting to the end and finding that it had not accepted the booking".

Lucas, found similar frustrations with those prisons who insisted on Visiting orders (VO's) which were completed by the prisoners' and sent to families who then must confirm the visit by telephone:

> "The line were (sic) only available for a couple hours a day and was always busy (…) gran was on there for an hour waiting in the queue, then it cut itself off (…) by time she got through, the visit rota had been filled for the week".

These frustrations in isolation may appear to be petty, but for young men full of emotions and nowhere to release them, it provides an understanding of how these affective strains led them back to maladaptive coping mechanisms repeatedly.

The most critical aspect of the visiting system, expressed by the subject participants', was in how it was managed by prison staff. Due, in no small part, to an ideological change in the penal system from the 1970's, there has been a significant shift from rehabilitation to controlling prisoners. Now, prison officials suddenly find themselves with substantial discretion in determining how visits should take place. Both Alan and Stephen, (prison officers) agreed that there is now a fixation on ensuring security and safety which can sometimes compromise the quality of the visit. A view reinforced by Hutton (2016: 74), who points out that, "the Prison Service's focus is clearly on incentivising prisons to facilitate family contact, but it seems to have lost sight as to what the quantity and quality of these interactions should look like". Instructions governing visits (NOMS, 2011), for instance, state that, at a minimum, prisons should allow, prisoners to embrace their visitor at least at the beginning and at the end of a visit without unnecessary intervention. Although this practice was adhered to, the young prisoners spoke about how this was translated literally, so that there was almost no physical contact allowed during the rest of the visit, "how you going to keep up any kind of closeness like that?" (Adam).

This lack of physical intimacy felt unnatural and unnecessary for most of the young inmates. The fact that visitors had already been through pre-visit searches only increased this frustration, "why when they search them before they come into the hall, they then have to watch over us like that?" (Aaron). Unsurprisingly, prison staff saw things differently:

> "People coming in from outside the gates are the main security risk for those on duty (…) you have to watch them like hawks otherwise next thing, you have got druggies throwing themselves off the landings because of the stuff they have managed to get smuggled in" (Alan).

When asked about the perception that they were at times overzealous and officious, Alan, referred once again to security measures:

> "The point is that you have potentially got a very volatile situation going on when outsiders come in (…) you know those that you can trust, but it only takes the smallest thing and then we are having to lock everything down (…) sometimes you have to remember why they are in prison in the first place".

Neither prison officer had much sympathy for the restrictions around visitor contact and felt that it was a just price prisoners' pay for having the visits in the first place, "I know that it is hard, especially for the younger lads, but at the end of the day they are inside to be punished" (Stephen). Unsurprisingly, prisoners' saw it very differently. As Ben explained:

> "you're put in this massive hall with a hundred other cons and their other half's, cheek to cheek, all shouting at each other to be heard (…) we had to sit opposite each other with a table between us like you were fucking interviewing or summat [sic] (…) no touching [a]part from a quick peck at the end (…) you's [sic] just get into a conversation and the screw would come up and start eye-balling you …no fucking privacy whatsoever, how's that going to help"?

For Paul, this focus on security meant that it became increasingly difficult to invest emotionally in family and friends, the loss of any meaningful social contact was so apparent:

> "On basic I was allowed two visits a month which was OK, but I had to get used to me wanting to touch or cuddle the missus as going too far (…) all I could do was stare into her eyes [starts to become emotional] it was like she wasn't even there [looks away from camera into distance]".

The visiting hall is potentially a place where a 'softer' emotional zone can be established, away from the brutality of the rest of the prison (Mitchell et al., 2016). A situation that Tristen, who served his sentence in a progressive and more humane prison environment found out:

> "The gov set out the hall so that those who had earned the trust would be able to sit with their wives or girlfriends up close with a bit of privacy, you know …no chairs in between or having the guards listening in, that sort of thing".

There also appeared to be an honesty in how prison staff carried out their surveillance.

> "…at times they said that things had to be monitored more closely [be]cause of drugs and stuff but those they could trust, they generally left us alone and gave us the space we needed to cuddle, hold hands, kiss that kind of thing".

A flexibility in how prison rules around visitation can be interpreted, "Bill came over and said that someone was dough-nutting[48] on the other side of the hall and so it was OK if we wanted to get up and walk around for a bit". Tristen, also spoke about prison staff apologising to visitors and inmates because they had had to search them on entering the prison, and in some instances conduct a 'full' search, which was carried out as humanely as possible, "as long as they say why they need to do it and show a bit of humility then it don't (sic) seem to matter as much".

This, however, contrasted abruptly with Liam's experience, "so you had a screw staring you out as you try and tell the missus you love her". As Kyle added, "intimacy chaperones" reinforced restrictions around hugging or kissing, "I had waited a month to see her and all I could do was look at her across a table that the boss had planted half his arse on". This denial of any physical intimacy was perceived as petty and self-destructive because it effectively obstructed even the most mundane level of opportunity for social bonding or

[48] Prisoner who had become aggressive.

emotional closeness to occur, “I sat close enough to smell her perfume but not close enough to tell her stuff I needed to get off my chest” (Adam). For Elijah, these intimacy restrictions were not only construed as a form of cruelty, “like’s [sic] having sweets but not allowed to eats (sic) them”, but also meant that any emotionality he wanted to vent, or purge was instantly forfeited, “I’s wanted to cry, let mama know I was hurting (…) let out this huge shit of frustration but couldn’t”. Any soothing or de-stressing opportunities that the visit might have provided appeared lost in over-zealous monitoring.

Ironically, the outcome of many visits, was that rather than providing one of the few opportunities for inmates to purge their emotions in safe and supportive interactions, perpetuated feelings of detachment and avoidance were exacerbated, “once it was over, I walked slowly back to my cage, lay on the bunk and went numb …emotionally dead” (Scott). As Kyle added, “trying to keep up this loving thing (…) when I only got to see her once a month (…) after each visit we seemed further and further apart (…) I started to scrawl her from my mind thinking that she wasn’t interested anymore (…) doing Mamba[49] and zoning out”. Lucas expressed this frustration most poignantly:

> “when it’s over [visit] and your back on the landings you talk shit to the other cons [a]bout how it was good seeing the missus and all that (…) inside your burning up with rage [be]cause you didn’t have more time with her, or could properly cuddle and stuff (…) trying to push her out your head but it’s going nowhere (…) later on your bunk, all you thinking is about where she now, does she still want you, that’s when the ‘fog’ starts to come over you”.

[49] Elicit prison drug.

Herman in his study (1992: 47) noted this fluctuation, “between floods of intense, overwhelming feelings expunged through having outside contact, and the arid states of no feelings at all when this contact was lost”. As Lucas explained:

> “There’s these weird triggers, you know, if you got ghosted[50] …it were like you were not wanted or [re]membered (…) that’s how crazy your thoughts are (…) you back in your pad and dark thoughts start to circle round your head, that’s when the ‘brain fog’ is [be]cause you not wanting to face up to it”.

A world-weary Alan, [looks at the camera and shakes his head slowly] summed up what most prison staff felt about visits:

> “I’m not being funny but when you have got a four-hour visiting schedule and 150 visitors that need registering, processing, searching and their safety being looked after, you tend not to be very sympathetic about whether they are allowed to move around the bloody hall or not”.

It seems at odds to think how young prisoners’ experience such quite different ‘contact’ despite being housed in similar environments. But it also highlights how the rules and philosophy around maintaining social contact with loved ones are interpreted differently. Moreover, there appears to be a striking contradiction between what the prison service says wants to happen, in terms of maintaining social and emotional intimacy between inmates, family, and significant others, and how this is carried out in practice. The experiences of the young men in the present study, highlighted the importance of interactional intimacy as a primary cathartic driver in reducing frustrations and giving a ‘voice’ to their emotions. Without this catharsis many resolved to keep their emotions distant through dissociative states instead.

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[50] When a visitor fails to turn up.

Letter writing

Armstrong & Jefferson (2017), believe that the construction of a letter acts to dissolve the distinction between prison life and community life, and in so doing, provides a coherent narrative, for the inmate, of how they should tackle their sentence. As Liam explained, "it made the other prisoners', staff and most important of all me aware that someone on the out was there for me (…) I actually had a future on the out". In this way, letter writing provides a medium for expressive disclosure, but also plays a more fundamental role in allowing the young prisoner a medium to slowly process the world around him. To develop a coherent narrative of who they are, and how they will be able to adaptively integrate and adjust to the prisoner society. Interestingly, for many of the subject participants, the act of writing a letter was initially associated with short-term distress, as it forced them to think consciously about their thoughts and engage with their negative ruminations. As Elijah put it, "I's [sic] would write the first sentence and then give up (…) what's the point, it only makes me feel worse". But over time this gave way to an emotionally cathartic response of soothing and de-stressing feelings that went some way in helping him to move away from avoiding his feeling states. As Scott observed, "it were (sic) letters sent home that made me mind up [a]bout things (…) I wasn't going to let the bastards get to me".

For Kyle, the opportunity to write, gave him tacit permission to be more emotionally honest about himself, and to express his feelings more openly with one of the female prison staff that he came to trust, "it were (sic) a healthy way of getting things off me [sic] chest (…) before, I were beating myself up all the time". Ben insightfully added, "it was like therapy (…) time to think and explore who I really was and where I was at". It appears, therefore, that at its core, letter writing represented a form of shared time-travel, allowing the young prisoner to use their present narrative as a route-map towards futures. As Daniel explained, "you could share your dreams about when you get out (…) how you going to pick yourself up

again". A stark contrast to the young man who when depersonalising would be subconsciously avoiding thoughts about the future altogether.

The act of letter writing creates an artifact that is just as important as its content. Thus, for Liam:

> "It wasn't just a letter (…) it was something that had recently been held by the only person on the planet who gave a fuck (…) I could spend an age just holding it, imagining her sitting at our kitchen table writing the words".

Others admitted that they preferred letter writing because they struggled to discuss their emotions with loved ones over the telephone due to the lack of privacy or small 'window' time when making calls, "when I was writing, I could think about what I wanted to say, the phone was no good for me, it worked me up too much (…) I would end up saying something stupid and having the arse" (Ritchie). For Scott, the letters were extremely important because of the distance his family had to travel, "they could only visit once in a while so (…) letters were crucial in keeping us together". Adam added, "I found them [letters] reassuring (…) I still had contact with friends, and they kept me up to date with what was happening back home (…) it gave me focus". The importance of letters and other correspondence took on even more significance for those who had children, or on special occasions such as Christmas and birthdays, "I can't tell you how important that card from the kids was for me at that time (…) it gave me hope" (Lucas).

Given these accounts, it is only to be expected that frustration, anger, and an overwhelming feeling of injustice was going to be experienced by inmates if they felt that this important medium for expressing emotionality was going to be denied or curtailed in any way. Several of the subject participants, for instance, spoke about the punitive cost of having to purchase stationary items and stamps from the prison shop, "they used to give out packs freely …what's it to them if it cost them when it keeps us out of trouble and connected like" (Adam).

For those who could not rely on financial support from family and friends the subsistence payments, through prison work or undertaking an educational course, meant that every penny became precious, “I earned twelve pounds a week and six of that went on phone cards”.

For Lucas, the widespread policy of replacing original letters, cards and even photographs with photocopies were considered a violation that struck deeply as unfair:

> “They pushed this smudged photocopy of a letter from home under the door (…) I could have cried; I don’t mind admitting it (…) they couldn’t even afford me that bit of decency”.

Adam became very emotional and began to cry when he told me that, “it was like looking at my own wife in a newspaper cutting”. The apparent rationale behind this action, was to curb drug problems by preventing letters soaked in Spice and other substances from entering the prison estate. There was an intense sense of perceived injustice, however, that all prisoners’ mail were being treated in the same manner. Even Tristen who had had a positive experience of prison, became frustrated by this practice, “knowing the card had been touched by her (…) it was a personalised piece of her love I could sleep with (…) instead I was given a dog-eared copy with half the words missing”. For Paul, it signalled a return to negative ruminations brought on by feelings of helplessness and isolation:

> “It felt like you had been personally abused (…) you gets (sic) to thinking they are doing it on purpose for punishment like (…) black thoughts creeping [a]round your head making you paranoid”.

Compounding these frustrations was the knowledge that all outgoing and incoming letters were subject to vetting. As Lucas said, “that letter was the link and anchor to my world, my reality and normality (…) why do the screws get to reading it?”. Words such as ‘violation’ and ‘trespassing’ were commonly expressed when asked to describe their feelings around this

prison policy, and there was a strong consensus that once the letters had been opened, read, and photocopied, any intimate value that it had held had all but been effectively removed. For the young men, this infringement of privacy struck at the very heart of their identity, infantilising them, and reinforcing existing vulnerabilities around trust, independence, and respect, "nothing could just be mine, why did I always have to have things second hand?" (Aaron). As with prison visits, letters had appeared to have become lost in a prison machine that cared little for the inmate as a sentient human being. As Ritchie emotionally put it, "once I knew that my mail would be trashed and made public knowledge, I lost interest in sharing my feelings".

Telephone conversations

In most prisons, telephone calls must be made using the phone booths situated in the recreational area of each wing. Since most prisoners on the wing have association at the same time, these phones quickly become overwhelmed with long queues often forming (HMIP, 2016: 22). Exacerbating this situation is the constant noise pollution generated on the landings:

> "You have to be there to experience it, nobody on the landing knows how to talk, everyone just shouts at each other (…) you got fucking rap music blaring out all over the place, the telly playing to itself (...) you end up half screaming down the phone to get yourself heard" (Ben).

For Aaron, telephone conversations became an exercise in talking in tongues, as he tried to covey how he was feeling whilst not being overheard by others cueing behind him, "it were (sic) impossible really, you didn't get a second without some sort of interruption". For Lucas, the uncertainty around when prisoners would be let out for recreation, or whether they would get to use the telephone at all given the long queues, meant that he found it difficult to say when he would be in contact:

” With your own phone you gets to call mam on your time when you are ready (…) inside its ons [sic] their time and you just have to be ready to says what you wanna [sic] say in 5 minutes flat”.

For Liam, this situation created enormous barriers for having an intimate conversation, “no, …it always ended up being just about nothing things, you know, like how is Petra? [dog]”. This lack of opportunity for private intimacy was further compromised because inmates knew that their conversations were being monitored by prison staff, along with the playing of pre-recorded messages at the beginning of the call notifying the recipient that the call originated from prison (Shammas, 2017). Intimacy barriers that prisoners experienced through the visiting system and vetting and defacement of written correspondence, were therefore, also often replicated in telephone conversations. This all acted to amplify existing perceptions that there was nowhere within the prison walls where the young man could release his emotions and feelings safely.

5.2 The proliferation of prison idleness

“I would stand endlessly by my bunk, head in my hands staring through my fingers at the walls and floor, waiting for something, anything to happen. Prison time is a cancer eating away at you constantly (…) it’s the boredom (…) I would stare at the walls for so long that they would wobble and kind of shimmy like they were made of glass (…) I felt broken (…) frozen and broken (…) stuck in an endless emptiness with no future” (Kyle).

Figure 3: Self-drawing by Kyle.

Kyle admitted that he was a career criminal who had spent a good deal of his adolescence and young adult incarcerated. His experience of the prison system meant that he knew what to expect, and how to behave with the other prisoners and staff, which kept him out of

trouble. During the interview, he appeared resigned to the fact that prison would not change him, and that eventually he was likely to ‘grow’ out of his criminality through marriage and having children. Despite being very accepting of his prison life, he did become very vocal about the boredom that prisoners face. He believed that all of the violence, smuggling and mental health issues that go on in prison were due to prisoners not having enough to occupy their time. This, he argued, had become worse in his time, because of overcrowding and prisons not having the money to fund projects in the way that they were able to do in the past.

It was found in a comparative prison-based study involving young males who had attempted suicide, that those who had been provided with prison routines and employment found boredom much easier to cope with, and the sense of isolation less debilitating. The study concluded that, “inactivity compounds difficulties in coping” (Liebling, 1992: 138). For Kyle, and the other participants in the present study, this idleness and boredom, formed a core negative experience of prison life:

> “It was at the centre of every minute I was in there (…) it poured through the cell walls and sat on my bunk like an unwanted uncle (…) it filled every moment of my waking day and almost destroyed me” (Scott).

A combination of a steadily rising prison population (Vuk et al., 2019), historically low staffing levels (HMPPS, 2020) and cuts to leisure and training opportunities (Meek, 2018) has led to a level of strain on resources, which has meant increasingly lengthy periods of time that prisoners are expected to reside in empty time. As Paul explained:

> “there were to many inmates competing for the same things (…) jobs, training, more time on the landings or in the yard (…) nearly two hundred of us in a space meant for just over hundred, queues for the phone, queues for the tuck, it just got fucking on

top of you after a while (…) everybody playing their shit music at top volume, guys screaming at each other (…) nobody had fuck all to do, it were a zoo in there".

As Reed et al. (2009) argues, carceral boredom is not just represented by not having enough to do, or having to exist in an environment that is chronically under-stimulating. There comes a moment, a realisation that carceral time behaves differently. Lucas explained this as his prison past and future becoming submerged into an endless repeating present that he had no control or ownership over, "time clung to you like a wet blanket and refused to budge (…) it were (sic) like a prison in your head". As Paul explained:

> "Any attempts to fight it off just imprints it further into your psyche (…) an endless loop of nothingness that lasts from the moment you wake until you go back sleep (…) where do you go when there's nothing …nothing now, nothing tomorrow".

It is little wonder that many of the subject participants reported having experienced boredom induced episodes of depersonalisation, "I became convinced that my body was stopping me from living (...) the only answer, to 'detach' and find somewhere else to be" (Paul). The endless present, that many of the subject participants spoke of, existed because there was so little in the carceral environment that helped to move time on, "every single aspect of prison is designed to make life appear slower" (Liam). Adam, for instance, spoke about how long it takes for any of the prison systems to work:

> "They came to my cell first thing to say I would be moved onto a different wing and should pack my stuff up …that were 7.40am …by teatime I had been sat in my pad waiting for ten hours with my stuff in a bag, nobody bothered to tell me".

He also spoke about the monochrome carceral environment, "green floors and grey walls (…) nothing else (…) you look over the landing and see green floors and grey walls, landing

after landing exactly the same". Ritchie added that, "pad windows covered in thick plastic that's had the fuck scratched out of them so's you can't even see out over the yard". As Kyle explained, "posters were banned so all's you had was the same wall staring back at you 24/7". The prison day was also heavily routinised and without deviation:

> "you ordered what you were going to eat a week at a time, they brought it in frozen from this company, so there was no need to have cons making their own food …no way you could decide on the day what you wanted to eat (…) showers only available 1.30pm to 2.30pm each day, no exceptions (…) canteen day[51] was always Friday afternoon at 4.00pm (…) there was no impulsivity, no spontaneity or happy surprises (…) the nearest you got to excitement was when a con had smuggled something in" (Aaron).

For Adam, any attempts at rehabilitation became futile with offender programmes always over-subscribed, and jobs and training failing to provide any necessary skills that he might find useful once back in the community, "how can you even start to think about life on the out when you get no prep for it?". In the end, prison became for the young prisoner, a trudge of monotonous pointless routines intersected by lengthy periods of solitary isolation, "forget the violence, the bad food, the sniping by staff, or petty arguments between cons, it's the boredom stupid" (Scott). Doing time, therefore, was reduced to engaging in temporally insignificant or self-destructive distractions that masked the reality of time and its painful consequences (Ginneken, 2015). As Ben put it:

> "You had to be slick in there see, any moment you are not doing something, anything, then that's another minute you are going to have to live (…) counting the wooden sticks [used for modelling] over and over is pointless but no matter because

[51] A term used in prison to describe the weekly delivery of items that have been ordered from outside normally via a shopping catalogue.

> it eats time (…) when you learn to sleep for 12 hours a day as habit there's something wrong with what prison is about".

The extant literature provides numerous examples of how prisoners 'do time' (Vuk & Sevigny, 2016; Steiner & Wooldredge, 2008; Adams, 1992) from 'edgeworks' (Lyng, 1990), consuming mind-altering substances (Trammell, 2009; Silberman, 1995), instigating violence for excitement on the landings (Laws, 2019) or absorption through television watching (Ireland et al., 2005). But for the study participants', 'doing time' also included routinely employing dissociative coping behaviours. Often alongside heavy doses of sleep that did little in aiding adjustment or providing a mentally healthy platform for the young prisoners to undertake their rehabilitation. As Ben explained:

> "I would stare at the four walls in my pad for fucking hours (…) my mind drifting in and out (…) it would suddenly catch me that I was dissociating again, and I would start to panic trying to stop it (…) coming out, I would realise where I was, and it all starts again".

Similarly for Scott, enforced idleness resulted in a 'time-bomb' of destructive psychological suppression and avoidance rituals, "you're on the edge of another 'DP', but don't want to go there, but don't want to be here either (…) how you cope with that?". In this way, prison boredom represented a 'harm' too far, countered only by becoming a dead person to the environment; by passively wandering through a hazy prisonisation that makes little sense despite still having to consciously engage with it, "boredom crushes your world and leaves you for dead" (Lucas).

Exacerbating these experiences is the realisation that the social dimension of time creates a compression on time outside of prison compared to inside. This is as Toreid et al. (2018) believes, because of an enforced digital exclusion within the carceral environment which has

made prison time even more of a burden to endure. The pace of life outside of the walls, is now largely dictated by modern technology, which means having access to an instant world with endless opportunities for absorbing time. But as Ciocchini (2010: 2) argues, in the absence of digital technology, "prison has conserved its own archaic time so that the gap between community time and prison time has grown exponentially". This means that an eighteen-month prison sentence is infinitely longer in 2023 than it would have been say in 1990. Although affecting all prisoners', this situation is particularly disproportionately harming to the young adult male, who having been brought up with time-compressing technology, is so used to having such entertainment on demand. As Lucas said, "on the out my day was full, not a minute without something to do (…) no need to think too far ahead". For many of the study participants this meant 'screen' time where any boredom could quickly be alleviated with stimuli from across the web:

> "you's [sic] got Facebook constantly pinging the background, you's [sic] listening to your sounds and playing COD [Call of Duty] online (…) you's [sic] never alone like that" (Ritchie).

Life in prison, however, removes at a stroke these digital choices, and in its place imposes an analogue world that the young man has no experience of, "we had a 13-inch television, rented for a quid a week, with seven channels that I would never watch on the out (…) they were taking the fuck". For Ben, this combination of a prison environment that was inherently unstimulating, along with the absence of modern technology, left him in an almost continuous physical catatonic and emotional dissociative state as the world and reality around him became increasingly estranged:

> "there's simply not enough to do in there [prison] (…) times when I seriously couldn't even lift my head off the pillow because I was so empty of energy (…) the thought of

> having to go through the same routine day after day sent my anxiety through the roof (…) I opted out, took my mind elsewhere and stayed there".

As Elijah put it, "boredom's [sic] is one of the toughest bits of prison (…) you is (sic) a vegetable, not wanting to do anything [ex]cept sit and stare into thin air". This boredom is not only measured in terms of time, but also attention. As Aaron explains, "it's not just that you got nothing to do, it's that it makes you want something to happen, anything, just so's for excitement". This attention to waiting is caused by an environment that is chronically sterile of interest and brings about what Eastwood (2011:73) refers to as an 'unengaged mind'. A mental state where ambition and drive become increasingly opaque. A persisting psychological void where thoughts become further detached from their reality and an emotional helplessness that causes the individual to reside in stupor or despair. For the young prisoner, this unengaged mind brings about a form of hyper-boredom. So that even when interest or stimulation does come along, the young inmate can find no motivation to respond to it. As Adam explained:

> "The sameness of everything, your routines, the cell walls, the shouting across the landings, presses down on you like a weight that can't be lifted (…) even when things are happening or there's stuff to do, you's [sic] still feel this weight stopping you from being happy".

The effect of hyper-boredom on mental well-being and functionality is negatively correlated. The young prisoner becomes so under-stimulated by the depriving environment that they feel unable to motivate themselves to engage productively in a prison culture that expects a pro-active approach to their sentence plans. It creates a 'perfect storm' of chronic apathy, that in turn deeply affects the young man's agency and willingness or ability to be motivated to engage in goal-directed activities. As Lucas explained, the prisoner becomes indifferent to the world around him by displaying a physical lethargy and emotional absence of feelings:

> “It [boredom] creates a feeling that you are without any energy (…) even the smallest of things is just too much effort. It’s that Sunday afternoon feeling when you are lying on the sofa and cannot even be bothered to watch TV (…) at least at home it is possible to get up and go somewhere new, but in there, you sit staring ahead for hours lost in yourself, having no idea what is going on around you”.

This is a new phenomenon. In the past, prison responsibilities for retribution, deterrence, incapacitation, and rehabilitation prevented morbid boredom from occurring through hard labour. Prisoners were fully utilised in contributing to the cost of their enforced stay (Foucault, 1975). Prisoner unemployment and idleness has, however, slowly crept up on the modern prison service. Today it is hard to find any prison within the UK that have a pro-active policy of keeping all inmates busy through structured work and training programmes (HMPPS, 2020). With an additional decline in available leisure and training opportunities (Meek, 2018), an ethos has evolved where prison time has become to all intents and purposes ‘dead time’. To be endured rather than used. The unengaged minds mantra of ‘waiting for something to happen’ has become the words that best describes the young prisoners’ experience. As Ben put it:

> “I would walk up and down my pad continuously until I got to one hundred, one hundred meant another five minutes of the day were gone (…) I would sit and count the creases in my hands (…) eighteen years of age and counting creases in my hands”.

It is easy to view these accounts of chronic boredom and its resultant physical, emotional, and social harm as somehow an over-exaggeration. Inmates, after all, are housed, fed three times a day, provided with activities, have a library, arts and crafts and music societies. In their cells they can rent a television, and most prisons provide ‘distraction packs’ made up of

crosswords, sudoku etc. As Stephen, one of the prison officers pointed out, "yes, prison can be boring, but we put on as much stuff as the space and staffing allow (…) half the time they would rather just watch telly all day in their cells anyway". To fully appreciate boredom from the young prisoner's viewpoint it is necessary to capture a typical day.

The monotony of prison time: a day in the life

The day for most prisoners begins around 7.30am – 7.45am:

> "I eat my breakfast sat on my bunk (…) breakfast is given out the night before so many cons eat it in the evening because they are hungry or for something to do. If you left it until the morning you would end up with a packet of cereal, small carton of smelly milk, and a slice of hard bread with a packet of butter and jam. It would take me about five minutes to eat and then half hour wait for the tea urn to turn up. The doors were opened at 8.15am and those who had jobs would file out onto the landings for roll call and work details (…) It would be the first time that I had been out of my pad for 12 and half hours" (Adam).

Currently, only 40% of inmates at any one time are employed within the prison estate (House of Commons Select Committee, 2019). So, those unlucky enough not to have a regular job are forced either to spend their morning in their cells, or sometimes be allowed to sit around on the landings. Those that do work, face a routinised conveyor-belt work system, that the subject participants' felt did little to improve their stimulation or provide skills training for life on the outside. As Liam explained:

> "I sat sanding the edges of a small wooden block that would then be attached to a bird box for a shelf (…) two and a half hours I would be rubbing sandpaper up and down blocks of wood and then pass it to the next guy who would put glue underneath

> and press it down onto the box (…) we would stare into the distance or make small-talk until the next block was ready (…) that's how it went (…) until they called us back for line-up"

This account of prison work is not dissimilar to what Archer (2003) also described in his diaries:

> "My group consists of four inmates whose purpose is to fill a small plastic bag with all the ingredients necessary to make a cup of tea (…) my job is to seal up the bag and drop it in the large open bucket at my end of the table (…) this mind-numbing activity continued for two hours for which I will be credited with two pounds in my canteen account" (Archer, 2003: 134).

These purposeless mechanical tasks produced products that would be sold by charities or to be used around the prison estate. They required no training, skills development or active thought, and were devoid of autonomy or creativity. They were often seen by the young prisoners' as pretend work, just something to fill time, but still, something that they should be thankful for:

> "I was supposed to kiss the bosses' bollocks because I had been picked to push a broom around for a couple of hours a day (…) in the end I threw a pot of piss at a guy who dissed [sic] me and that was it, no more work for me for the next year and a half" (Aaron).

Prison labour was carved up into several two and a half hour blocks:

> "I would be back in my pad by 10.30am (…) that was my shift over with. Then I would sit in my pad until 12.30pm until the canteen opened (…) four main things to keep me occupied; exercise, sleep, reading and writing letters (…) no telly until night-time, my

> rule, otherwise thinking about the stretch all night would send me over the top" (Liam).

After lunch, prisoners were allowed out of their cells for association to socialise, play games or perform domestic duties such as showering or doing their laundry. As Crewe et al (2013) found in their study, boredom is spatially differentiated, so even in the busy environment of association, inmates are often attempting to stave off idleness a lot of the time. As Ritchie put it:

> "I's [sic] would sit on the landing, distracted by my own thoughts, listening to the other cons talking total shit (…) there was nothing new so I would hear the same story over and over again until I could lip sync with those telling it (…) even the most ordinary of things that happened were blown out of proportion to create excitement".

In public areas, where prisoners congregated, activities such as reading or simply having a conversation were constantly interrupted by shouting across the landing or by petty infractions, "any moment a fuckin spice-head could take exception to you breathing" (Liam). Several of those interviewed said that they kept away from areas such as the gym because they were intimidated by, "the beef-heads …pushing weights and eyeballing you as you moved around (…) like they owned the place" (Scott). During formally assigned association, the prisoners could engage in activities that included playing pool, watching sports in the TV Day room, or visiting the library. The constant tension on the landings, however, meant that most of those interviewed tended to do these activities intermittently and largely kept themselves to themselves. As Paul explained, "I was already anxious about stuff in there, it just always felt like at any moment things would kick off (…) I just didn't feel safe being out of my cage". For Kyle and others, reoccurring dissociative episodes, meant that, "I could never truly relax (…) it could be triggered by anything, but often just the atmosphere on the wing brought it on". Association did, therefore, present a welcome respite against cell time but the

hypermasculine culture of the landings made the young prisoners' wary of letting their guard down or seeking social support from other inmates and staff, "you'd share a joke, but situations get out of hand so quickly (…) you'd be talking and next thing a pool ball in a sock would be swinging round your head" (Liam).

Although educational courses and training were timetabled for the afternoons, the reality, for the young prisoners', was that only a minority of inmates could be accommodated due to security issues or low staffing levels. Alan, (prison officer) admitted that "it was difficult to provide these things because reductions in staffing meant that the priority had to be on maintaining security and the safety of the guys". For Adam, despite having attained good GCSE's and A levels at school and showing an ambition for wanting to go to university, it meant not being able to access any courses during his stay in prison, "they didn't have a tutor doing the OU [Open University] course I wanted to do".

Paradoxically, such strict and rigid timetables produced times when the young inmate found himself rushing around:

> "It sounds bonkers and looking back now I can laugh about it (…) lunch was at 12.30pm and then domestic until 2.00pm. This was the only time to do things that had to be done (…) so for me I needed to shower, get to the laundry and shop for stuff before phoning home (…) times you had to put in an app[52] (…) there was never enough time (…) before you know it, you were banged up again and wondering why you had to rush around like arseholes, now we had as much time as we wanted but nobody wanted it" (Kyle).

From late afternoon to early evening most of the young prisoners found themselves back in their cells. Considered by all the interviewees as dead time, this was passed by television

[52] A means of making an official complaint or requesting a privilege.

watching, sleeping, or daydreaming. As Kyle said, “go to sleep and try ignore the shit rap music round the corridors (…) drift off to places where my mind would let me go”. Similarly for Adam:

> “I would do some push-ups, you know, try tire myself a bit, and then lie on my bunk and drift off (…) I’m not sure whether it was real sleep or just daydreaming most of the time (…) I reckons I managed to daydream through half my sentence in the end”.

After tea there was another opportunity to take association and have a walk around the yard, but by 6.30pm-7.00pm all prisoners were back in their cells for the night. For Paul, the sleep in the afternoons, “meant that I couldn’t get to sleep at night”. Consequently, insomnia and sleep-related illnesses were widely reported. Noise pollution around the landings and a poor ventilation system made the cells hot and stuffy and added to this problem, “you’d be awake half the night with your head banging on with stupid thoughts (…) sleep problems were always there with me” (Elijah). With up to thirteen hours to endure before breakfast, prisoners developed a range of time-passing routines that revolved around watching television, listening to the radio, writing letters, reading, and exercising. For those still experiencing entry-shock, this aspect of prison life proved to be the most damaging, often acting as the catalyst for deepening levels of despair and their resulting depersonalisation. As Ben explained, part of adjusting to prison was accepting the realisation that every night would be like this, static without novelty or purpose:

> “You had a plan of routines like they was therapy, that could be gone back to again and again (…) first off, I would check in my head that I’ve got the night time planned out (…) that I knew there was something else that needed doing (…) my last resort routine was counting the lines of mortar between the bricks, 183 (…) it took just over four minutes to do it”.

By far the most common evening activity was watching television, “it were (sic) on all the while even if I wasn’t watching it” (Liam). Stephen, (prison officer) noted that the young inmates needed to have constant noise in their cell. This contrasted sharply with older inmates who were more likely to spend a larger proportion of their cell-time engaged in goal-orientated activities such as studying, reading, and writing quietly. As Ben pointed out, “I shared a pad with this older guy, for a while, doing this course (…) he had fucking books and paper everywhere (…) must have been about seventy and in for life so gods knows what he thought he was going to do with it all afterwards”. For Kyle, despite knowing that mindlessly watching TV for hours on end was counter-productive in alleviating his boredom, he felt that once he had completed all his other routines, he had little choice but to engage with” the one-eyed monster”. As Liam explained:

> “It was like mental poison, the hours banged up (…) telly just numbed the pain a bit that’s all (…) you ended up staring through the screen, watching your life slowly disappear behind a glass wall (…) you would think to yourself enough now, surely I’ve been punished enough “.

Sat in a box, 6ft by 12ft, with nothing to stimulate, presents a challenge for even the most mentally balanced of people. But for young adult men, who are already emotionally damaged before they enter prison, and without access to the time-compressing technology that would have seen them through at home, it is torture. As Ben explained, “you get isolated with your thoughts (…) thinking over and over how you got there, it nearly broke me”. Ritchie spoke about, “dark thoughts” that would take hold and grip like a vice, “the prison were in me [sic] head (…) I couldn’t shake out of it unless I let the ‘DP’s’ take over”. A debilitating malaise would come over the young men so that, “nothing’s exciting anymore (…) like living in an emotional vacuum” (Adam). The depersonalisation that followed was as much about breaking through this malaise as it was about absorption into more interesting worlds,

“numbing your senses so that boredom and monotony didn’t trigger anymore” (Kyle). As Paul said:

> “You’d wake up and slowly, gradually realise where you were (…) despair that kept you awake last night becomes your new day (…) from dreams where you could go anywhere to reality (…) you had to shut the door of reality out your head before you went mental”.

Shalev (2008: 147) found in her study that prisoners’, experiencing this level of solitary confinement, began to find reality, sleep, and their own ruminating destructive thoughts hard to distinguish between. The absence of external stimuli becomes so great that prisoners are forced to take on a catatonic posture devoid of all emotion. Kyle, managed to sum up this deprivation of stimulation best by reading out an extract from one of the letters he had written to his girlfriend:

> “You ask what it is like? Imagine, being trapped in a room the same size of our bathroom, for 16 hours a day by yourself with nobody to talk too. Imagine the room has a metal bunk, lop-sided table, broken chair and toilet with a seat that is cracked and moves around with your arse as you sit on it (…) your shit constantly backs up the toilet (…) the day light can’t get in because the window has been covered over to stop things being thrown in (…) the bed has a mattress that is yellow in the middle and paper-thin (…) a pillow that is iron flat and a scratchy duvet. Imagine the room with grey walls, covered in graffiti and a floor that is sticky to the touch. You are only allowed six books at any one time and the only pen you had has been half-inched by some arsehole when you were showering. The TV is small with seven channels and has two deep scratches in the screen, it is put in the pad so that you must sit right on the edge of the bunk to get a proper view of it. Outside is the constant thud of music, shouting and doors slamming shut. You go to sleep only to be woken up in the night

> by cons screaming or banging against the metal pipes. Some are complete psycho's screaming that they are going to kill you over and over again or crying hysterically. Now imagine having to live in that room every day and night for three years and you start to understand my misery".

But why should it be this way? In stark contrast, Tristen, a category C prisoner found himself in a regime with an ethos underpinned by keeping inmates busy at all times through meaningful routines and activities, "we would have breakfast all together in the food hall at 7.30am and be out in the prison gardens by 8.00am, planting shrubs and flowers and taking care of the lawns all morning (…) we had these guys come in from the local council show us how to look after the plants and stuff". He reported that alongside work in the mornings, all prisoners had access to education and social programmes in the afternoons regardless of IEP status. Evenings were organised around quizzes, bingo, and poetry/rap workshops, "there were societies set up, you know like chess and music, where you learned how to play an instrument or get to learn new skills". Lockdowns still happened occasionally, but there was a zero-tolerance policy to drugs or violence on the landings, "everybody knew that they would end up in 'seg' if they pushed it". Predictably, Tristen found that although he still got bored, it tended to be, "on and off" and that the dissociative episodes that he had experienced during his entry-shock had quickly subsided and been replaced by more approach-focused coping strategies like undertaking a college course to keep him busy. On leaving prison he found that the skills he had learnt in the prison kitchen led to a job as a pub chef.

5.3 Self-governance and the uncertainty of prison rules

"They break you from within (…) prison has changed (…) in the past you would get a kick-in by the boss if you were out of line and that would be it (…) now the screws smile and play endless mind games with you instead" (Liam).

Figure 4: Self-drawing by Liam.

Liam spent 16 months in a category C prison for affray. Of all the subject participants, he was the one that spoke most passionately about the effect of arbitrary rules and regulations that the prison system enforces. In one instance, he relayed an incident about how he had been encouraged to join the music society because he had an interest in playing the guitar. Although he was not particularly good, he persevered and subsequently was picked to take part in a concert at a local council run venue, a chance to get out of the prison environment for a few hours. He put in the statutory application for leave which was signed off by the governor. A day before the concert was due to take place, he was informed that he did not have the necessary privilege level to take part and that he must withdraw. Despite protestations from the other band members and some prison staff this rule was upheld despite another prisoner having the same level of privilege and who would be allowed to go. When Liam protested, he was told that the other guy had met his sentence plan which involved attending an offender management programme. Liam was unable to be a part of this course, despite it also being a condition on his sentence plan because there were not enough places available. When he mentioned this, his application was reviewed, and a further offender course was added to his plan because he had failed the self-governance

‘test’. A course for prisoners who were non-compliant to prison rules. He never did attend the concert.

Although the ‘pains of imprisonment’ are an inevitable feature of incarceration, how those pains are administered can vary from prison to prison depending on their governance model. This brings about what Liebling (2011: 71) refers to as differing levels of “moral performance”, as prison regimes adopt preferred strategies to ensure compliance and retribution. Lauded as a means of giving inmates a ‘voice’ (Jouet, 2021), self-governance is a carceral ethos that has been adopted by most progressive institutions over the past thirty years. It is designed to empower a sense of control over an inmate’s destiny without the need for external interference by prison staff. An attempt to move away from the inflexible rules and rigid hierarchies of earlier ‘punishment’ models, towards “soft power” where individual responsibility “encourages prisoners’ to regulate their own behaviour” (Crewe, 2011b: 456).

Although presenting as a more humane form of incarceration, it has not gone without criticism (Jouet, 2021; Crewe, 2011; Bosworth, 2007; Hanna-Moffat, 2000). Self-governance has been called an additional mechanism of control that curtails prisoner autonomy rather than freeing it. A dangerous ambition to “punish better”, but which instead stir intense paradoxical emotions of “confusion, anxiety and ambiguity” (Shammas, 2018: 110). For the study participants’, self-governance largely represented a ‘pretend’ freedom with invisible boundaries, where the breaking of a rule would go unrecognised until it was too late. As Elijah put it: “you’s [sic] didn’t know day to day what the rules were going to be (…) they was (sic) made up as they went along”. Underpinning this self-governance was an expectation that prisoners’ will seek out ways of rehabilitation by actively participating in sentence plans regardless of their level of vulnerability. Lucas, for instance, found that this ethos meant embracing the incentive and privileges system without question, “there was no sleeping through your time, oh no, you had to fucking walk around with a big smile plastered on your

face saying how rehabilitated you were becoming". As Ritchie realised to his detriment, any failure to adhere to this philosophy, or even to give a perception that he may not be trying hard enough to adhere to it, was enough to result in prison rules mysteriously changing and privileges removed, "you's [sic] not trying the boss said (…) I told him I was depressed, but all's I's got was 'don't try that one with me sonny' look". The narrative that follows highlights how self-governance and the taking of individual responsibility is unsuited to young adult males and the impact that it has on their coping abilities to maintain good mental health and adjust to the prisoner society.

Self-governance and the uncertainty of prison 'grey rules'

For Sykes (1958: 75), imprisoned individuals were governed totally by the prison as an institution, so that every part of their daily life was determined by unflinching rules, regulations, and schedules that, "reduces the prisoner to the weak, helpless, dependent status of childhood". Ben quickly realised how this style of prison governance had changed when he wanted to put a poster up on his cell wall, "the day boss said no problem, it's good you take pride in your pad (…) then it was ripped down by screws on the night shift because posters aren't allowed". Prison under self-governance is riddled with these 'grey rules' that confuse and disorientate in turn. As Scott explained:

> "They [prison staff] use these so-called schemes to get us to police ourselves, you know like giving carrots to a donkey (…) trouble was, nobody had a clue what the rules we were supposed to be playing by looked like".

Prisoner self-governance represents an experiment in neo-liberal reform that questions the merit of autocratic regimes. Instead, it imposes a carceral environment where direct supervision and coercion has been moved away from an 'in-your-face' authoritarianism

towards power operating ‘at-a-distance’ without the need for direct intervention (Taly et al., 2020):

> “There’s eighty of us cons wandering over the landings and three screws supervising …most of the watching is done by CCTV now (…) you’s [sic] talking to a guy and later you get a visit from the screw saying that you were seen with this guy …watch it [be]cause they be monitoring him for drugs, and they figure I’m a mule”.

As Cox (2011: 599) commented in her study, the main problem of self-governance for detained young males is that they have, “a general lack of rationality and psychosocial maturity to realise the self-transformation that would help them to self-govern and act autonomously”. For Adam, this meant having to, “second guess how they expect you to behave (…) doing things because you think they are right rather than wanting too, only to find that they’s [sic] be wrong anyway”. When asked to give an example of this he cited applying for a training course in one of the workshops:

> “I asked the boss how do I go about getting on to this course, and he said that I would have to get my key workers say first (…) when I asked, he told me my IEP status was too low and that I should apply for one of the orderly jobs instead. So that’s what I did (…) next thing I’m being balled out because I hadn’t been in long enough to become an orderly and my sentence plan said I needed to do the course (…) so’s I asked again and was told that my IEP status didn’t allow me to do any course and that I should be focused on improving my IEP (…) but to do that, you need to be willing to do stuff on your sentence plan (…) I gave up in the end and never did manage to get on the fucking course I had originally been told I had to do”

In this way, there comes to be a deep uncertainty, for the young adult male, around how ‘grey’ rules should be negotiated, amid a growing fear that at any moment they may fall foul of an indiscretion that they are not even aware of, “so, I rang the cell bell (…) there are signs

up saying use the cell bell if you need anything. Next thing the boss comes over, all angry like. He shouts that I've interrupted his meal and I had better be close to death" (Scott). As Liam noted:

> "The screws seemed to change the rules anytime to suit (…) we couldn't do anything [a]bout it (…) if you try to argue then that's seen as dissent and reported (…) the worst is that the rules are different for different cons (…) it makes your life day on day fuckin[g] miserable because you don't know where you stand (…) [es]pecially if you get on the wrong side of one of them".

As stress and frustration levels rise, the young inmate find that they are emotionally ill-equipped to negotiate the myriad of potential traps that rule uncertainty entails. As Paul describes:

> "In the end I all but gave in trying to double-guess what they wanted from me (…) I would just go flat, absent with my feelings, pretend to myself that I didn't care any longer (…) some of them [guards] were just bullies".

Depersonalisation, therefore, was often employed when attempts to negotiate the affective dissonance of having to engage with rules that they neither understood nor could successfully navigate failed. As Ben pointed out, "I distanced my feelings from everybody (…) the longer I did that the more foreign they were to me and the more they couldn't harm me". For Kyle, part of this rule uncertainty triggered negative memories from when he was a child:

> "As a nipper they promise you the world long as you are good. But all you end up with is misery, moved from pillar to post (…) the next family will want you to stay they say (…) jumping over more hoops that then come to nothing (…) prison felt the

same, whatever you did to try and please nothing was ever good enough (…) in the end there's no point in even trying".

So, as the subject participants observed, the ethos of prison self-governance may speak of liberaltarianism, but the arbitrary and ever-changing environment that underpins it, serves to increase the affective pains of incarceration. As Adam explained:

> "take a simple thing like buying roll-on[53] right (…) so we would get prison issue roll-on couple times a month, but then they stopped giving it out [be]cause arseholes were trying to smoke it (…) we had to buy our own right (…) then we would get a pad-spin, and if they had your number, they would take from you regardless whether you had paid for it out of your allowance or not (…) it were a form of bullying that you would get at school (…) just playing these mind games to let you know whose boss …and you let them [be]cause you can't do nothing?".

Individual responsibility: Actively embracing prisonisation.

Individual responsibility is a tenant of self-governance that raises the bar around how much the young prisoner is expected to participate in his own confinement. As Hannah-Moffat (2000: 523) argue, there is an increased expectation in modern penal systems that a "model of self-change" should be strived for, regardless of what the prisoner wants. For Ben, this meant that he wasn't allowed to, "just do my prison time quietly by myself (…) that wasn't punishment enough". Instead, the expectation was that the inmate will pro-actively embrace their sentence by taking individual responsibility towards their rehabilitation:

> "as soon as I got in [prison] they started to pressure me into agreeing to these stupid fuckin [sic] sentence plans (…) work with my key worker to find a job, a vocation and

[53] Deodorant

complete the OBP[54] to be considered for early release (…) the reality was that I spent 18 hours a day in my pad, there was no job, a crap music club with broken instruments and I managed to attend one OBP in all the time I was in there" (Aaron).

Similarly for Lucas, who was still a recovering drug addict when he first entered prison:

> "…I came to prison after sleeping rough for a year (…) suddenly everyone was in my face, crowding me out, telling me that I could make a difference to myself (…) I wasn't ready for all that yet".

Most of the subject participants were convinced that this insistence on pro-active responsibility was just another layer of compliance. A means by which prison governors could use differential privilege levels to make prisoners' compliant, rather than any genuine attempt to prepare them for when they were to be released, "it was a way of getting you doing stuff that you didn't want to do that's all (…) the motto was that if you didn't put yourself forward to please the screws then you couldn't expect enhanced, that kind of thing" (Kyle). The irony of this scheme was not lost on Lucas, "It were a fucking joke (…) they expected us to be positive about living in a fucking mad house, banged up for most of the day, pretending that things are not really that bad (…) it made me fucking puke". Paul, put it more succinctly:

> "I went into the joint thinking that they were going to take away my freedom and that I would be left alone with my thoughts until I got out (…) instead I was expected to walk around telling people how lucky I was that prison had saved me".

Underpinning individual responsibility was a focus on rational choice, an assumption that the young inmate would want to take responsibility for their actions without having to be prompted. As Daniel sarcastically put it, "yeah cos [sic] I made all the right moves before

[54] Offender Behaviour Programme

prison, didn't I?" This ethos of rational choice, though widely adopted, was always going to be problematic to young men. Having not yet developed the cognitive and emotional capacity to accept responsibility for their previous failings, they were suddenly required to engage in a dialogue about why they were 'bad' people and how things could be different when they get out of prison. As Scott explained:

> "It were made out that what had happened before prison was my fault, that I chose the life I led (…) there were some in there that this might be true of, but I turned to drugs to blank out my shit life (…) I took drugs [be]cause dad left when I was four and mam drank herself to sleep every night with any bloke willing to have her, that's why I took drugs (…) which part of that is my fault?"

For Liam, there appeared to be a pretence around saying that things were now going to be OK because somehow, he had been rescued:

> "They tret (sic) you like you were a child who could just turn off all the stuff that had gone on before (…) that these things no longer affected you [be]cause you are now in nick [sic] and have seen the error of your ways".

Hannah-Moffat (2000: 529) argues, the main reason that pro-active participation through taking individual responsibility, "can be incorporated, is because it does not represent a challenge to existing relations of power, in fact it reinforces them". It follows a copy-book methodology of prison denial that refuses to accept the reality of the young prisoners' past and the impact that it may have on their present. As Rossesser et al. (2021: 64) argues, "traumatic childhoods, institutional failings in education and social marginalisation have conspired to create 'broken' young men". Rational choice, however, presents a view of young inmates as emotionally stable and cognitively competent in realising that they have made bad decisions, and have the strength and resilience to address it. As Scott put it:

> "There was this feeling that unless you were being strong in there you were somehow not playing the game (…) I had demons in my head that meant I had to detach a lot from what was happening around me, but this was just seen as me not really trying".

Neumann (2012: 148), who has conducted research in open prisons, where the level of pro-active responsibility is at its most demanding, has argued that contemporary prison regimes might represent the "ultimate version of the Foucauldian panopticon". An all-seeing eye that monitors how committed inmates are to wanting to change. As Lucas says:

> "I was on A-lowers [be]cause of my Asperger's (…) they knew that certain things triggered me off, you know noise, people getting in my face that kind of thing (…) but whenever I wanted to stay in my pad because I was feeling overwhelmed by things they would come over (…) 'we have been watching you, why are you not joining in?' (…) next thing it is down on report as non-compliance".

The narrative that developed among the interviewees was that the notion of individual responsibility contrives 'active participation' as something that every prisoner desperately wants to be a part of regardless of life histories. But in so doing, it happens to disable the very objective that it hopes to achieve. Namely, adjustment to prison life and the development of a holistically stable person that can survive life outside of the prison walls. As Adam put it:

> "I was an arsehole in the joint, I don't mind admitting it, but that was mainly because I felt vulnerable and fearful all the time (…) I would try being silent but was told that I wasn't fitting in, so I would try to fit in, but my anxiety would force me to become withdrawn again (…) going round in ever-decreasing circles (…) in the end I stopped trying and just basically gave up".

Many of those interviewed echoed Adam's sentiment and spoke about pretending to participate whilst engaged instead in an exercise in dissimulation:

> "I didn't want to spend a day in jail longer than necessary so I tried and avoided doing anything that was going to keep me inside (…) everything was a pretence because I didn't want to give the system the excuse to keep me in longer than necessary (…) I would go along with their head games because I learnt that this was what they used against you (…) that if you say no they'll smile and talk, call you by your first name and fings [sic], and then they'll go in the office and kill you off in your file" (Paul).

The young men therefore largely participated in a psychological form of 'masking' where their true affective selves were put on hold whilst they simulated being the 'model prisoner'. As Lucas explained, this experience of pretending to accept the prison counterculture becomes one of the most destabilising and fearful aspects of prison life:

> "They always win because we have no power (…) not even over our own thoughts (…) the wing ran itself; they didn't need to control anything because we all wanted a quiet life and wanted to get out (...) but they also wanted control over our minds as well …the damage was being done in our heads, we were just robots with no thoughts or feelings (…) just slaves to their hypocrisy'.

Thus, the carceral ethos, perpetuated by prison staff, was of an "incoherent inclination" of expecting pro-active participation whilst simultaneously reducing prisoners to extreme forms of learned helplessness (Stevens, 2012: 257). This dehumanising effect undermined individuality and marginalised the young prisoners' abilities, thoughts, feelings, and actions. It resulted in a further loss in their identity, and a constant desire to emotionally escape through depersonalised stress-coping responses. As Ben summarised:

> “My anxiety levels were topping out [be]cause of the way in which I was expected to be positive about being in prison (…) I didn’t even recognise who I was any longer (…) just a scared kid who was becoming more and more isolated and dependent on others for the simplest of things”.

Assessment and rehabilitation programming

Part of self-governance and the taking of individual responsibility was to seek out appropriate assessment and treatment interventions whilst in prison. Its primary purpose is to support inmates in reducing their likelihood of reoffending, effectively managing their risk of physical and psychological harm, and preparing prisoners for their release back into the community (Berelowitz et al., 2011). Although a cornerstone of modern penal practice, Crewe (2011: 513) has argued, that recent cuts in prison budgets and the adoption of manualised interventions, have meant that most prisoners are no longer afforded the same level of mental health care that would be expected within the community. In many instances narrowly defined assessment and treatment provision may, in fact, misrepresent marginal prison cohorts such as young men by adding to rather than decreasing their carceral strains. A view widely supported by the study participants:

> “All they was (sic) interested in was whether you were going to top yourself or had an addiction (…) nothing else was a priority for them. I had borderline personality disorder and told them so (…) the nurse said that he didn’t have access to my GP records so couldn’t confirm that (…) he said that he believed me but lots play on it to get extra privileges so you could see where he was going with his thinking” (Liam).

Similarly, Ben’s psychological assessment for mental vulnerabilities appeared to start and end with identifying the likelihood of self-harm and substance misuse, “they gave me this questionnaire and asked whether I had been doing drugs or were self-harming before I came

inside (…) I said no and that was that they was (sic) not interested in anything else”. This experience was also similar for Lucas, who despite presenting with severe anxiety was told that he would be OK after a few days because “everybody felt this way when they first go inside”. All the study participants agreed that there was little attempt at exploring the wide array of clinical and sub-clinical vulnerabilities that they were bringing with them into the carceral space. For Scott, this also meant that those running the offender rehabilitation courses were unaware of how he was likely to react to the types of interventions that had been placed on his sentence plan:

> “My anxiety was off the charts (…) I needed somebody who could help me to get a grip of myself in there [prison]. Instead, I got a fucking victim awareness course where I had to stand up and say what a bad person I had been”.

The fact that the treatment focus of most offender rehabilitation courses in adult prisons are based around CBT- led intervention, means that they are wholly unsuitable for developmentally traumatised young men. Fighting to make sense of what has happened in their lives, these types of intervention are likely to re-trigger adverse memories as a result. As Cox (2011: 56) explains, “these courses require the ability to analyse, explain, reframe and regulate difficult or new feelings, so the absence of such skills for many young people, raises questions about their suitability”. A point that Kyle clearly demonstrated:

> “The nurse asked me if I was self-harming, I told her that I had panic attacks which made me dissociate a lot. She said do I feel suicidal …I said no but the panic attacks affects my attention and motivation (…) she asked why I thought I was feeling this way and I told her about the abuse as a child (…) eventually she scribbled something about depression next to one of the tick boxes and said that they are reluctant to prescribe drugs in prison, it was like she had not heard a fucking word I was saying”

In the end Kyle was given a sentence plan with an array of offender programmes on them, but not one that would help him to discuss and move forward with the underlying traumas he had spoken about in his interview:

> "I were made to do TSP[55], CSCP[56], CALM[57] you name it, but they didn't help, I just got more and more down until I had no motivation for anything (…) the worst was that they made me do this empathy course thing (…) I kept saying that I was the victim [looks away from camera emotional], they were the ones that harmed me (…) later I was told that I didn't get enough out of the course and would have to repeat it. Obviously didn't give the right answers".

All of this is in stark contrast to juvenile offender interventions. In addition to providing practical strategies such as vocational training and helping to find accommodation on leaving detention, they offer individualised and targeted social and psychological treatment plans. These are designed to explore the reasons preventing the young offender from adapting to mainstream society. Through small group and one-to-one work, professionals attempt to re-build the young person's confidence and resilience by forging new relationships with their families and communities. They tackle previous adverse experiences through a mixture of client-centred therapies and psychotherapy opportunities that provide a space for the young offender to talk about their feelings and frustrations. For Daniel, who had spent some time in a youth detention centre, this intervention proved invaluable:

> "When I was in Felton, they knew what to do with you (…) I was really angry all the time but [name] she just said talk to me about it, get it out so we know what we are

[55] Thinking Skills Programme

[56] Cognitive Self-change Programme

[57] Controlling Anger and Learning to Manage It Programme

> dealing with (…) it took a long time for me to open up, but she was patient and that made all the difference, I never had that before”.

In contrast, most of the former prisoners found that in an adult prison setting they were faced with an ad-hoc range of behaviour management and rehabilitation programmes. These were focused on behaviour management, victim empathy and cognitive restructuring, rather than trauma informed interventions. As Ritchie explained:

> “The courses tell you’s [sic] you are a criminal, you’s [sic] are a criminal and will be one whilst you’s [sic] keep thinking that way (…) I was hurting’s [sic] inside, missed my family, my wife, the kids, but that didn’t matter”.

The reality of intervention for Lucas appeared as traumatising as the reasons why he needed help in the first place:

> “I felt a right knob, sat round in a circle with seven other cons having to talk about how I was feeling [a]bout the bloke I had beaten over the head with a hammer (…) I couldn’t even remember anything about it to be honest (…) the other side of the room I eyed this guy who had tried to stick a pencil in my eye a few days ago, yeah, I really was going to open up”.

Considered as both pointless and simply a box-ticking exercise to prove that they were meeting their sentence plans, these manualised intervention programmes, promoted sets of planning targets that did nothing but dehumanise inmates into behavioural stereotypes. As Ben frustratingly explained:

> “They were not interested in how you ended up in stir, it all had to be about now and how you were going to move forward (…) they would say this isn’t the place to

> discuss those issues (…) no for that you would need to do the 'I'm completely fucked because my mam was a druggie course', but surprise they don't do that one".

Most of the study participants were widely sceptical of the ACCT (Assessment, Care in Custody and Teamwork) system and considered participation in it as an occupational hazard.

> "It didn't matter how many times I told them, or how many times I had to go through their fucking assessments, they wouldn't believe me (…) my problems only began when I got sent inside (…) I ended up having to put up with their individual projections and distortions of why I wasn't complying and what I'm supposed to do about it (…) eventually you give in (…) they will take the bits they can manipulate, twist and turn into something that is completely unrecognisable in order to fit the boxes on their forms" (Scott).

As Ben explained:

> "They's [sic] are big on your offending history but ignore or distort any other reasons for you's [sic] behaviour other than you have chosen to do it (…) in the end I said nothing [be]cause they mix things up and suddenly, I'm not trying hard enough (…) then it's on report and I'm being told that I's [sic] may not be ready for release because I'm not engaging with the programme".

Cognitive-behavioural interventions assume the right to be highly intrusive, encouraging prisoners to expose their personal beliefs and private emotions (Day, 2004). It is also premised on the notion that the young adult can think through and can verbally express and analyse their experiences with another individual. Something that the subject participants found great difficulty in doing, "I couldn't just open up like that (…) just thinking about being on the out made me emotional and there was no way I was going to break down in front of the guys or anybody else for that matter" (Liam). The greatest fear of opening up to the

healthcare team, for some of the young prisoners', was how the information might be used. This was because there was a general perception of a blurring of roles, where inmates were encouraged to open up to the mental health team only to find that the information would be used to assess their suitability for early release. This made it difficult for them to ask for support since revealing distressing or troubling thoughts might be taken as an indicator of increased risk. As Adam said:

> "there was no confidentiality (…) I made the mistake of asking my key worker for help once because I was panicking a lot and it was getting out of hand (…) next thing I was being asked whether I was thinking about self-harming and when I said that it had crossed my mind, I was put on a SW[58] (…) that was their support …I kept myself to myself after that".

As with the IEP system, a common adaptive strategy, by the young men, was to disengage fundamentally from institutional offerings by declining options to undertake offender programmes. For Kyle, this decision, although potentially affecting his sentence length and privilege status, seemed to provide at least some psychological certainty:

> "In the end nobody is being rehabilitated in prison, they are simply being warehoused until their day of release (…) I decided that enough was enough and if it meant having to stay in for longer at least I don't have to keep jumping through their stupid fuckin (sic) hoops like a circus trick".

For Paul, this meant, "playing the game" and engaging in incentive programming purely because there might be a chance that he might be, "released sooner", "you did the zombie thing (…) just go along with whatever they said and don't question it".

[58] Suicide watch.

5.4 Living on the edge - Fear and security.

"You have got to be strong from the start in there (…) they prey on you like pack animals [be]cause you weak, some are determined to make your life as miserable as poss[ible] (…) times you feel there's no escape, nowhere, not even in your own pad" (Daniel).

Figure 5: Self drawing by Daniel.

Daniel was in prison for 14 months after being convicted for burglary. As someone with self-confessed anger issues, he found the intimidating environment of the carceral setting to be both a place of fear and contradiction. Inmates who had shown an interest in being friends with him when he first entered prison soon became enemies, as they demanded repayment for things that they had lent out with interest charged on top. He was to share his cell with a convicted murderer for the first month and there was always tension on the landings as he came to be known for the gang that he had been a member of on the outside. Gang rivalry spilled out numerous times and Daniel had been subject to several assaults during his sentence. It was his description of the underlying intimidation from 'window warriors' that most affected Daniel.

When an institution that is both materially and socially depriving decides to confine large numbers of men with anti-social tendencies in close proximity to each other, it is inevitable that fear of violence and intimidation is going to be an integral part of prison life. This dynamic was observed by Sykes (1958: 78), who noted that inmates live in perpetual fear, "uncertain of whether or not today's joke will be tomorrow's bitter insult". At the extreme, this violence may culminate in life-changing injuries or even death. For most of the study participants, however, their experiences were more commonly associated with low-level physical bullying and emotional intimidation. The perception perpetuated by the media, of

inmates having to physically protect themselves from violence because of what awaits them on the prison landings proving wide of the mark (Armstrong et al., 2017), The fear, still, should not be under-stated, as it does bring on a level of hypervigilance that must be constantly maintained in a closed society where it is difficult to avoid those intent on the bullying (Berg et al., 2006).

For Daniel, the anticipation of intimidation was what proved to be the most debilitating, “you just don’t know where it is going to come from”. Given the uncertainty around this anticipation, the young inmate would frequently resort to familiar coping strategies because in the absence of being able to remain passive, they must make every effort to try and escape their captives as best, they can. Lacking the adequate emotional maturity to negotiate their way out of conflict or the resilience to withstand the tremendous pressure placed upon being a captive, meant that many of the former young prisoners resorted to depersonalisation as a means of escape. As Liam explained, “you go distant and withdrawn to protect yourself, but they then see that as a sign of weakness, that you will give in to them which makes it a hundred times worst”. Such a coping approach, selected out of familiarity and experience, tends to worsen the young man’s security fear, and leads to further negative ruminations which may worsen the detachment and numbing response. As Ben argued, “there’s this spiral of doom that takes hold, so you don’t know how to react any longer”. For Ritchie, this spiral encouraged catastrophic thinking patterns which in turn triggered even more of an anticipatory effect:

> “you’s [sic] waiting for the nexts [sic] bad thing to [h]appen (…) it haunts so’s [sic] that even doing simple stuff, like in the laundry room, you’s [sic] fearful (…) you’s [sic] never get used to it [be]cause they’s [sic] always new cons coming in so trouble’s all around”.

Physical violence in prison

Interviewees recognised that intimidation and victimisation from bullying were far more common in prison than physical violence, but this did not prevent an ongoing concern for physical safety that the young prisoner had to remain vigilant too. As Blitz et al. (2008: 34) argues, "modern day prisons are overcrowded and economically depriving places, a lethal combination". For Adam, this created a paradoxical constancy and unpredictability around the threat of violence, "it could happen anywhere, anytime without warning, oftentimes you were not even the one being targeted". Similarly for Scott, it became more a fear about being drawn into violence even though he had done nothing to incite such a response himself, "if they get your number, even if you done nothing (…) you are in a whole load of shit". Kyle explained this further:

> "As soon as you get in they are eyeballing you, see if they got anything on you (…) they'll come over and say where you from and which gang do you belong too on the out (…) you don't have to have done anything inside, just living in the wrong area or hanging around with somebody that a con has got beef with was enough".

As Ben added, "few people could be trusted (…) you had to work out quickly where your loyalties lay". Liam demonstrated the level of paranoia that existed around remaining safe with his insistence that if you were being targeted there were few places the prisoner could go to escape, "no matter where you are they can get to you if they need too …just a couple of lads to distract the boss and boom you have been pushed into a corner for a kicking". Where the anticipation of violence and the corresponding depersonalised coping response was at its strongest, was during the entry-shock period of first arriving at the prison. As Scott explained:

> "They were this view of prison as a violent place before you even get there and then the atmosphere that hits you when you first arrive is fuckin overwhelming (…) you

> feel it all-round, the shouting and aggression (…) then you soon get to hear the stories of cons being sent to the health wing [be]cause they lost an eye".

Elijah expanded:

> "Most's [sic] the violence is bravado, you's [sic] gets to hear about it, but by the time it's been told a few times, the violence has been upped so's a quick kick-in has now's [sic] become a fuckin [sic] near death experience (…) that's their reputations they looking after".

Entry shock would provide the backdrop to prison being as dangerous as they previously thought so that avoiding physical violence was imagined as a mainstay of remaining safe. For Paul, it was this aspect of prison that triggered his first dissociative episodes:

> "The atmosphere was too much for me to take in first thing (…) I sat in my cell 'zoning' in and out all over the place (…) I said to the boss, no fucking way you getting me out of this cell".

The prisoners' depersonalisation becomes further triggered when word gets to the young inmate that they are being looked for. As Liam explained:

> "It were (sic) your initiation test (…) your fucking shitting yourself [be]cause there's no escape from them, you gotta [sic] come out and shower, use the phones, get your canteen (…) they wanting to test you, see how hard you are".

Due to the elevated level of security, especially around the use of CCTV throughout the estate, it was difficult to find 'off-sight' places where beatings could be carried out without being caught (Criminal Justice Alliance, 2012). So, inmates quickly became wary of the locations that were not covered, including showers, inside the cells and some areas round the exercise yard. As Elijah explained, "you's [sic] would have the grabbers, those who would get hold of you's [sic] and drag you's [sic] into an area where big brother wasn't

watching and then jumped on by those he owed too". Physical beatings were more often carried out during domestics and association where, "it was easy to push a con in a cell whilst others were waiting inside" (Lucas). Conversely, assaults on 'free flow' (when prisoners' were moving to work and education) were rare and instigated minor incidents, largely because staff intervention was swift, "you would get a kidney punch, that kind of thing whilst in detail (…) just so's [sic] you knew your place" (Adam).

For many of the study participants, this direct violence led their depersonalised stress-coping to enact reciprocal effects through negative cyclical ruminations about where they should go and with whom they should talk too. Kyle, for instance, avoided" risky" areas such as the exercise yard or open landings unless he had somebody, he could trust with him, "it wasn't worth it (…) just eyeballing one of the psycho's would be enough half the time". For those who did venture out, many felt compelled to carry around weapons to provide a sense of safety, "got's [sic] me a sock with a weight in it" (Elijah). Simply trying to avoid trouble was difficult because of uncertainty around who might pose a threat and what actions might make themselves targets. As Daniel commented, "so you actually sleepin' [sic] next to a murderer. You got a murderer right there on the top bunk, you can't even be safe in your own crib". For Kyle, the constant hyper-vigilance he had to maintain whilst walking around public areas made him paranoid which fed into his depersonalisation still further, "you's [sic] got to remember that some of the bosses, they were in the pocket of the cons (…) I trusted nobody". As Lucas put it, "being in a place where you cannot escape the bastards who want to see you hurt, you imagine that (…) you come to trust no one and end up having the 'DP's' over and over again".

Direct victimisation

The subject participants described various forms of predatory victimisation, targeting those inmates perceived to be weak, vulnerable or as Aaron said, "because of who they were". Strikingly, such victimisation was widely accepted as an engrained part of the prisoner

society, “most times those who got leaned on deserved it” (Adam). This was because, victimisation functioned as the main medium for punishing those who had disrupted the prison economy by becoming indebted to other prisoners. This legitimacy, however, meant conflicting social rules and expectations abounded where inmates were expected to be loyal to one another, yet at the same time could not trust each other. As Scott put it, “the cons code meant you were not likely to ‘rat’ on one another (…) this gave those doing the bullying more of a licence to continue”. Preying on the vulnerable, including those with learning difficulties or mental health vulnerabilities, appeared to be seen as a legitimate way of doing business, by coercing them into carrying out tasks such as moving contraband around the estate. As Lucas explained, “there were some poor bastards picked on in there (…) getting mules to do it meant that if they got caught it wasn’t coming back to you”.

Victimisation also proved to be the main economic sanction in an environment where prisoners’ derived status from the acquisition of material goods. As Sykes (1958: 63) suggested, “prison life is ‘depriving (...) in the extreme”, and so the availability of desired items is heavily restricted. This serves to increase, rather than decrease the importance of acquiring available resources, and in turn creates a ‘market’ for goods and services that feeds the bullying and victimisation, “most times a con would get the bird [be]cause he owed out (…) borrowed something and come canteen hasn’t paid his due” (Ben). This process of borrowing and paying meant that prison was rife with exploitation and extortion. As Kyle explained:

> “It was scary in the beginning, but once you had learned the rules then it became just another part of doing your time (…) it was important to know what the consequences were for borrowing or lending stuff out (…) get it wrong and you end up in their debt (…) don’t think it won’t follow you on the outside”.

As Paul was soon to discover, any pro-social behaviours where prisoners might want to lend or even give items away were vehemently resisted, “if you were not making a profit then you would be visited (…) don’t make us look bad son they would say, if you got freebies to give away then you know where it should be heading”. As Gonçalves et al. (2015:10) put it, “lending could be an act of camaraderie but not paying back on time with interest becomes a source of conflict”. Bullying and victimisation, therefore, was seen simply as a part of ‘prison business’ to encourage prompt payment or to break the will of the victim, “you just get it (…) the same voice in your ear, the nudge in your back, day after day until you give in” (Liam). As Scott explained, “so you would get the same guy eyeballing you every time he saw you (…) even if he isn’t physically touching you, mentally, it starts to play with your head”. In this way, the bully reinforces the victim’s low status in the prison hierarchy, “each time he came over and smiled in my face, I knew he was trying to wind me up, get me to lash out so I could then be taken to one side and get a beating (…) there were a code see” (Aaron).

Interestingly, the act of bullying and victimisation were considered as being caused for entirely varied reasons by the subject participants. For Lucas, the bullying was seen as unprovoked and resulting from actions that the victim had little control over:

> “If you get bullied its [a]bout stuff that’s happening [a]round you that’s all (…) so, you friends with some on the wing and you get the bullying [be]cause of that, that’s not your fault but you get it anyway”.

Victimisation, on the other hand, was seen in the context of the inmate having somehow contributed to their situation, normally while getting into debt with another inmate, “some get’s [sic] in way over their heads and [be]cause of the double bubble[59] no way it can be paid back” (Elijah). This illicit economy where trading and borrowing is such an embedded part of the prison culture meant that victimisation was seen as unavoidable. As Ben explained:

[59] Unpaid debts would incur a 100% surcharge compounded for every week that it remains unpaid.

> "You know what you're letting yourself in for so there's no excuse (…) one of the first things you learn is that if you cannot pay, don't ask for it in the first place (…) those that did were just muppets and deserved what came to them".

This view also was publicly condoned but privately endorsed by prison guards, "they are fools to themselves if they think that borrowing something and not paying back is not going to lead to consequences" (Alan). As Stephen, another prison guard, said, "it works that way on the outside so why should it be any different (…) they have brought it on themselves". When asked how they would usually intervene when they see victimisation going on, the response was blunt, "we don't turn a blind eye as such but unless there is physical violence involved, we tend to let them sort stuff out by themselves" (Alan). This practice illustrates how engrained the illicit economy is in prison and how it is given an almost semi-validation by prison staff. What is not taken into consideration, however, is that some groups in prison are more vulnerable to these actions. The former prisoners admitted, for instance, that they were more likely to be impulsive, more likely to focus on the present and less likely to engage in consequential thinking than older inmates, and so therefore more likely to get themselves into debt. As Kyle said, "if yer [sic] on basic and not getting money coming in from outside, how you supposed to get the stuff you need?". For Liam, delaying gratification proved to be simply beyond his capabilities:

> "I didn't wait for my wallet to be opened, I was straight in their borrowing stuff I needed (…) everything has got a price in the slammer (…) you want good trainers rather than prison issue then you are going to have to pay for them and that price can quickly get out of control if you're not careful".

As Adam found, not only do prisoners', therefore, incur debts quickly, but soon it becomes impossible to repay, "that's when things get nasty, and it starts to get out of hand". A system that remains the same regardless of whether the borrowed goods are legitimately available

in prison or not. The demarcation between legitimate items like shower gels and confectionary and the illegitimate trade in smuggled drugs or mobile phones seemed to be just one big supply and exchange chain with victimisation keeping a break on inflation. As Paul said, “no difference between chewing gum or mamba, you get it from the same guy and you pay the same interest, simples”.

For the young male prisoner who found himself in a barren environment without luxuries, the temptation to become indebted appeared to be at times overwhelming. As Elijah explained, “not’s [sic] everyone gots [sic] family on the outside feeding the cash so [a]part from what you earn you gots [sic] make do”. This system of prison economy appeared especially debilitating to those, such as former looked-after children, who had little in the way of family subsidising what they earned in prison. For Daniel, this situation was further exacerbated because he had no money coming in from prison work, “my time was [supposed to be] less than eight months, so a job or training wasn’t seen as important”. As Liam explained:

> “Once my smokers pack had been used, I was climbing up the walls for a ciggie (…) I thought about borrowing a couple of patches to get by but knew what would happen if I couldn’t pay up (…) in the end one of the screws felt sorry for me and got me another smoker’s pack”.

In many instances, prisoners feared that they had little choice but to borrow, and inevitably become embroiled in a vicious cycle of paying their debts through increasing repayments. As Lucas explained:

> “you can get anything in prison if you are willing to pay for it (…) Gods honest I saw an inflatable women being stuffed down a cons pants (…) but any delays in payment spells big trouble and there’s nobody around that will back you up, that’s how it is (…)

only hope you got is that you convince the loon squad that you got problems in your head, and they move you onto the health wing".

The impact that this system had on the young prisoner was destructive. Ritchie for instance, found that he had quickly become indebted and then spent the remainder of his sentence having to, "look out for his back". Others, experienced acute esteem issues as they were unable to compete with those who could afford to buy from the smugglers, "quality stuff from the cat[60], that was everybody's dream" (Daniel). As Adam explained, "what you got as standard issue inside was a joke (…) everybody had fucking wet dreams looking through the catalogue". The smuggling of contraband into prison did not help this situation and appeared to disproportionality effect the consumer orientated mind of the younger prisoner. As Aaron said, "you got a guy with a watch worth couple hundred quid and a pair of flip-flops[61] he can walk round with his head up (…) last thing you want in prison is a fuckin [sic] watch but it's the status that matters". These experiences not only lowered the young adult's self-esteem further but increased their feelings of shame which inevitably fed into their dissociative episodes. The young prisoner felt stigmatised which in turn exacerbated their anxiety and avoidance behaviours. As Scott said, "prison is bad enough without being told every day that you are fuckin[g] worthless [be]cause of the shit clothes on your back".

Vicarious victimisation

The subject participants identified another type of victimisation that had little to do with the elicit economy and more a reaction to residing in conditions where inmates slowly start to behave like animals. Vicarious victimisation differed from prison to prison but had the same de-stabilising effect on the young male prisoner. This included name-calling or derogatory

[60] Prison catalogue used to order items from outside.

[61] Apparently high-end flip-flops were highly desirable in prison.

remarks which could be aimed at prisoners' themselves but more often at the prisoners' family members that had been visiting; "he came up to me and asked whether my wife was a good shag because he was getting out soon and wanted to pay her a visit (…) fucking moron" (Ben). This verbal form of abuse rarely happened face-to-face but was carried out in a clandestine manner such as shouting through the walls or communicated with notes pushed under the cell door. As Scott explained, "the fuckers were all cowards (…) you didn't know where it would be coming from next (…) sometimes you didn't even know who was doing it". At times, there would be several inmates working together to carry out the intimidation which could exacerbate feelings of helplessness and reinforce social isolation and powerlessness. For Kyle:

> "It gets to a point where you cannot even trust being safe in your own pad, that's how it plays on your mind (…) you're thinking that if they have the screws turning a blind eye any moment the door is going to be open and you about to get a shit-sandwich in your face[62]".

A common method of verbal intimidation was shouting out of the windows. Prisoners used the term 'window warriors' to describe those who did this (Harvey, 2012: 126). As Ben explained:

> "Those fucking muppets, shouting out the window at you all night (…) 'I'm coming to fucking get you' (…) when you first get in prison your sitting on your bunk shaking, but nothings done about it (…) you get others joining in just for the crack, banging on the pipes in the next cage so it sounds like they are coming in through the door".

Verbal posturing, challenges, and the desire to gain the upper hand were all part of these exchanges despite the prisoners' who issued these threats rarely carrying them through,

[62] Reference to faeces that are used to make a protest in some way.

“most were pussies …getting a kick out of trying to scare the fuck out of you, but only while they had the walls in between” (Adam). The success of this form of intimidation rested on whether the ‘victim’ was prepared to tolerate such behaviour. Prisoners believed that those who accepted and gave into such demands had confirmed their status as victims and were therefore ‘fair game’ for further exploitation whilst those that stood up to it, “might gets [sic] a kick-in but’s [sic] at least you have shown guts and they move onto somebody else” (Ritchie). In this way, a level of inner strength combined with resilience was needed to ride out the initial verbal abuse. This obviously affected some young prisoners’ more than others. As Paul put it, “there were some in the slammer, poor fuckers, who took it badly (…) became isolated from everything and ended up on healthcare [be]cause they had a break-down”.

A common form of intimidation highlighted in the interviews involved one prisoner demanding that another order canteen for him, by shouting instructions down the corridor. Alternatively, the bully would fill in a canteen sheet and push it under the cell door of another prisoner and then claim the canteen later that week, “canteen shopping was rife, [e]specially with those who were seen as weak and unable to defend themselves” (Ben). When prisoners were unlocked collectively to undertake domestic chores or for periods of association, the canteen would then be passed, “you passed it on under clothes or wrapped in a pillowcase” (Kyle). Cell theft, whilst the prisoner was out on the landings was also another form of indirect victimisation. As Scott explained, “taking stuff out of other cons pads was a way of testing new arrivals on the wings (…) you get to see what kind of metal they carrying and whether they can be picked out for canteen shopping or not”.

Chapter 6: Troubled Lives: Imported Vulnerabilities

"What chance did I have? Fostered out [be]cause dad had buggered off with another women and mam was spending too much time on the happy tablets (…) the foster family wanted me [be]cause they would get more money as a section 20 (…) all I had as a kid growing up was rejection" (Paul).

Figure 6: Self-drawing by Paul.

This chapter addresses the third research question of my study: What is the influence of imported vulnerabilities on the employment of depersonalisation as a learned-coping response among young male detainees? It begins by exploring, through the accounts of the former prisoners, the relationship between attachment disruption and offending behaviour which was first alluded to by John Bowlby (1973) in his book, 'attachment and loss'. Through his work with juvenile delinquents, Bowlby, examined the possibility that unhealthy care-seeking interactions with parental caregivers could give rise to the infant developing an unstable sense of self and others. This in turn, would, as the child grows, lead to a fractured identity. Taking this argument further, Liotti (1992), suggested that although the child may react adversely to a range of caregiver abuses and neglect, there is one maladaptive attachment style, disorganised attachment, which was most likely to bring on dissociative coping.

More recent research has explored the nature of complex trauma experiences on those caught up in the criminal justice system. In particular, how adjustment insecurities from maladaptive attachment relations are likely to be compounded by further adversities growing up including educational exclusion, social marginalisation, and gang membership. Underpinning the depersonalised coping response is the young man's emotional immaturity

and lack of developed resilience, which means that they are more likely to react to incarceration in unpredictable and self-destructive ways. Lashing out in anger and aggressive behaviours, followed by extended periods of emotional numbing and detachment responses, may best describe their pre-prison coping, but such coping responses are also likely to be imported into prison with them. The fear is that this subsequently prevents the young man from adjusting to the prisoner society and may in fact manifest into more serious forms of psychosis and extreme avoidance coping mechanisms including self-injury and suicidal ideation. This chapter, therefore, explores the view that the pains of imprisonment may be experienced by all prisoners' but for some, these pains are disproportionately more harmful than for others.

6.1 The relationship between disorganised attachments, offending and depersonalisation.

It became clear, early in the interviews, that all of the former prisoners had faced unpredictable and at times traumatising early caregiving experiences. Although these included accounts of both physical abuse and neglect, and in one case sexual molestation. The theme that emerged was of childhoods that had dealt with unpredictable parental behaviours that were often contradictory and inconsistent in nature. As Daniel put it, "mum would give off these mixed signals (…) she wants a cuddle and be up close (…) then pushes me off to go away". Similarly for Adam, "it always felt like love on her terms (…) she was loving but also cold and sometimes cruel, you know, by what she said". Although there were several reasons for this behaviour, the participants' narratives often focused on parental alcohol and drug misuse, poverty, teenage parenting, and the wider effects of absent fathering. As Liam explained:

> “Mum was never that close, you know, cuddles and that …she …kinda [sic] expected you to look after yourself most times when she was on the booze (…) when she was sober, she could be very loving, all over us, demanding cuddles and the like”.

Similarly, when describing his father, Liam spoke about him “just getting up and buggering off for weeks at a time (…) mam never could cope with that”. Daniel, whose father worked on the oil rigs also had this experience, “he’d be gone for three months at a time (…) when home he would be found most times in the pub or round his mates house”. In fact, seven out of the twelve subject participants, reported that they had lived, for one time or another, in a family headed by a lone mother. Often faced with having to juggle a myriad of competing commitments usually against a backdrop of poverty and social marginalisation, these mothers frequently struggled to keep the family together.

> “I know it was tough, her having to work and bring me up by herself (…) she always seemed tired, I suppose that’s why she was always grumpy and didn’t have much time for me” (Kyle).

Even when the father was present, he would not necessarily be invested in his family, “he was a dickhead, doing drugs and crashing out on the sofa night after night (…) I was a nuisance to him that’s all, he all but said it himself” (Lucas). Inevitably, given these fractious relationships, children were a frequent witness to parental rows and domestic violence. As Paul describes:

> “Mam and dad would row and then it came to blows (…) I would sit at the top of the stairs with my hands over my ears scared that they were going to murder each other, they would row a lot about me so I thought it was all my fault (…) I still blame myself for a lot of it even though I know better …I can’t help it”.

This sense of blame for their parents' negative behaviours was commonly voiced, "as I got older, I didn't help things, I know, getting into trouble with the police and things (…) I can't blame mam for everything" (Liam). For Adam, this meant trying even harder to please his mother despite the rejection that he was frequently facing, "you's do a picture of flowers at school and bring it home for mam [be]cause she likes flowers (…) but she wasn't interested, she was hurting, I can see that now". What Freyd (2003) refers to as 'betrayal blindness' was very apparent during the interviews where the young men would focus the blame for their parents' behaviour on themselves and come to believe that they must be the bad person in the relationship. This betrayal blindness was illustrated in its most extreme form by Scott:

> "I think I was about five or six …mam had been depressed for a few days and was taking loads of pills …I spilt some pop over myself and she just flipped out, she dragged me upstairs and pulled my t-shirt off and started to run a bath …next thing she had pushed my head under the water and kept it there …I was struggling but she just kept it there …I don't know how long for because I blacked out …for days afterwards I just kept saying sorry to her and I would be a good boy from now on".

Although often fearful of their caregivers' actions and behaviours, they felt that they had to maintain an attachment, so an idealised version of their mother, on whom they could continue to rely on emotionally would manifest. As Elijah explained:

> "Mammy wasn't always this way, you's [sic] know, distant and stuff, she could be very cuddly, and I's [sic] was always spoilt at Birthdays and Christmas times (…) it was the men that she were (sic) with that caused her to behave's [sic] this way (…) without them mammy and me would get along just fine".

Interestingly, at a cognitive level, both as children and then as adults, the subject participants tended to retain feelings of guilt and blame for their perceived inadequacies rather than

accepting that their early childhoods had been blighted by poor parenting. As Ben pointed out:

> "my social worker was like, 'it's because of your upbringing that you turned out the way you did', you can't blame yourself, but that wasn't true (…) my life wasn't half as bad as some, and at least I wasn't put in a home or anything (…) it all started to go south when I got into the gang thing …when the drugs started that's all, I needed the money to buy the drugs and things just happened from there".

The rationale behind Freyd's (2003) betrayal blindness is the child's inability to fight-or-flight from their situation, a paradox that Kyle was only too aware of as he grew older, "you was (sic) trapped (…) where could you go? (…) what choice did you have?". There was also an element of them not knowing any better, believing that is how all children were treated:

> "it was only later's [sic] I realised mam ran hot and cold (…) she was tough on me, you know, if I hurt myself she'd say, 'don't worry be a brave boy' (…) she wouldn't think I needed a cuddle if I got upset, so I would keep my crying in until I was out of sight [be]cause I thought this is what everybody did" (Aaron).

The picture that emerges, therefore, is of parental love that tends to flip-flop between warmth and affection, followed by rejection and confusion, "when mum was on form, she were (sic) life and soul (…) everybody loved her" (Lucas). But as Tristen explained, this warmth was always tempered with sudden changes in behaviour:

> "we would get crisps and pop in of a Friday because that was treat night like (…) mam would start out great, laughing and joking, tickling us and making a big deal (…) she would start on the wine and then later she would just get up and bugger off

> upstairs and that would be the last you would see of her (…) if you were upset or anything and wanted a cuddle you had to get in early like".

There were instances, however, when parental neglect turned into abusive behaviour. Paul for instance, ended up being placed in care after his father broke several of his ribs and an arm by kicking him down the stairs when he was just four years of age, "I don't remember that much (…) I was clinging on to mum and he kicked me across the landing". He was left lying at the bottom of the stairs until his sister came to his aid. Similarly, Scott was left with wheal marks from cigarettes that had been put out on his arms and legs. He had also faced constant psychological humiliations such as being urinated over when he had been sick once". Eventually, a teacher noticed that he had a deep swelling on the side of his face and social workers were called in. Although this extreme form of physical abuse and violence appeared to be the exception rather than the rule, there was a feeling during most of the interviews that participants did not want to talk about what may have happened to them:

> "Yeah, there were other stuff, being knocked around and all that (…) mam could be devious at times and she was all for pleasing dad so times I got a belting [be]cause she blamed me for not having stuff perfect in the house" (Adam).

These experiences of paradoxical caregiving have been identified as a type of maladaptive attachment relation called disorganised, which conveys the message to the young child that the caregiver cannot be trusted or relied upon when emotional support is needed (Fenimore et al., 2021; Horowitz et al., 2018; Dutra et al., 2009). As Aaron explained: "you never really knew where you stood with her (…) would she let me in her bed or not if I got upset?". For Lucas, this disorganisation, meant that he transferred his emotional allegiance onto his grandmother, "I could sit next to her, she would talk to me whilst we watched telly together". Similarly, Paul had used his sister a lot for emotional support but found as she got older that she would not give him the time he craved, "I just wanted to spend all my days with her". For

others, the absence of a surrogate parent meant improvising, “you’s [sic] got to be good at fantasising …trying to tek [sic] your feelings back by pretending you a soldier, that kind of stuff” (Elijah). A form of fantasy absorption that would initially provide the necessary emotional distance from contradictory and destabilising parental behaviours. As Aaron explained:

> “she didn’t much like physical contact when she was on one of her downers (…) you would feel it in her, the way she …turned her head away irritated like to get me off [looks away from camera emotional] … she would like growl at me if she got fed up with me trying to get close on the sofa …so I would sit and think about us being on a beach eating ice cream together”.

As Adam highlighted, these maladaptive parenting cues were not exclusive to mothers, but were frequently displayed by fathers also:

> “Dad would disappear off the scene …I got used to him not being there (…) he would be home times and all over us with his beery breath saying how much he loved us, slurring that he was going to be a good dad from now on (…) it wasn’t long before he was out the door again though.”

Kyle, found that these contradictory cues were often coupled with frightening or negative intrusive language, including mockery, insults or making fun, “she would say some horrible things …like she only took me on [be]cause social services were paying her (…) she thought it were a joke”. As imagined, these cruel comments would often instigate intense feelings of isolation and feed further into the young child’s desire too emotionally remove themselves:

> “I wanted to go on a picnic with my friend and his mum, but we had no food in (…) she could have gone to the shops but instead just put two slices of bread together

with crisps between them (…) she told me that would do [be]cause it wouldn't be a proper picnic anyways [looks away from camera emotional]" (Daniel).

There were times when fantasy absorption no longer had the desired effect of providing enough emotional distance, and so a precipitous move towards a deeper form of affective escapism would start to develop as a learned behavioural response:

> "When I felt that I couldn't go to mam I would go kind of quiet in my head (…) looking round things would be slowing down (…) sometimes it lasted a few seconds, but I wanted it to go on for longer and longer because it helped to calm me down" (Aaron).

As the interviews proceeded, it became apparent that through their unresolved affective dissonance, emotional detachment and numbing responses became a habitually learned extension of fantasy absorption, for the young child. A source of regulating and coping with emotions that had become too stressful to keep in conscious awareness, "I would go to my bedroom numb (…) no feelings at all (…) all noises baffled like I was in a padded room" (Adam). A default coping strategy that could be instigated repeatedly until it became an automatic response:

> "Mum would lie on the sofa not talking to anyone, in a world of her own, just staring into thin air (…) sometimes she would quietly sob which made me cry (…) I would sit next to her, holding her hand 'zoning in and out', next to her" (Paul).

For Paul, this meant spending many hours, "emotionally alone" even though he was rarely apart from his mother, "she were (sic) there but not there if you know what I mean". It also meant that from an early age he was depersonalising frequently:

> “When I was about seven or eight, my parents had an almighty row. They always argued, and the house was full of friction, but this was different (…) I thought they were going to kill each other. It was years later that I learnt from my sister that mum had faced up to dad about having an affair and he started hitting her (…) she went in the kitchen and got a knife and was waving it around (…) I don’t remember anything about it even though I was there and seen it all (…) all I remember was everything round me went ‘foggy’ and I was drifting off in my head”

And, for Daniel:

> “…it was cruel at times …that was hardest to deal with …mam was not well … she became more distant as time went on and the hugs kinda stopped after that (...) she would say hurtful things like unless I shut up she would leave home and then I would be sorry (…) I would go upstairs, ‘zone out’ and be as still as possible so she didn’t think I was there”.

The narrative presented in these accounts provide an emotional ‘roadmap’ of how the confusion and contradiction inherent in disorganised attachments affects a child’s sense of self, leading to the development of depersonalisation as a learned coping response. Through the experience of fear and emotional neglect, the child is unable to use those around them as a stable anchor which brings on a fear-without-solution paradox (Lyons-Ruth et al., 2006; Liotti, 1992). As Aaron explained, “you felt trapped (…) six years old and thinking how I’m gonna [sic] get on a train to escape from dad”. By dissociating, this fear-without-solution paradox becomes temporarily circumscribed:

> “She would fly off the handle at the slightest thing, you know flid [sic] out and scream and shout at me if things went wrong for her …then I would get the silent treatment

> for hours afterwards until she calmed down (…) only one place you going with your head in that state”.

The drive to physiologically flight is a powerful one, but also an unpractical one for the child. As the rejection continues the child has little choice but to forgo flight or fight for the third option ‘freeze’:

> “I would feel my anger and frustration build up when mam was with him (…) she didn’t want anything to do with me (…) the anger would eventually calm down and I would try and forget how I was feeling (…) just become ‘dead’, you know, to everything that was happening around me” (Aaron).

As the disorganised relations between child and caregiver continue, it creates incompatible realities for the child that are exceedingly difficult to reconcile and hard to combine into a coherent structure (Ruth-Lyons, 2006). The contradictory and potentially unresponsive care-giving inherent in fear-without-solution behaviours fragment and distort (Fenimore et al., 2021).

> “Mam was kind and cruel in equal measure (…) she would say hurtful things and then try to take them back later, but the damage had already been done (…) I found myself having the ‘DP’s’ more and more to escape because I could never relax. In the end I started to feel strange in my surroundings and stuck inside myself” (Lucas).

6.2 Complex trauma and dissociation

Over three quarters of the former prisoners interviewed had experienced being placed away from their parents, either short or long-term, at some point during their childhood or adolescence. These experiences of looked after care were wide ranging including residential care homes, full-time foster care, weekend respite, and juvenile institutions. Paul's childhood, for instance, revolved around a series of unstable and disruptive care placements as he was moved away from his birth parents:

> "I was a weak and rather pathetic kid really who had to quickly get used to being moved as soon as I had tried to settle down somewhere (…) there was this one foster family who were serious about adopting me but by then I was damaged goods, I couldn't control myself (…) in the end like everybody else they gave up on me".

The unstable and unpredictable relationship dynamics of looked-after care often mimicked the same contradictory approach and retreat interactions that many had faced with their own parents (Mazerolle et al., 2020; Marder, 2013). As Liam put it, "the foster families meant well, but their own children came first, I always felt expendable". Faced with a similar emotional landscape to previous caregiving interactions, the young person's identity became further fractured resulting in them having to use their depersonalised coping ever more prominently. As Scott said: "I got psychologically fucked at home and then for good measure I was moved into care and fucked all over again". There was also a clear link between looked after care and entry into criminality as Paul explained:

> "The home I was in …it was like a school for thieves, you had no choice but get in with the wrong crowd (…) for me, I needed to have somebody to look up to, you know, have a father-figure like …but that didn't happen".

Thus, the care environment presented a set of risks, including poor parental or guardian leadership and strong anti-social peer influences, which instigated and reinforced offending behaviours. A fact that was not helped by a justice system that blatantly criminalised those in looked-after care. As Ben observed, “the police were expecting us to be trouble (…) they would drive round the streets directly looking for us”. A view reinforced by justice agencies that saw those in care as ‘damaged goods’ that were unlikely to desist from criminal behaviour. As Paul said:

> “If you go out without permission in a normal family they would ring round or get in the car and come find you, you would get battered once home and that was it (…) in care they ring the cops instead so you soon getting a reputation (…) then course, they are looking out for you everywhere you go …you get labelled and that’s it”.

Ben, thought that part of this problem arose from the sharp contrast between the oppression he had experienced at home and the freedoms he enjoyed whilst in care:

> “as soon as I was moved away from mum the troubles started (…) at home I was used to having all these rules in place about what I could and couldn’t do …but in care they let you do the fuck you want (…) times I would go out, cause a shit load of trouble because nobody was there to stop me …times the police picked me up, they knew who I was but didn’t do anything, they weren’t interested, just took me back to the home (…) back there I would be grounded, but they could never stop me climbing out through a window”.

For Ritchie, the uncertainty and confusion of being moved from placement to placement at short notice also did not help:

> “you’s [sic] know’s that you were in care, that’s [sic] you’d be moved round fostering and all that (…) It’s [sic] they didn’t tell you nothing that caused the hurt …you’s [sic] be getting along fine and then boom they tell’s [sic] you that you being moved on next day …they’s [sic] never bother to tell you what’s happening until it had already happened”.

Similarly for Ben, who found that most of the time nobody appeared bothered about sitting down to explain the rationale behind having to be moved:

> “Some [foster placements] didn’t work out and you were moved, that happened but …it felt like I was moved around so much without anyone saying why … I just came to the conclusion that nobody wanted me …not a good place to be in as an eight-year-old”.

This absence of stability and lack of involvement in care proceedings undermined further the child’s sense of helplessness and self-worth. Under such circumstances, it was only to be expected that the young person would eventually resist attempts to invest in meaningful relationships:

> “It becomes like a vicious circle (…) you get hurt so many times that you make this decision not to trust again and then you get put with a family where you could actually make a go of it but now you can’t …it completely screws you up” (Paul).

More generally, there were other factors that appeared to contribute to the cumulative risk of looked after children becoming inevitably involved with the criminal justice system. The boring and mundane nature of being in care was clearly an element: “think [a]bout it, you had no money and were stuck in this house with nothing but your clothes and four other kids” (Ben). As Paul explained:

> "I used to hang round the shopping centre asking for fags from passer-bye's …there was nothing else to do (…) you didn't have any of your own money, it was held by the home and they would only give you bits at a time (…) I knew these older guys who would nick cans of lager from the offy [off licence] so we would sit on this wall at the back of the job centre downing them all day".

There was also a resentment that came from the perception that many foster carers were just doing it for the money, "they didn't care, you could see it a mile off …they were just in it for the money and food vouchers" (Ben). As Ritchie pointed out:

> "There's this foster family, everybody's knowing them (…) big house paid by social services (…) only did emergency stuff, like's [sic] over-night or weekend and drove [sic] around in this fancy car (…) she didn't care a fuck, about the kids it was all [a]bout what she could squeeze from the council".

The looked-after experiences of these subject participants reveal a journey of neglect from parents into care. This neglect, however, did not stop there but continued through what has been called the education – prison pipeline, a set of institutional and social organisations that continue to poly-victimise already vulnerable young people.

Educational exclusion

The overwhelming response from the study participants was that having been through poor parenting it was only expected that they would then go on to have a poor education:

> “What was the point? The teachers didn’t want me there [be]cause they could see I were trouble (…) where I lived everybody knows which family you coming out of so the reputation was there even before I arrived (…) I couldn’t fucking sit still long enough to learn owt [sic] and played up to get attention. Eventually they put me in the ‘flid’ class” (Adam).

Adam’s experience seemed typical of those interviewed, where a combination of risk-adverse children with complex attachment issues were placed in schools that did not understand their complex needs. Driven by a curriculum agenda where ‘problem’ children had to be ‘streamed’ into highly controlled but marginalised groups. Aaron for instance, said that his school problems began, even before he had started the school year, “the social worker went in and told them that I was likely to be disruptive and would refuse to do things”. Pre-empting this behaviour, the school resorted to stereotypical responses such as isolating Aaron from those children deemed to be more able and placing him in a group of other ‘challenging’ children, where there was a higher level of control, but a reduced curriculum offer, “I were doing arts and crafts most days [be]cause that is how they thought they could keep us out of trouble”. Ben found that once the school had been made aware that he was coming from looked-after care, he was quickly moved from his original class into, “a special needs set”. Any attempt at persuading them otherwise was met with indifference. As Liam explained, “you end up living up to your reputation by behaving badly [be]cause that’s what’s expected of you”. Similarly for Lucas, “[e]ventually you play up to how they think you should be”. Ritchie for instance, was told by one teacher that they knew how disruptive he had been in care, and so if he behaved and remained quiet, they did not mind what he did at school. This initially had the effect of causing him to lash out in aggressive behaviours as he conformed to his label. Over time, however, he learned that any expressions of emotion were best avoided because the sharing of feeling states would be met with negativity, “there’s no point in showing’s [sic] how you felt, nobody ever cared”.

This policy of moving so-called ‘problem’ children into rigid hierarchical self-contained classes frequently meant that educational aspirations were withdrawn in favour of behaviour management and containment strategies, “other kids had the best teachers, we were stuck with sir who didn’t give a fuck [a]bout us as long as we were not swinging from the windows” (Kyle). The school curriculum was, therefore, effectively abandoned and given over to unstructured activities aimed at distraction or keeping ‘problem’ children out of trouble and away from the mainstream children. For Tristen, this translated in prolonged periods of being sat in front of the television:

> “They would have you doing painting and stuff during the morning but in the afternoon, it was telly watching (…) just keeping you busy and out of the way case you kicked off (…) nobody cared to ask me why I felt angry and frustrated”.

This feeling that nobody was listening increased the child’s affective dissonance and reinforced the belief that there was no legitimate avenue for venting emotions. Resorting to dissociative coping was also problematic because it was often interpreted by the teaching staff as the child withdrawing their consent and further evidence of their anti-social intentions. As Lucas explained:

> “I don’t blame the teachers really; they were not to know …all they see is this kid kicking off and then going silent all the time and not controlling his feelings (…) they have to protect the other children otherwise parents are moaning (…) there were some teachers who tried to understand but I don’t think I was saveable by that point”.

There were several examples of well-meaning but misdirected teachers. It was revealed in the staffroom, for instance, that Ben was being fostered, and so teachers were told to be mindful about how they should approach activities and discussions in the classroom. Nobody had bothered to find out that his foster parents were in fact going through adoption

procedures or that they had been looking after Ben for nearly three years, “so I was told by miss to put Tony and Angela on my Christmas card to them and then I could do another one for my real mum and dad …I had long since considered my foster parents as my real mum and dad”. Similarly, Paul was both embarrassed and upset when he found that they had put a coloured sticker next to his name on the register marking him out as being in care, “it made me feel like I had a disease or something”. He also explained how he felt non-human when he was referred to by his care status, “the social worker told my teacher that I was a section 20 …a number, not even a real person”. A fact that was further exacerbated by his social worker often turning up wearing his council ID badge and taking him out of class. Ritchie also highlighted a morbid fascination by the other children because of his looked-after status, “it’s [sic] felt like you were in a zoo times (…) kids staring at you’s [sic] [be]cause you’s [sic] was different …feeling sorry that’s [sic] your life so shit”.

For some, a hostile attribution bias developed as they interpreted the ambiguity around how they were being treated at school as a form of rejection, “it were (sic) clear that they didn’t want me there …you could see them sigh when I walked in” (Liam). From this, negative ruminations would ensue creating further anxiety and triggering re-traumatising memories of similar paradoxical behaviours in earlier childhood. This would manifest in yet another version of Freyd’s (2005) betrayal blindness as they blamed themselves for this situation:

> “Whenever things went wrong, I always blamed myself for being so pathetic, eventually I thought, well if I’m really that bad, and its true …what’s the point in trying to do well …I was only going to fail myself anyway” (Daniel).

Inevitably, through this self-blame, a self-fulfilling prophecy developed where the child’s behaviour came to be interpreted as anti-social behaviour by teachers, rather than a cry for help, which in turn reinforced the child’s belief that they were in fact ‘bad’ children. Eventually, a decision was made to either ‘live-up’ to their labelled behaviour or withdraw

completely. For Tristen, this manifested as constantly walking out of school and into town, whilst for Adam it meant severely damaging a classroom by setting alight a full waste-paper bin:

> "It got to a point where the teachers and the other kids were expecting me to do things …you know be bad …this would build up inside like and then I would start lashing out at anybody who got in my way (…) I would get frustrated like and end up slinging stuff across the room or burning things".

Kyle summed up many of the interviewees school experiences by suggesting that "it is not a place for broken children". A perception that was underpinned by an inability to emotionally invest in teachers due to a general wariness of the number of times they had been emotionally betrayed by those they had depended on in the past. As Paul put it, "there were some nice teachers, especially in my first school, but I had trust problems and would get angry really quickly (…) they quickly gave up on me". For Daniel, "school was like being at home [a]part from more adults telling me how shit I was at everything". This frustration around teachers appearing insensitive to the child's emotional needs would manifest in withdrawal or regressive behaviours as Adam pointed out, "I would just go quiet in myself (…) acting like a baby, being clingy and shouting for attention (…) I just didn't seem to be able to control how I was feeling". It was clear that a lack of secure attachment relations in the past had left many of them with dysregulated emotions that schools found difficult to reconcile within their educational curriculum planning. As Elijah explained:

> "I's [sic] kept being told that unless I's [sic] tried, I's [sic] wouldn't [a]mount too much and end up on benefits after school (…) I's [sic] wanted to try but I's [sic] was scared of failing that I's [sic] would make's excuses most of the time".

These oppositional behaviours were frequently a cry for help from the children who had become so fearful of making mistakes. A form of emotional paralysis. As Lucas put it, "in tests I would just doodle rather than answer the questions …the teacher would say why didn't you try you are good at maths …I knew the answers, but I didn't want to try in case it were (sic) wrong". A situation that was not helped by unsympathetic comments made by teachers who often assumed that the children were just not trying. Liam, for instance, overheard his form tutor saying, 'that child is unreachable, I give up'. Something that has stayed with him ever since, and which has made him on occasions withdraw completely, especially when confronted with a task to complete in adulthood. Many teachers did their best and there were some reported instances of sensitive and responsive teachers, among the interviews, but often this would not continue for very long. Daniel, for instance, found that one teacher:

> "Spent a lot of time with me when I first started at school (…) she said that she understood my anger and confusion and was there to help me (…) we had these one-to-ones every day and she was making a difference because I started to trust her …then she was suddenly sent to another form year because of staff shortages and was replaced by this arsehole who wouldn't give a fuck".

Similarly, Scott was given a great deal of emotional support as he moved through his first year in primary school, "all the children were mixed up, so you felt you were with normal kids". But this came to an abrupt halt when the school realised that his developmental and emotional needs far outweighed the support that they were able to provide, "so I was moved to another school and dumped in this small group of problem kids and that was that".

For Lucas, school became a bitter-sweet experience as he was moved from one school to another despite having teachers that he had developed a trusting relationship with:

> "I enjoyed school but because of problems in my family I was moved around quite a lot and so this became disruptive for me (…) when I was eight I had settled into primary school and had these two teachers who were looking after me (…) I became really close to one of them [be]cause she seemed to understand that I was anxious all the time and needed a lot of reassurance …when she left to go on maternity leave I was given this supply teacher who didn't really care and so I started misbehaving and it all fell apart from there".

It is difficult to blame teachers for this situation, as they are under enormous pressure to advance each child in their class, and so often find themselves in a bind because just one disruptive child can effectively derail an entire lesson. Some, however, either because of a lack of experience or as Ben put it, "because they didn't have the fight for it", appeared unable or unwilling to understand that most children would behave if they could, but were being prevented by their emotional demons borne out of early negative adversities. Most simply lacked the basic social skills necessary to navigate personal interactions with teachers and their peers appropriately or garner the emotional resilience to withstand an anxiety producing task. As Paul put it, "they [teachers] started off alright, trying to help and understand …but my issues were too big for them and so [e]ventually they start to give up". As a defence mechanism, teachers caught up in these complex maladaptive behaviours often begin to display the same contradictory behaviours of approach and avoidance reminiscent of the child's previous attachment relations. The result is that children resort to their default emotion-regulation strategy of suppression and detachment, "sat in the isolation room just staring at the workbook they had given me to do …I was away from them in my own reality bubble" (Liam).

Marginalised communities

A common experience of the study participants was of growing up in fractured and run-down communities dominated by unemployment, poverty, and social marginalisation. For Scott, this represented an environment of, “run down closed shops (…) all you got is charity shops and Poundland”. An overwhelming sense of poverty that was reflected in the “bars at the windows of the local pubs and the security guard standing in the doorway of Tesco’s metro”. Similarly, Adam’s experience growing up was of, “bed sheets propped up at windows for curtains” and “bare-chested men chugging cans of lager in the streets at nine in the morning”. An overwhelming feeling of a loss of pride in homes and community meant, “front gardens with bits of cars all over them” (Adam) and “bins that had been torched and left empty whilst litter was strewn across the roads” (Lucas). Against this backdrop, the former young prisoners’ spoke of being caught in a vicious cycle of boredom through social exclusion and unemployment, “there were fuck all to do [a]part wander the streets causing trouble” (Ben). Violent gangs marked out areas where it was safe and unsafe to go. It was impossible to keep hold of nice things because they would either be taken from you, or you would be stared out constantly for having them in the first place, “their’s [sic] thinking he got’s [sic] a car, next thing you’s [sic] surrounded by wannabees pushing for a piece” (Elijah). For Adam, the area where he lived represented disparate rows of streets where nobody knew anybody else, and nobody accept gangs were looking out for your back, “you looking (sic) round constantly for signs of trouble (…) the streets were bleak, and it always seemed dark … not sure why (…) but there were lots of drugs and theft going on”. For Lucas, the community mirrored the unpredictability and uncertainty of his home life, “there were drunks in the house, and I walked over drunks in the street”.

Overwhelmingly, the subject participants observed an absence of pride in where they lived, and in the people that lived there. A shared view that their communities had been left behind, and as a result had suffered a loss or erosion of tradition and identity. This erosion was

frequently explained by, “foreigners taking all the housing and jobs”. For Liam, it meant queuing alongside “all sorts” at the recruitment centre where they would be taken on first because they would accept lower wages and work overtime, “fucking 60 hours a week for a few hundred quid (…) I wasn’t going to lower myself to that”. Daniel felt that foreigners coming into the neighbourhood had created, “no go zones” despite admitting that the area had always been seen as a place where “druggies and benefit scroungers lived”. Blaming foreigners seemed an easy target but it also highlighted how disenfranchised and alien the young men found where they lived to be. Kelling and Wilson’s broken window theory (1982) suggested that individuals in these areas are more inclined to commit crime where visible signs of anti-social behaviour or social marginalisation clearly exists, and that as civil order decreases further, more serious crimes begin to emerge. For Paul, it felt that he was always on the margins of society, “there was little money around and everybody was judging you [be]cause that’s where you lived”. Structural inequalities meant that people were deprived of the same life chances as those living in better areas, and therefore became committed to crime as they strived for equal access to opportunities. As Liam argued, “we had no voice …nobody really cared …the council was happy to let our area go down the drain whilst they focused on the other areas”. A sentiment shared by Paul, “people wanted to work but there was nothing …unless you counted flipping burgers as a career”.

Subsequently, the local economy in these communities represented an elicit one comprising, “guys selling dodgy stuff in the pubs or out on the street” (Adam). For Liam, it felt like everybody engaged in crime, “everybody was on the hustle …everybody seemed to know somebody who had been in prison”. In this way, crime took on an almost normative dimension. Despite all the former prisoners’ expressing a strong commitment and aspiration to taking on legitimate work, they all experienced the same problems in transitioning from educational exclusion and into paid employment. As Kyle, argued, “I had no qualifications …they take one look at you and reckon you’d be too much like hard work”. Those who had accessed jobs often described them as being poor quality, temporary and exploitative, with

employment being intermittent and low-waged, “washing cars in all weathers with cold water and morons demanding you clean their wheel trims” (Lucas). There was a general lack of opportunity to prove their worth, and a catch-22 frustration of rejection letters citing youth and lack of experience as reasons why they had not been successful. For Liam, a lengthening record of intermittent unemployment meant that he became less attractive to employers as the months passed, “when all’s you done is shit manual work, it’s just going to follow you round”. Poor working conditions and often exploitative and punitive employers accompanied low-waged work and a succession of unsuccessful efforts to break into more secure or rewarding employment often led to a ‘cooling down’ of previous ambitions, despite those ambitions being very modest in the first place.

On the ‘street’, there was a general acceptance that they would experience both victimisation and marginalisation, and that the elicit economy was most likely to be their only means of gaining money and status. So, most of the subject participants used their work ethic to be good at crime and move up the criminal league tables as quickly as possible. As Tristen eloquently put it:

> “poor people have dreams as well, but they also have ten times as many obstacles to overcome (…) the people I grew up around were mainly decent and given the chance they would have given up on crime and gone straight …but the world doesn’t work that way does it …you keep digging for the pot of gold but without the tools …you are trapped and there is no escape other than turning to crime”.

Crime attracted the police, however, and as Aaron’s account of being constantly stopped and searched proved, it reinforced the view that the area where he lived had normalised criminal activity and was therefore seen as a hot spot to be ‘over-policed’ but ‘under-protected’:

> "It makes me laugh …they spout this shit about having a presence so that crime can be reduced, and residents protected then they disappear as soon as it gets dark (…) they are all over you during the day, but suddenly don't have the manpower to drive around the areas where most of what's going down is happening".

As Paul put it, "any wonder there is a them and us attitude?". The general view of those interviewed was that the police were only there to serve the members of the public that they identified as respectable members of society, and that anyone from these more marginalised areas must have chosen to be there because that is where the crime was. As Liam put it:

> "it gets you thinking that those with the badge are there to protect everybody else from us …that we are the problem, the rough sort, that we chose to live in these areas and get involved with gangs (…) the truth is that it were the other way round, I didn't want to live in that shit-hole but where else could I be?".

As a result, there was a perception that rank-and-file police officers primarily focused their efforts on defending the hard working, respectable citizens from the 'rough' urban poor, where most of the former prisoners had lived. Ben, for instance, had many experiences of being moved on, "because I'm supposedly in the wrong area (…) following me around until I go back to where I've come from".

All of this underpinned the difficulties many of the young men faced when it came to building trusting relationships with those in authority. A prevailing perception of young adults lacking in opportunities coupled with low educational achievement and coming from a background where the habitus is to either enter the labour force during schooling or receive social welfare benefits once they have left with little to no qualifications. It highlighted the grim reality of being a teenager, and a young man living on a 'sink estate', where the lure of gang

membership and risk-taking behaviours of drug misuse, alcohol consumption, petty crimes and joyriding were an ever-present incentive. As Liam explains:

> "I would wake up and look for jobs in the local paper (…) most days I would sit around bored out me head thinking about how I can get out of the hole that I'm in …no excitement, no money, no future …I ended up slanging[63] in a gang to help pay my mums rent and put money in the meters (…) everything in our house was on the knock[64], the telly, the cooker everything, so somebody had to put some notes on the table (…) at night I would get buzzed[65] and try and forget".

As socio-economically disadvantaged young people try to survive in an increasingly neoliberal society which promotes middle class values, it is almost predictable that there is a strong positive relationship between crime and poverty. As Aaron pointed out:

> "There is pressure everywhere telling you what kind of man you need to be …what you gotta have to prove that you are making it (…) the nice phone, play station, nice flat in a good area …money to take the girlfriend out and spoil her, buy her stuff …the pressure is immense and just adds to your existing insecurities".

These traditional representations of masculinity, emphasise a tough, assertive, and independent male that could only be gained through 'being street'. Consequently, those young people who subscribe to the values of street culture place a strong emphasis on gang membership and not 'grassing' on one another. With most engaged in a mundane street reality, their sense of masculinity and solidarity manifest in confrontational interactions with

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[63] Selling drugs

[64] Credit finance

[65] Take drugs or consume alcohol.

the police, community, and other gangs. As Liam ironically explained, “crime becomes the machine that oils the wheels, that makes things work …without it you would have a full-scale riot on your hands …its crime [that] largely keeps the peace”.

Gang membership

What the previous sections have demonstrated is that the former young prisoners, from birth, are confronted with relational uncertainty, confusion and paradoxical life choices that follow them through schooling and into the wider community. Underpinning this situation, is an emotional and physical alienation to those relationships, which bring about an affective dissonance as to who they represent and what they want to be. It was only to be expected that almost as a right-of-passage most would end up involved in gangs. As Liam said: “everybody I knew growing up was a member of one gang or another (…) it were (sic) the fastest way of gaining street cred and knowing that your back would be watched”. For many of the study participants, gang membership was not coincidental, but due to an existing strong gang presence in the area, “you get to be aware of the various gangs from an early age and though you are shy of them when you was (sic) young, they continue to pull you in” (Liam). In some instances, the transition into gang membership is made easier due to siblings already being members, or in Kyle’s case an uncle who was a gang leader: “I got immediate respect [be]cause I was family like”. For Adam, belonging to a gang was initially seen as a means of protection and a way of raising his status, “they looked after my back and gave me some of my respect back, like I was a somebody”. Similarly, for Scott, it gave him a level of freedom and sense of belonging that had been previously denied:

> “Before I started hanging around with the other guys, I had no cred [sic] whatsoever, I was just dissed [sic] and ordered around by everybody …not after though, I made my choices, and it became my life and home”.

Helping to further this sense of belonging were older gang members who often acted like 'father-figures' by creating a stable and coherent familial structure and hierarchy that the young man had been craving after for most of their lives:

> "You knew where you were in the pecking order …you had to take a lot of shit in the beginning and win some respect, and it could get ugly, but it wasn't long before you moved up the ranks and could put some out there yourself" (Liam).

For Kyle, the gang structure appealed because, "you have structure and rules that don't piss you around …they are same for everybody, no favours". There is shared narrative of fractured identity; of young men who have a shared experiences of early family dysfunction and subsequent marginalisation at school and within the wider community. As Paul explained:

> "don't matter how fucked up you feel, the guys are there for you (…) they understand [be]cause they have been there too (…) you can actually tell a guy that you hurting, and he will say 'come bruv 'let's do some weed and feel better'.

The gang, therefore, understood how the young man was feeling without him having to say anything. Feelings and emotions still had to be internalised within the masculine culture but could be vented to an extent through a shared or common goal of being part of a gang family. This structure and status created an in-group sub-culture where, "there was pride in knowing that people knew which crib [gang] you belonged to" (Ben) and where, "it got your dignity back (…) you not invisible anymore" (Liam). The loyalty that the gang demanded satiated the young man's insecurities and helped to eliminate negative ruminations about purpose and identity. This acceptance far outweighed the criminal aspects of gang life:

"I recognised myself for the first time …the loyalty and position you get is something that I had never experienced before and gave me the confidence to be who I wanted to be (…) the crime and rewards of crime were always secondary for me (…) the gang made me aware that there were a us" (Ben).

This sentiment was shared by other study participants and supported the fact that belonging was the primary driver in becoming a member. For Elijah, this was proved succinctly when he became involved in criminal activity that carried enormous risk yet no financial gain.

"It's [sic] were a test of loyalty see …so we's [sic] on top of this bus shelter right …bloody freezing and the rain lashing down (…) so's [sic] the trick is to wait for a bus to pull up and get on the roof to surf (…) looking back it was a fuckin suicide waiting to happen but I's [sic] managed to get to the end of the road before I was spotted …the fuckin respect I got from that man".

Known as 'knifing', the new gang member is taken through a series of 'tests' to prove that they are serious about joining, and in the process become more and more attuned to the sub-cultural norms and values of gang life whilst slowly being peeled away from mainstream society. For Liam, this meant learning a whole new way of life:

"Most of what we did was [a]round drugs …the crack market was cheap and plentiful round where we was (sic) so you could make tons of money for little work. We was (sic) first mules, you know, moving and delivering the stuff for the dealers …once you prove you had the minerals[66] you were allowed to get into the market yourself, have

[66] Bravery

> a patch to work from and then [de]pending on how far you wanted to push it you could start to take over a patch".

The appeal of this regimented hierarchical system was that there was no room for confusion, contradiction, or uncertainty. By having older members from different gang's function as judge and jury there was a consistent operations system of organisation that many of the young men had never really experienced before. As Adam pointed out, "Sid took me on and taught me how things were (…) it don't change he says [be]cause everybody gets hits that way". For Lucas, this way of doing things, gave him a semblance of his identity back, "you somebody [be]cause you have a place (…) everybody has a role, no matter how low you are". It also meant that there were opportunities of getting on, "I fought other gang members for their position (…) had this tattoo [shows forearm with a skull and gang name to camera] (…) I would die to protect the gang" (Ben).

Strikingly, none of the study participants felt that they had been forced into gang membership. As Lucas put it, "there is all this talk about being forced into gangs and crime, but the reality is that guys like me were attracted because they could be a family that nobody else was willing to". This 'pull' rather than 'push' factor of gang membership is supported by Harris et al. (2011) who emphasised that the motivation for membership often revolved around the perceived benefits of safety, protection, support, and a sense of belonging rather than feeling that they had no choice but to get involved. For Kyle "the gang seemed the natural place to head for (…) they didn't recruit me, far from it …I had to do a whole load of shit to be accepted". Similarly for Liam, "you got to do some crazy shit to be accepted properly …otherwise you will always be seen as 'fringing'. These initiation rituals were an important rite of passage for joining the gang, but rather than putting the young men off it had the opposite effect of galvanising their commitment.

Although not the primary reason for wanting to join a gang, the subject participants agreed, that criminal activity did provide financial benefits as well as a material street status that evaded those who were legitimately trying to get by:

> "You gotta be a mug for it, you know what I mean, working 50 hours in a fucking freezing cold warehouse to get together a couple of hundred pounds, when you can 'nick' a pair of high-end trainers in a couple of minutes and sell them for the same amount" (Scott).

Financial rewards could be high, but for many of the young men, the true reason for the criminal activity revolved around proving loyalty and moving up the ranks. As Ben explained:

> "The stuff we did, you know, the crime and all that, most times it was a test, you know, making sure you belonged and were willing to look after each other (…) the money was good, but I don't think it were the main reason".

The other way of enhancing status was inflicting violence and intimidation towards those who were perceived as being weak in the gang or affiliated with other gangs. Despite violence being extreme at times, the subject participants reported that they had already become desensitised to it through ongoing exposure in their homes, as well as their disadvantaged neighbourhoods, plagued by poverty, drugs, and violence. As Elijah explained:

> "It becomes normal like's [sic] to hear or see's [sic] people being chased [a]cross the road having been bladed[67] (…) you's [sic] waiting for a bus whilst some brother is

[67] Stabbed

pushing dope round the queue (…) watching somebody being beaten badly …it's no big deal".

Similarly, with Kyle:

> "There was a code see …you looked after your own regardless of the risk to your own life …that's why we were all carrying blades, it was an insurance policy like".

As Scott commented, "as long as people knew who you belonged [gang] then they would give you a wide berth (…) you still got to look out for those wanting to skank you [be]cause you are not from their gang". The fact that gang affiliated violence was considered an occupational hazard highlights the importance of understanding the strength of the person's identification with that group, and the impact that it can have on their behaviour. As Kyle said:

> "Looking back, it is difficult to think that once I would have killed somebody …it's bloody scary really, but that's how close you get to the other guys, you would literally do anything for them [be]cause you know they would do the same for you".

This exposure to violence, stress and adversity, had a significant effect with most noting a hypervigilance and need to 'watch their backs'. Once a part of the gang, the label was carried around with them so that there was always the risk of being attacked personally or having girlfriends or family members targeted by virtue of their affiliation. This fear and hypervigilance made it difficult for the young men to make friends outside of the gang and contributed to their isolation and greater dependency on the gang for safety, "it gets to a point where all's you got for family is the gang" (Scott).

Most of those involved in gangs admitted to selling and consuming drugs. Not only was it a currency that earned favours and acted as a bargaining chip, “you get double your money for a decent wrap” (Ben), but knowledge from the group quickly spread about how to mix drugs to create, “off the wall hits” (Elijah). As Kyle noted, “the drugs were like cementing you as blood, like passing round the bong …it was an important part of being together and looking after each other”. The other way of forging identity was through graffiti or ‘tagging’ of the areas where the gangs believed that they had right to own:

> “You tagged your territory, made people know where they can and can’t go (…) the pigs called them no go areas, but this was our patch where our rules were the only ones that mattered” (Lucas).

As Ritchie suggested, “it were (sic) a way of showing our identity, that we existed and wouldn’t be put down”. This sense of identity and ownership was especially prevalent in communities that were perceived as having been invaded by outsiders, “we was (sic) clinging on, a small part of Liverpool that hadn’t been taken over by fuckin suits” (Paul). Similarly, Kyle spoke passionately about how his local community had become alienated by an influx of East Europeans, “it was a fuckin [sic] dumping ground (…) they were put in this hotel right in the centre of town …they just sat around all day on the steps bringing the place down”.

Discussion

This chapter discusses the overall reflections of my study. It will then go on to make recommendations before discussing the studies strengths and limitations. Finally, it will offer some overall conclusions including directions for future research.

The contribution of the present study to existing literature

A recent thematic report carried out by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons (HMI Prisons, 2021: 5) concluded that, "outcomes are poor for young adults when compared with those for older prisoners (those aged over 25)". The report cited a range of contributing factors for this, including negative relationships with prison staff, uninspiring behaviour management schemes, poor mental healthcare, and a lack of purposeful activity in work and educational training opportunities. The report also outlined a similarity between adverse factors experienced by young adults in prison and those present in young adults' lives when they committed their offences. My study has contributed to this debate by illustrating through the lived narratives of young prisoners', how the influence of imported vulnerabilities and the emotionality of the carceral environment may explain, in part, the reasons for these poor outcomes. It has explored how depersonalisation, which can be traced back to maladaptive childhood coping, becomes such a significant coping response once again in prison. Using Sykes (1958) original pains of imprisonment, but disaggregated to young adult males, the following factors have been identified which may provide a backdrop as to why in HMI prisoner surveys: "less than half of young adults (46%) report that their current prison experience had made them less likely to offend in the future" (HMI Prisons, 2021: 5).

Housing young adults in adult prisons

Over a decade ago, the Chief Inspector of prisons (HMI Prisons, 2006: 9) reported that, "what will not work is simply to decant young adults into the mainstream adult prison population". A recommendation that has since been ignored. Having graduated through the youth justice system, where support is both trauma-informed and client-centred, the young male offender will suddenly find himself at the age of eighteen in an adult environment, where such support services are conspicuous by their absence. The approach in juvenile detention centres, which involve understanding the underlying reasons for offending behaviour, including the impact of psychosocial immaturity, adverse childhood experiences, and the traumatisation of gang membership are gone, replaced instead with an ideology of rational choice. Suddenly prisoners are expected to accept responsibility for their crimes, through pro-active self-governance and participation in CBT based offender behaviour programmes. An ethos that requires the young prisoner to cognitively navigate entry-shock, embrace prisonisation, and prepare for resettlement seamlessly. Underpinning this ideology of rational choice, is a widely accepted view, that prison adjustment represents a uniform and homogenous process. That, once the inmate has become accustomed to the prisoner society, they will quickly move away from maladaptive coping behaviours, and develop an approach-coping regime of doing their time quietly, seeking social support when needed, and finding positive meaning to their prison lives. As my study has revealed, this situation is far removed from the reality that the young prisoners experience. The insistence on young men taking individual responsibility for their crimes and actions require a level of emotional maturity and self-awareness that is beyond them. CBT intervention requires a commitment to change, and a strong hold on reality. An acceptance that faulty or irrational thinking causes offending behaviour rather than their own adverse histories. An expected cognitive transformation, all achieved within an environment that expects prisoners to overcome extreme boredom, ever-changing rules, the fear of victimisation and the loss of intimate

contact with families and loved ones. It is little wonder that when examined in this context the young man' fails repeatedly.

How do young men cope with prisons?

The first question in my study was around how young males cope with incarceration. It has concluded that the young prisoner is more likely to continue to employ coping behaviours that have proved successful in their past, regardless of how adaptive or otherwise they prove to be in the carceral setting. Rather than the young man's depersonalisation decreasing over time, it was found that severity, frequency, and duration actually increases, as the young man rails against an environment that refuses to adopt a disaggregated approach to imprisonment. An adult environment where young men cannot function or adjust effectively, resulting in them becoming ever more withdrawn and isolated. It is this environment which lays the foundation for continued dissociative behaviours which does so little to prepare for life outside of the prison walls.

Considering the emotional impact of carceral strains on young adult males

The second question in my study explored the emotionality around carceral strains and their subsequent impact on depersonalised coping behaviours. Although not exclusive, themes did emerge around specific strains among the young prisoners. The first was the loss of intimate contact with those outside of the prison walls. Clear evidence has been shown that maintaining contact with family and loved ones whilst in custody is vital in helping the inmate to adjust more quickly to prison life. The present study, however, found that a range of institutional and operational barriers, often revolving around reduced staffing levels and privilege status, prevented the young prisoner from gaining the quality of contact that they so desperately needed. Prison visits were frequently cancelled, at short notice, without explanation and inmates moved to other prisons with little warning. Because of the cost of

phone calls, making a call was seen as a luxury rather than a necessity, and afforded little privacy because of the open areas where the phones were situated and the fact that prison staff continuously monitored calls. Even the simple task of writing and receiving letters became caught up in an administrative nightmare as original copies of letters had first to be photocopied and so often sat in the prison post-room for several weeks before being distributed. The most frustrating aspect of maintaining social contact was in how the visiting system was organised and administered. Alongside problems in booking visits, the subject participants were extremely negative about how the visiting area was set out. Rather than being a 'softer' emotional zone where inmates should be able to relax and share their feelings with loved ones, the visiting hall was too often subject to insensitive and unfeeling intrusion. Apart from a brief hug and kiss at the beginning and end of a visit, there was a policy of keeping inmate and visitor physically apart. This was achieved through ensuring chairs were placed opposite to each other rather than alongside and the use of tables in between. There was little opportunity to rearrange chairs and almost no opportunity to be able to move around the visiting space independently. Prison officers often stood or sat within hearing shot of conversations, and there was an underlying mistrust of any physical contact in case items were being illicitly passed on. Because of this, visitors were reluctant to engage in personal or intimate conversations, thus rendering most visits as simply an opportunity for a 'chit-chat' or an opportunity to eat 'goodies' that had been brought in. Despite a focus on security, many of these institutional barriers appeared to be both petty and far removed from their original purpose. They were also seen as ultimately counter-productive because they created considerable obstacles for the prisoners to engage in a level of cathartic intimacy in which to off-load their frustrations, fears, and anxiety. In the absence of this emotional intimacy, the inmate had little choice but to suppress and avoid their feelings through 'bottling-up' and detachment behaviours. A process that often led to further harmful and self-destructive behaviours including violence, substance misuse and self-harming.

A second carceral strain that disproportionately impacted young adult males, was prison boredom. Overcrowding, chronic under-staffing and reduced funding was used by prison staff to justify why inmates were no longer routinely kept busy through structured work and training programmes. Instead, a widespread policy of housing inmates in their cells for up to 22 hours a day was a common occurrence. For those jobs that did exist, purposeless, highly routinised procedures had replaced any attempt at skills development or preparation for re-joining the employment market on release. Exacerbating this was a morbid reluctance to introduce modern technology into the prison estate, despite appropriate security measures being available. The affective consequence of this gross under-stimulation was a paralysis of agency and an over-reliance on mindless activities such as television watching and extended sleeping routines. All happening in an unvarying cell where all of life's activities including eating, sleeping, and defecating must be carried out in a room no bigger than an average bathroom. It was interesting to note that many of the participants had initially wanted their own cells when they first entered the prison, only then to change their mind once they realised how much time they would be spending alone. The drabness of the cells was replicated among the surrounding landings which were described as being 'grim' and 'dehumanising'. Surrounded by the same objects, light, smells, and walls without deviation, the young prisoner came to develop a form of 'emotional' Stockholm Syndrome where they structured their lives around isolation. Opportunities to leave their cells became more difficult, as they experienced emotional atrophy, and became fearful of social contact as they once did social isolation. Extended periods of dissociation were employed in these instances, creating negative ruminations around whether the inmate was going to be able to leave prison with a grip still on reality. As their prison sentence progressed, the effect became more insidious. In these instances, dissociation took on a further dimension, resembling post-traumatic symptoms, such as extreme apathy and depression, which meant that the prisoner lacked the motivation to do anything other than embrace learned helplessness. Any attempt at adjustment to prison life, under these circumstances became futile.

The third carceral strain described by the young prisoners was the fear of violence and victimisation. As one of the interviewees said to me, “at least when you are locked up for so long you are safe from the nutters on the landings – wrong!” (Liam). What the subject participants actually found was little in the way of physical violence during their prison sentence, but instead a ‘power’ war of psychological victimisation acted out between competing groups. Most of this comprised ‘hidden’ intimidation tactics such as ‘window warriors’ shouting abuse across the landings, banging pipes, or placing threatening notes under cell doors. Sometimes this verbal abuse was not even aimed at anybody in particular, but came from mentally vulnerable prisoners’, wound up by their pay masters, who insisted on screaming, shouting, crying, or banging pipes continuously throughout the evenings. To overcome this, many prisoners would turn their televisions or stereos up to drown out the noise, but in so doing would create even more noise pollution that prevented prisoners’ from concentrating or sleeping. Outside of the cell, most victimisation revolved around exploitation and extortion. A situation that flourished because of a semi-legitimate underground economy which used a borrowing and trading system based around the repayment of high interest rates. An underground economy that was so engrained in the prison counterculture that neither prisoners’ nor prison staff saw any harm in what was going on. The reasons why inmates became indebted varied but included having just come into prison and not being aware of the high repayment charges, or not having the financial support of family and friends. There were also many instances of delays to the opening of prison accounts which meant having to rely on prison issue to get by. The main reason for victimisation was the widespread addiction to drugs within prison. Drugs would often be provided with little means to pay for them, bringing about waves of intimidation, which then often spilled over into physical violence. As a result, prisoners would refuse to leave their cells and became further withdrawn and isolated.

The carceral strains and resulting dissociative coping behaviours found in my study are not inherent aspects of incarceration. They are instead indicative of a system that is ‘broken’. As

Tristen (one of the young prisoners) proved, there is an alternative, but it takes vision and clarity from the governor and prison staff to want to have influence. The debilitating effects of the young prisoners' depersonalisation, for instance, were frequently exacerbated not by vindictiveness but a lack of staff awareness and professional support. A situation that is reflected generally. As a House of Commons Justice Report[68] outlined, "while there have been improvements in prison mental healthcare, provision is still not adequate. The high unmet need for treatment for mental illness in prisons is surprising and disappointing" (HoC: 8).

Prison staff, overall, were unprepared for dealing with the dissociating prisoner. Most were not even aware that such a condition existed, including, surprisingly the prison mental health team. Subsequently, dissociative behaviours that included emotional abstinence, spacing out, catatonic posture and glazed eyes, were always interpreted as the inmate being intoxicated on alcohol or drugs. No screening tools were available in prison to identify traits that might predispose the young man to dissociate, despite such tools being available, and no training was provided or available for staff. During the interviews, it was admitted by one of the health care workers that many other mental illnesses are similarly likely to, "go under the radar" (Carol) because existing psychological assessment protocols do not adequately capture the complexity of the young man's vulnerability. Screening, instead, appears to be preoccupied with attempting to identify substance addiction and the likelihood of suicidal tendencies. GP records of past trauma or mental health rarely follow the young adult into prison. So, health care staff are reliant on diagnosing depression, bipolar disorder, and schizophrenia through their own limited screening service and without access to autobiographical histories. There is an over-reliance on self-referral, which has been branded as not fit for purpose, because over-worked healthcare staff rarely follow them up

[68] House of Commons Justice Committee: mental health in prisons (2021): https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/7455/documents/78054/default/

unless an immediate risk to life is detected. Most prisoners are unwilling to draw attention to their vulnerabilities anyway.

In terms of treatment intervention, cognitive behavioural therapies dominate. Such interventions ignore the complex trauma histories underlying offending histories. Young adults, instead, are often coerced onto inappropriate courses that appear unsuitable for young men fighting to make sense of what has happened in their lives. Attempts by prisoners to discuss how they are feeling or to request support are ignored or interpreted as a ploy to be placed on the healthcare wing away from other prisoners. There was also a real fear among the young prisoners' of admitting to their dissociation as they believed that such actions would result in further victimisation.

The relationship between imported vulnerabilities and the employment of dissociation as a coping mechanism.

The third question in my study addressed the relationship between imported vulnerabilities and the employment of dissociation as a coping mechanism. There are undoubtedly many adults with complex trauma histories and resulting dissociation who have not gone on to commit crime or been imprisoned. However, the subject participants in the present study, did feel that that there was a clear relationship between early relational disturbances, intervening complex adversities, and dissociative coping responses. Descriptions, given by the young prisoners, of their early caregiving behaviours, matched Lyons-Ruth et al. (2006: 42) description of disorganised attachment. Characterised by parental approach and retreat behaviours "who are often not consciously aware of the harm that they are inflicting on the child". In the absence of an ability to fight or flight from these contradictory behaviours, the child faces the dilemma of both protecting themselves from the caregiver whilst maintaining a relationship with them.

The central effect of this disorganisation, on the child, is one of confusion around their own developing identity and a negative effect on self-esteem, social skills, and capacity for intimacy. By dissociating, the child comes to make some sense of the contradictions inherent in their caregivers' behaviours by suppressing emotional responses, and to ensure further survival, develop an idealised attachment to their caregiver. At a cognitive level at least, these children, and later adults, will tend to feel guilty and blame themselves rather than their caregiver for what has happened to them. By taking the blame, being 'bad' and keeping the caregiver as an idealised figure in their mind, they retain a sense of control by simply forgetting or denying the neglect. Freyd (2005) referred to this as betrayal blindness, an adaptive and defensive strategy that enables the child to function within a relationship, but which also leads to the development of a fragmented sense of self. As a result, the child may end up with multiple, incompatible views of the caregiver seeing them as both a source of protection and danger at the same time, and consequently develop incompatible views of themselves as well. This sort of fragmentation lays the groundwork for dissociative experiences that become in adulthood the default setting for any situation where the individual feels unable to deal with stress or distress, however minor.

My study finds support for those who believe that dissociation only persists if there is intervening complex adversity growing up, lending credence to the specific trauma typology argument. Subject participants, for instance, cited the neighbourhood in which they grew up in as having an important impact on their capacity to develop and thrive. All but one of the interviewees defined their neighbourhood as disadvantaged due to social poverty, gang domination, and the high levels of crime where drug availability was widespread. Having delinquent peers and being exposed to community violence was also widely described, as was the impact on mental health through a fear of neighbourhood violence and wider criminal behaviours. The young men living in these neighbourhoods experienced feelings of hopelessness which became one of the main draws towards gang membership. Two thirds

of the participants in the study were gang-involved and almost half believed that they were drawn to gangs in part because of the absence of a strong father figure in the home as well as the depriving wider community. Because of their troubled childhood histories, gang membership, provided a sense of belonging that became central to their social identity. They also felt that fear and anxiety over future victimisation, had the effect of drawing them to the gangs, due to a perceived need for protection, but ironically also preventing them from leaving.

This implies that the genesis for pathological dissociation may lie in early attachment disruption, especially, disorganised attachment relations, but is reinforced through ongoing traumatic experiences (complex trauma) throughout childhood and into adolescence. This focus on the parent-child dialogue, may help to address current gaps in the dissociation literature. Especially, among young adult offenders in custody and the community, where there is currently an emphasis on traumatic experience rather than the ongoing dyadic parent-child process in adult dissociative disorders.

Young adult offenders with complex trauma histories, evidence both behavioural and emotional expressions of pathology, due to an impaired capacity to self-regulate and self-sooth. These expressions manifest as depersonalisation, and other maladaptive coping responses including substance abuse and self-harming. The young male is emotionally labile, with extreme rapidly escalating negative reactions to minor stressors. The adoption of the depersonalised coping response, therefore, helps to cope with frightening and contradictory behaviours; a response that they then take into prison with them. The prison setting where the environment mimics in many ways the high criticism, low emotional warmth that they continually dissociated against in their early years, becomes the backdrop to their new reality. The disorganised attachment relations that the young adult offender once experienced is repeated in prison in patterns of emotional insensitivity, devaluation, rejection, humiliation, and non-responsivity of the young adults’ emotional needs. This cycle

of emotional neglect conveys to the young man that they are worthless, unloved, or unwanted, which in turn reinforces damaging messages about their developed sense of self. Depersonalisation numbs these feelings of helplessness, abandonment, betrayal, failure, and helps to temper their increased susceptibility to stress. The deficits caused by depersonalised coping, create maladaptive interpersonal schemas that interfere with social functioning. The pains of imprisonment, are therefore, likely to cause the young prisoner to adopt the same coping mechanisms that had proven so successful in the past, with the consequence that they are unable to fully adapt to prison life and become a successful member of the prisoner society.

Recommendations

Through the 'voices' of the participants' in this study, several recommendations regarding the imprisonment of young adult males can be forwarded. Central to these is an understanding that young men are emotionally immature, lacking resilience, and very always import into prison with them a range of mental health vulnerabilities. Because of this, they will often lack the range of coping skills necessary to negotiate prison entry-shock and assimilate into the carceral environment successfully. Instead, they are likely to become disproportionately affected by the emotionality of contemporary prison pains and come to rely on learned coping responses such as depersonalisation as a result. Given these deficits, there is a compelling argument that young adults should not be sentenced to imprisonment in the first place, or if they are, should not find themselves in adult prisons. However, in the absence of either of these views currently being taken seriously by the criminal justice system, it is essential that there is a renewed debate around what purpose imprisonment serves for young adult men and how the present system can deliver.

First, there needs to be a recognition that young adulthood represents a specific developmental period that brings with it additional challenges to imprisonment. Simply decanting young adults into an adult setting without specific measures being put in place will not work. This age group is particularly susceptible to employing dissociation because they have often imported this learned coping response into prison with them. As this study has recognised, dissociative episodes often become more maladaptive in the full glare of carceral strains and may quickly generalise to other problems, including misconduct and 'harming' behaviours, or other forms of psychosis including PTSD and depression. It is therefore important to have a simple screening test, such as the widely used DES questionnaire, available for those prisoners' who may be vulnerable. This test has proven to be easy to administer and both dependable and valid. It could be set, for instance, by the key worker assigned to the young man on admission. Of equal importance is that all staff working within the prison system are provided with greater awareness, knowledge and training, regarding dissociation, including its characteristics and link to deepening mental health vulnerabilities.

Secondly, screening for dissociation needs to be followed up with effective interventions that are both trauma-informed and developmentally specific. This includes targeted strategies that support a move away from avoidance behaviours, towards more approach coping. The current reliance on cognitive behavioural intervention, in adult prisons, is inappropriate for this age group, and often results in frustration and disillusionment that their 'voices' are not being heard. An extension of the 'assetplus' programme, widely used for detained children under the age of 18 years, would be a positive step forward.

Thirdly, there needs to be a greater recognition that there are carceral strains that disproportionately harm young adults in prison, and which as a result are more likely to bring about maladaptive coping. Boredom, for instance, is experienced by all prisoners', but is exacerbated for young adults because of their pre-prison reliance on new technology. It is

also the case that institutional barriers to maintaining intimate contact with family and loved ones deny the young man a cathartic medium that older prisoners rely less on. Victimisation impacts young adults more keenly because they have a craving for status items but often lack the means to pay for them. Therefore, a combination of emotional immaturity and a risk-minded attitude is likely to find the young man in debt to other prisoners' and facing ever-increasing interest rates. Thus, there is a need to understand that young adults, when confronted with the emotionality of prison life, will experience perpetuating feelings of abandonment, loss of identity and low self-esteem, unless considered a special case. Having greater access to technology, designated private spaces away from the visiting hall where emotional intimacy can be freely expressed, and resolute prison wings housing vulnerable young men away from the victimising mainstream population, would go some way in helping them to adjust more freely.

Finally, individual responsibility as a governance model is not an effective incentive for this age group. It often results in the young inmate 'dropping out' because they cannot understand how to keep within the myriad of 'grey' rules that they are constantly forced to negotiate. A move towards an empowering system of governance, where mutually agreed actions for sentence planning and completion should be implemented instead. This must start with an admission that some offender programmes are unsuitable, and that agreement must be sought from the young prisoner, before any programmes are added to their sentence plan. The IEP system should be exempt for young adults, and instead full privileges be provided on entry including an active prison 'wallet'. Privileges should only then be removed if the inmate consistently fails their sentence plan or for more serious infractions. There must also be a greater emphasis on a 'keyworker' system that nurtures and supports the young adult from entry shock to release. Although this already exists in some prisons, its take-up is still patchy and varies in quality. A prisoner mentoring scheme would be a useful starting point, where trusted older inmates are willing to socially support

young men. This has proven to be effective in those prisons who have trialled it and should become a mainstream policy attached to each sentence plan.

Strengths of the present study

My study has several strengths. Firstly, it addresses an important gap in the extant literature around what may be a common and certainly debilitating coping vulnerability. It explores in some depth the impact that prison conditions and routines have on the onset, frequency, and severity of depersonalised coping, and provides evidence of how it impedes adjustment to prison life beyond initial ‘entry’ shock. Taking a qualitative ‘lived’ approach has proven beneficial because it has been able to set out, for the first time, a joined-up narrative demonstrating how depersonalisation, first used as a coping response in early childhood, becomes more ingrained as the child moves into adolescence. The resulting barriers to adjustment that it creates should help inform professionals working within the criminal justice system to understand why young adult males are disproportionately represented in terms of re-offending rates and in-prison conduct violations.

Secondly, the present study highlights the influence between imported adverse histories, carceral strains and the adoption of depersonalisation as a coping response. It suggests that a developmentally informed framework of intervention for young male adults caught within the criminal justice system should be implemented, and that the adverse effects of maladaptive coping behaviours be a key area for policy intervention. More specifically, dissociative coping should be more widely recognised as a mental health vulnerability, and further research should be carried out into the effects of emotional numbing and detachment behaviours in prison adjustment.

A final strength of my study is that the methodology was able to triangulate the former prisoners' life narratives with other sources of evidence including drawings, storyboards, as well as wider interviews with prison staff and a range of professionals working within the criminal justice system. This not only provided a more holistic interpretation of the young adult males depersonalisation experiences, but also provided alternative ways for the interviewee to express themselves. This proved particularly valuable in the early part of the interviews when the participants' found difficulty in talking about their experiences.

Limitations of the present study

The main limitation of my study was that due to access problems, young men could not be interviewed during their prison sentence. The initial intention was to carry out several observations alongside the interviews, which would have provided first-hand experiences of the dissociative experience and a more rounded understanding of the prison culture. A process that I believe would have provided additional credence to the researcher's interpretation of the phenomena. Unfortunately, the Covid pandemic meant that this was not possible, so a reliance on retrospective accounts was only ever possible. There are several problems with this approach, especially in the context of emotionality. This includes respondents giving less accurate answers when asked about their past than when asked about the present, and retrospective questions placing a high cognitive demand on their memory for events. An additional problem is that participants' have more difficulty in remembering details, especially if the topic in question elicits emotional responses as this study did. Finally, participants are more likely, albeit unwittingly, to report past attitudes and feelings that tend to be more consistent with their current situation, societal norms, and values. However, the intention of the study was only ever to undertake an in-depth qualitative piece of research that, for the first time, took a lived approach to dissociation in prison.

A second limitation was that ten of the twelve ex-prisoners were recruited from a self-help online dissociation forum. This is problematic because it infers that a selection bias may have occurred. The ideal study population (ex-prisoners) was clearly defined in my study but due to the Covid pandemic, could not be recruited from mainstream sources, such as the probation service or through wider organisations working with young adult offenders. A pragmatic approach to recruitment of participants, therefore, had to be made. To help deal with any potential bias, the focus of data collection was widened to include recruitment of ex-prisoners that were not directly connected to online mental well-being or health sites (Unlock). A wide range of professionals, unconnected with mental well-being but working within the criminal justice system were also interviewed. I was careful not to use recruitment materials that may have drawn participants to the study purely because of their interest in depersonalisation (see methodology for an account of this) and because an interpretative phenomenological approach (IPA) of data analysis was employed, there was no attempt to create a representative sample that would be generalised to the population at large. However, recruiting from an online dissociation website, clearly raises questions around ensuring that their related narratives of depersonalisation and well-being had not been affected by their membership to the forum.

A third limitation was that the study focused on young male adult prisoners' only. Therefore, it would be inappropriate to attempt to generalise this study to female prisoners. However, findings from this study do share similarities with existing research literature identified and discussed earlier in this thesis. This criticism was also raised and justified in the methodology section including the difficulties of gaining access to female prisoners' as they represent a small population, and the fact that females are likely to dissociate in a more normative manner and for quite varied reasons than a male prisoner. This should not marginalise the importance of researching female prisoners' and it is hoped that future

studies will include this cohort as a valuable addition to our understanding of prison dissociation.

Future directions

Several suggestions can be made for future research. Firstly, this study could be carried out again but with interviewees still carrying out their sentences in prison. Interviews could be combined with observations to provide a more holistic account of prison dissociation. Secondly, it could be extended to both females and older prisoners, so that a comparative analysis could be provided. The inclusion of females is important to ascertain the marked differences in types of dissociation and motivation for the employment of this coping response among this population. Thirdly, a comparative study could be carried out with those young men held in dedicated young people's detention centres compared to those housed in adult prisons. This would be especially useful in terms of assessing the usefulness of alternatives to the governance model of rational choice and CBT as a mainstream intervention found in adult prisons. Finally, dissociative research involving young adults could be widened to consider other institutional settings including schools, colleges, and universities. This research might be able to provide an insight into barriers to learning and coping strategies employed during times of stress.

Final thoughts

My study is the culmination of an area of interest that I have held for over thirty years since setting out as a college lecturer. My work with young adults in various settings including education and psychological practice, has provided the template for this unique contribution to the criminological debate around why young men find adjustment to prison life so

demanding. It is the first to explore in detail a little known and recognised mental health vulnerability that has its genesis in early childhood, but which in early adulthood can continue to stifle identity, self-hood, and social interaction. By taking an interpretative phenomenological approach to the study of dissociation, I hope to have furthered our understanding of the synthesis between imported vulnerabilities and affective carceral 'pains' upon the young adult males' experiences of prison. It has also provided a better understanding of how these influences represent barriers to prison adjustment. In this way it has extended Sykes (1958) original prison deprivations and provided a contemporary interpretation that is unique to detained young men. That Sykes deprivations still hold relevance today is testimony to its longevity, however, affective prison 'pains' around the loss of emotional intimacy, boredom and self-governance provide further insight into 'prison' harms.

The impact that these carceral strains have on the young male prisoner is evident in the interviewee's accounts. Several formal support services exist within prisons to help young men, but the evidence in this study suggests that needs are still currently being inadequately met. Until there is a greater recognition that young adults are developmentally different to older inmates, and therefore, must be treated as such, a continuation of the adjustment problems identified in this study are likely to remain.

In conclusion, this thesis has gone some way to examining the impact of prison life on young men, and the effects of avoidant coping strategies upon a prisoner's adjustment and adaptation. It highlights the importance of qualitative research, and in particular phenomenological analysis in providing a clearer understanding of dissociation as a coping mechanism and its impact on prison adjustment and adaptation.

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Appendix

Appendices 1: Initial contact letter to organisations

Department of Criminology and Sociology
Faculty of Arts, Culture and Education

Dear Sir/Madam

I am contacting your organisation in relation to research that I wish to undertake as part of my PhD. I am currently in my second year of a PhD in Criminology/Sociology, which I am studying full-time at the University of Hull. In addition, I work part-time as a Lecturer in Psychology and Criminology at York College and previously have worked with vulnerable young adults within a range of mental health settings. The aim of my PhD is to examine coping strategies among young adult males (18-25) who have been in prison and are now resettling back into community life. In particular, I am interested in episodes of dissociation that young adult men may have experienced whilst in prison and since release. This is an extension of research that I undertook as part of my MA where I explored dissociation as a cultural phenomenon among young males and females within an eating disorders rehabilitation unit.

My research will involve semi-structured interviews with approximately 8-10 young adult males aged 18-25 who have recently served a prison sentence or been held on remand as well as interviews with a range of professionals working within the criminal justice system.

I would be grateful if you could pass this email onto an appropriate member of your organisation who might be able to provide me with some advice about gaining access to potential volunteers.

Regards

Marc Powrie
PhD Candidate

Appendices 2: Reflective Statement.

Throughout the research process a reflective diary was kept. This provided me with a space to note significant decisions or events as they emerged and record emotions and personal feelings along the way. It helped to train my thoughts around how the research was being conducted and provided an opportunity for me to reflect on my own role as researcher. This reflective statement mirrors the notes that I made in my diary and records the learning process that I underwent regarding the process of planning and carrying out an interpretative phenomenological analysis.

The motivation for the study

My career in further and higher education has given me the opportunity to work with and research young people. I have always been interested in how they cope with the academic rigours of their programmes of study. Quite early on in my career I noticed that some students appeared to struggle with assessments, despite they often being some of the more able in class. Further investigation appeared to show that poor performance was not attributable to a lack of preparation or revision. It was also not due to poor examination technique as they often gained high marks in practice papers. Following a small-scale study that involved a life-style questionnaire and interview it became apparent that those students who struggled with assessment were often using poor coping strategies to deal with the stress that they were experiencing. Avoidance coping through dissociative responses were commonly reported by the students. As one said to me: *"I know I know it, but my mind goes blank …suddenly I'm not in the room anymore, I've floated off to find somewhere safe to be …by the time I have come back to myself it's too late".* Subsequently, I did a research master's degree with a focus on depersonalisation among exam stressed students. The main conclusion of my research was that dissociative coping was a good deal more common than most believed. A few years later, a chance conversation with a group of prison officers

doing a CPD course that I was delivering, confirmed that dissociation was a very commonly observed phenomenon within prisons and that it had quite a significant impact on how prisoners adjusted to the carceral setting. This thesis is the result of over 15 years of interest in prison coping and in particular depersonalisation as a learned prison coping response gatekeepers. In the early research planning stage, it was decided that I would go into prisons and carry out a mixed method of semi-structured interviews and observations on young male adults. A HMPSS research application, which took several weeks to complete, was submitted whilst my research proposal was being taken through the University ethics committee. Unfortunately, the Covid pandemic had just started to become realised and the first public lock-down meant that access to all prisoners was immediately suspended. By this point I had spent over eight months securing an informal agreement with the deputy governor of the prison I was to undertake the research in. The resulting second lock-down meant that prison access would not be possible.

I felt very low by this point and contemplated whether I should continue with my studies or suspend them. After taking advice from my supervisors, I decided to start my research proposal again and the shift moved to gaining access to participants from outside of the prison system including ex-prisoners on licence and prison staff who the researcher had had previous contact with through his work as a teacher and trainer. By targeting these groups, it was hoped that it would become easier to negotiate the main gatekeepers for access and perhaps subsequently yield indirect benefits from the original proposal in terms of having more flexible access to individuals because they were in the community rather than the closed prison environment. Initially, I focused on gaining access to ex-prisoners who were currently on licence. A series of letters and telephone conversations were held with the Community Rehabilitation Company (CRC), who were the probation administrators covering Yorkshire, Lincolnshire and North Yorkshire. The company works on behalf of the Ministry of Justice (MOJ); and is one of twenty-one Community Rehabilitation Companies (CRC) operating across England that came into effect in 2015 following the Government’s

Transforming Rehabilitation reforms. Despite proposing to carry out interviews remotely online, I was subsequently informed that COVID-19 restrictions had been imposed across the whole criminal justice system and it would not be possible for the company to sanction any research activity or fieldwork at this time. This was a further set-back and potentially more serious because it meant direct access to prisoners or ex-prisoners was going to be very difficult.

Having been unsuccessful at gaining entry to prisons or the probation services, my attention moved to community organisations that supported ex-offenders on release from prison. I contacted a range of local and national organisations including the Princes Trust, NACRO, Community Links, ForwardTrust, Northbank resettlement services and Phase8 based in Hull. An email was sent to each organisation followed up by a letter and then a telephone call. The response received from each organisation was broadly similar, stating that unfortunately because of the present situation it would not be possible to organise any research opportunities, and that even volunteering applications had currently been put on hold. I was encouraged to contact them again once social distancing restrictions had been lifted. My methodology chapter takes up the story from this point onwards, but my research diary contains a number of entries that highlight the emotional roller-coaster that I experienced throughout this time: October 2020, "just been informed that Northbank cannot help me (…) there's something seriously wrong here, why is the universe not playing ball? (…) so pissed off".

Data collection

The interviews were carried out using Microsoft Teams. Frustrations noted in my research diary included participants who forgot when they were to be interviewed, internet signal disappearing at crucial moments, participants using mobile phones rather than laptops to do the interviews, refusing to put their camera's on so that I couldn't see their faces and

important interviews over-running, but which had to be ended because the room I had booked out at the University library had other people ready to use it. During the early interviews I realised that I was not giving the participants sufficient time to think about their answers before I interrupted them and some of my questions were too direct which made them ‘close’ up on me. A lot of the answers were monosyllabic, and I feared that my interview technique was not up to standard. I sought advice from the skills centre at the University and they were able to provide me with some advice that proved invaluable going forward. Eventually the problems were ironed out and I started to get some in-depth narratives from the participants. The interviews proceeded slowly at first and I found that I was sticking to rigidly to the questions that I had set out. As my confidence increased, however, I was able to allow the participants to go off on a tangent but be also able to re-focus them again when necessary. My plan originally was to conduct the interviews during the afternoons so that I could write up my notes in the evening but in the end the interviews were happening at the strangest of times including 4.00am during the participants night shift at work. The young men were reluctant to do the drawings initially but in the end I had far too many to use in my thesis. The story-board idea proved to be very successful because participants were reluctant to discuss in any detail their dissociative experiences but were motivated to respond to accounts of others having similar experiences.

Transcription

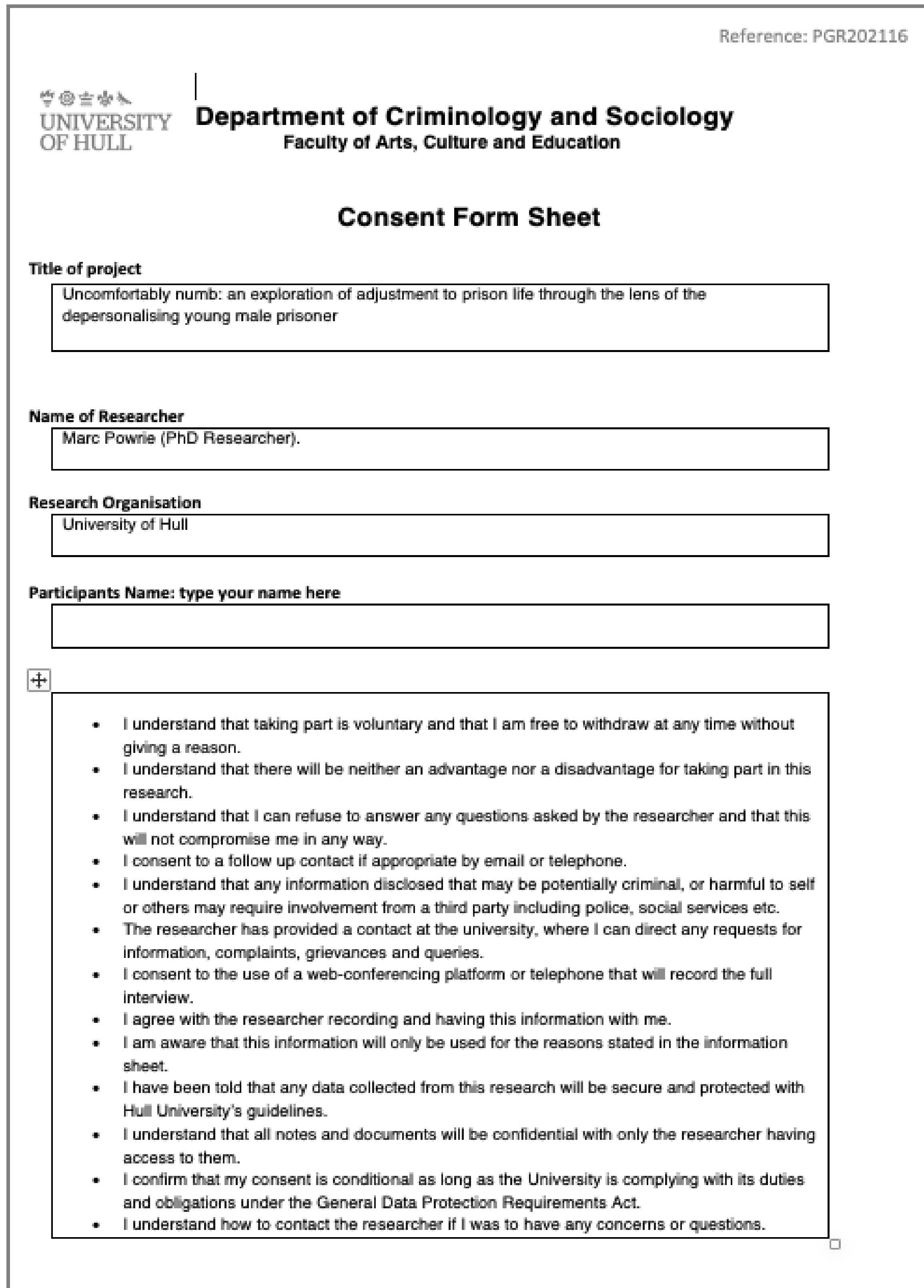
There is a transcription tool on Microsoft Teams and so the first thing was to get a script for each of the interviews. My belief that a small amount of formatting would only be needed for each interview proved way off the mark as I came to realise that the scripts contained hundreds of mistakes and large sections did not make any sense because they needed annotating with notes about the context of what was being said. I had originally set myself three months to complete the transcriptions but in the end I worked for almost six hours a day over 7 months to get them done. It was soul-destroying at times and felt like I was

wasting time that could have been spent on interpreting the data. Each interview had to be edited sentence by sentence with annotated notes alongside identifying context, body language and links to the storyboard and drawings. My wife got thoroughly fed up with me sitting in bed, laptop on all night as I crawled through almost 75 hours of interviews. This stage was a big learning curve and proved that qualitative research requires a level of time that is sometimes wholly disproportionate to the results obtained.

Supervision and the ‘Black bag’ seminar series

Because of the pandemic lockdowns, the University was effectively closed and so any contact with other students or staff had to take place online. Doctoral research is a lonely undertaking at the best of times but the inability to use the library or have face-to-face supervisions was particularly disheartening. My supervisors tried to their best to keep me focused but it did feel at times that I was doing a project at home that nobody had any interest in and would probably never see the light of day. One of the best things that happened was a the ‘Black bag’ series where once a month PhD students could come together along with the faculty staff to discuss each other’s work. I contributed a number of times to this series, and it helped to keep me focused on my work.

Appendices 3: Consent form



Reference: PGR202116

UNIVERSITY OF HULL

Department of Criminology and Sociology
Faculty of Arts, Culture and Education

Consent Form Sheet

Title of project

Uncomfortably numb: an exploration of adjustment to prison life through the lens of the depersonalising young male prisoner

Name of Researcher

Marc Powrie (PhD Researcher).

Research Organisation

University of Hull

Participants Name: type your name here

- I understand that taking part is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason.
- I understand that there will be neither an advantage nor a disadvantage for taking part in this research.
- I understand that I can refuse to answer any questions asked by the researcher and that this will not compromise me in any way.
- I consent to a follow up contact if appropriate by email or telephone.
- I understand that any information disclosed that may be potentially criminal, or harmful to self or others may require involvement from a third party including police, social services etc.
- The researcher has provided a contact at the university, where I can direct any requests for information, complaints, grievances and queries.
- I consent to the use of a web-conferencing platform or telephone that will record the full interview.
- I agree with the researcher recording and having this information with me.
- I am aware that this information will only be used for the reasons stated in the information sheet.
- I have been told that any data collected from this research will be secure and protected with Hull University's guidelines.
- I understand that all notes and documents will be confidential with only the researcher having access to them.
- I confirm that my consent is conditional as long as the University is complying with its duties and obligations under the General Data Protection Requirements Act.
- I understand how to contact the researcher if I was to have any concerns or questions.

Reference: PGR202116

- I understand that the information I provide will be stored by the researcher for 5 years following the interview, however, the original recordings will be deleted following transcription.
- Before I start the interview, I confirm that the researcher has provided me with the name of a member of staff at the university of Hull that I can speak to regarding this research and they can direct any complaints, requests for information and queries following the research.

Declaration of consent

I confirm that I have read the Participant Information Sheet and read and understood all the points above and I consent to take part in this study

By signing, I confirm that I am above 18 years old **Date:**

I have explained the study to the above participant and they have agreed to take part.

Researchers signature **Date:**

Appendices 5: Research Participation Information Sheet

Reference PGR202116

Department of Criminology and Sociology

Faculty of Arts, Culture and Education

Research Participation Information Sheet (Prison Staff)

Title of Study: Emotionally numb: an exploration of adjustment to prison life through the lens of the depersonalising young male prisoner

Name of Researcher: Marc Powrie (PhD Researcher).

Experience of Researcher: Lecturer in Psychology/Criminology/Early Years, and Former Mental Health Project Worker with young people.

1. **What is the purpose of the project?**

The aim of this project is to investigate the effects depersonalisation has on a young male prisoners ability to cope and adapt to prison life. This study will examine the complex nature of maladaptive dissociation within the prison setting, with the aim of extending knowledge and understanding. The results will help inform the relationship between dissociation, the effects of prison conditions and imported pre-prison experiences, with a view to influencing current prison practices and support strategies. The questions that make up the interview schedule will focus on your experiences of working with young adult males (18-24 years) and their coping and adjustment strategies.

2. **Has this project received ethical approval?**

Yes, the study and its protocol have received full ethical approval from the Faculty of Arts, Culture and Education Ethics Committee at Hull University (UK).

3. **Why have I been selected to take part?**

I want to explore the nature of maladaptive dissociation not only through the young adult males perspective but also through those who work or have worked with these individuals. Depersonalisation is not a widely recognised mental health vulnerability and so your contribution will help to further empirical understanding of this disorder.

4. **What will I have to do?**

Once you have finished reading this information, you will be required to sign a consent form within 7 days, which will indicate your confirmation to take part in this research. An interview will be carried out using web-conferencing platforms (Team's or Skype) to be arranged at your convenience. The interview will last around 60 minutes.

You do not have to answer any individual questions posed by the researcher and you can also stop or withdrawal from the interview if you feel uncomfortable. There will be neither an advantage nor a disadvantage for your participation/non-participation in this research.

Follow up contact may be appropriate if the researcher requires clarification, this will be either a telephone call or an email, whichever you prefer.

5. How will confidentiality be assured?

The researcher has put in place a number of procedures to protect the confidentiality of participants. Your name or other personal details will not be associated with your data as pseudonyms (numbers) will be used throughout the research. Only the researcher will have access to any identifiable information; and all electronic information will be stored on a private password-protected computer of which the researcher only has access too. Any handwritten notes will be stored securely in a locker at the University of Hull. The researcher will keep a copy of all participants' name and signatures on the consent form, but this information will not be kept alongside any data collected. All copies of consent forms and research interview recordings will be kept separate from each other to maintain anonymity of participants.

You will not be identified in any research outputs (e.g. reports, papers, presentations).

6. Who will have access to the information that I provide?

Any information and data gathered during this research study will only be available to the researcher. As the research may be presented at conferences or published, no personal details will be used, therefore making vicarious identification unlikely. If you would like to see the findings of this research, I will be happy to provide an executive two page summary of the results.

7. What will happen to the results of my study?

The results of the study will be summarised in the researcher's PhD dissertation and/or as a journal article and could be used to support future research, but this would always be in a form whereby you cannot be identified.

8. How will my information be stored/ used in the future?

All information and data gathered during this research will be stored in line with the General Data Protection Regulations 2016 (GDPR) and will be kept private and confidential. The original interview recordings will be destroyed once results have been transcribed and transcriptions will be kept securely on the University network for a further 5 years following the conclusion of the study. No company or organisation will be given any individuals information, and neither will police, security services, social services, relatives or lawyers, unless forced to do so due to restrictions in confidentiality regarding individual safety.

9. Data Protection Statement

The data controller for this project will be the University of Hull. The University will process your personal data for the purpose of the research outlined above. The legal basis for processing your personal data for research purposes under GDPR is a 'task in the public interest'. You can provide your consent for the use of your personal data in this study by completing the consent form that has been provided to you. Information about how the University of Hull processes your data can be found at [https://share.hull.ac.uk/Services/Governance/SitePages/Privacy%20notices.aspx].

Appendices 6: Prisoner Interview Schedule 1

Department of Criminology and Sociology
Faculty of Arts, Culture and Education

Young Males Participants Interview Schedule - 1

Section 1: Familiarity and orientation

1. **Thank you for kindly volunteering to be a part of this study. Could you tell me what motivated you to do so?**

I would like to understand a little more about your background including your family, employment and events that led up to your imprisonment. Can I remind you that you do not have to answer any questions that you may feel uncomfortable with and you have the right to withdraw from the interview at any time.

2. **Could I start by asking you about your early family situation, where you were born and to describe your parents or the main person that brought you up?**

   Prompt: Where were you born? What were your parent's / main carer like? Did you move around a lot through your childhood? Did you continue to live with your parents/main carer throughout your childhood? What did your parents/main carer do for a living? What was their relationship like? Was your family financially secure, if not, what was life like?

3. **Do you have brothers and sisters, and if so, how would you describe them?**

   Prompt: Was your relationship with them close? Would you say that they influenced you during your early childhood, if so, in what way? Did any of your brothers or sisters have mental health issues as you were growing up? How old are they now? Are they married now and have children? What type of employment are they in? would you describe yourself as being close to them now? How would you describe their mental health now?

4. **Can you tell me a little bit about your grandparents or other members of your wider family that you feel may have influenced your childhood?**

   Prompt: How did they influence you during your childhood? Do they still continue to influence you today? How important were they or still are in life? Are there any other people among your wider family that have had an influence on you?

1

5. **How would you describe yourself?**

   Prompt: How old are you? Are you easy going? Are you sociable? Intelligent? What tends to stress you out? What was your mental health like before you became caught up in the criminal justice system? Do you have a long term relationship with somebody, if so, describe them? Do you have any children of your own, if so describe them? Why do you think that you commit crime? How determined are you to stay out of prison?

6. **Can you describe events that were going on in your life prior to you being arrested and charged with the offence for which you were last imprisoned?**

   Prompt: What was the main motivation for committing the crime? Were you in employment at the time? What was your financial situation? Can you describe your social circle of friends or people that you knew at this time? Were you a member of a gang? What was your relationship like with your parents/main carer at this time? How did you feel when you were arrested? What were your main thoughts as you were being interviewed by the police prior to being formally charged? Were you frightened about the thought of being sent to prison?

7. **Had you been in contact with the police, courts or prison before this incident? If so, can you describe those experiences?**

   Prompt: How old were you? What was the nature of the crime? Were you alone or acting as a group or gang member? Was there anybody who supported you personally during these times? How do you feel that you were treated by police, court staff and other justice workers at the time? Were you offered any support or programmes that would help to prevent you from committing further criminal acts at the time? How did these incidents affect your education / employment?

Section 2: Dissociative episodes

I am now going to ask you a few questions about your experiences of dissociation. Once again can I remind you that you do not have to answer any questions that you may feel uncomfortable with and you have the right to withdraw from the interview at any time.

8. **Can you tell me how old you were the first time that you experienced a dissociative episode and can you describe what was it like for you?**

   Prompt: How old were you? What were you doing prior to it happening? What do you think triggered the episode? Had you been taking any drugs or other intoxicating substances at the time? Was anybody else with you? How did it alter your perception of yourself and your surrounding environment? How long did it last for? How did it make you feel? Were you frightened? Did you tell anybody about it afterwards? What did you think was happening to you?

9. **How regularly did you have dissociative episodes after this first time and how did they differ from the first?**

Prompt: Did the episodes remain infrequent or did they start to appear more frequently over time? Were they brought on or triggered by anything in particular? How did they manifest, what levels of unreality were you experiencing about yourself and/or the environment around you? Were people around you aware that you were having them? Did you find yourself trying to avoid these dissociative experiences? Is it hard talking about these experiences now? Did you feel that you had any control over these episodes when they came on? How long would each episode last for? Why do you think your symptoms appeared at these particular times? How did you interpret these episodes afterwards? How did the dissociative episodes impact on your everyday functioning? Did it affect your relationships with other people?

10. **Were you experiencing dissociative episodes whilst moving through the criminal justice system (i.e. being charged, interviewed, appearing in front of magistrates and crown courts, sentencing)?**

    Prompt: How frequent were they? How did they manifest? Were the dissociative episodes similar to those you had experienced previously? If different, how? Were they more/less intense, debilitating, difficult to control? What do you think was triggering the episodes at this time? Did you tell anybody about them? How did those around you including the police, lawyers etc. react to your episodes? Were you considered uncooperative / cooperative at the time?

11. **How often did you experience dissociative episodes in prison and can you describe them to me?**

    Prompt: How frequent were they, did they last longer or shorter than those experienced before? When did they usually occur and where were you? Was there particular parts of the prison or times of day when dissociative episodes would occur? What do you think triggered them? How would they manifest? What were you feeling before, during and after each episode? Did it happen impulsively or did you have some control? Did you tell anybody about them? Who? What did they do? What happened? Were you offered any support, if so what? How did officers and inmates react to you?

12. **To what extent did these dissociative episodes help or hinder your ability to cope and adjust with prison life?**

    Prompt: Do you feel that dissociating in prison is a problem, Why? What effect did it have on your everyday functioning? Did it impact on your ability to make friends in prison? Did it impact on your ability to get along with the prison staff? Was there a positive side to dissociating in prison? Did the dissociative episodes help or hinder your integration and adjustment to prison life?

13. **Were there aspects of the prison environment, regime, policies, rules etc. that particularly brought on a dissociative episode or exacerbated existing ones?**

    Prompt: How did the following aspects of prison life affect the onset, duration and intensity of the dissociative episodes: loss of liberty, having personal items removed and replaced with prison issue, not being able to see loved ones, boredom and mundane routines, lack of personal safety, overcrowding, lock-up hours, denial of heterosexual relations? Are there any other aspects of prison life you would consider important?

14. **Would your dissociative episodes spill over into other forms of external behaviour such as aggression, violence, self-harming, substance misuse etc.**

Prompt: have you purposely hurt, burned, or cut yourself in order to feel pain or make sure that you were real? Were you ever taking drugs whilst having these experiences?

Appendices 7: Prisoner Interview Schedule 2

Department of Criminology and Sociology
Faculty of Arts, Culture and Education

Young Male Interview Schedule - 2

Section 1: The deprivations of Prison life

I would like to understand a little more about your experiences of being in prison. Can I remind you that you do not have to answer any questions that you may feel uncomfortable with and you have the right to withdraw from the interview at any time.

1. **Can you describe the first 24 hours of your arrival into prison?**

   Prompt: How long did you have to wait before being transferred from the court to prison, what were your thoughts? How long did the journey take? How were you treated by the justice staff during this transfer? What time did you arrive at the prison? What were you thinking and feeling during this transfer? Can you describe the reception process on arrival? Did you have any problems on arrival? What were your thoughts as you were taken through the reception process? Were you able to use the telephone to contact loved ones? How did you feel about wearing prison clothing and the removal of your valuables? Were you given information about the reception and induction process and what was going to happen to you? Can you describe the cell that they put you in for your first night? Were you alone? Did you feel safe on your first night? Was it a quiet environment or noisy, intimidating or calm? What were your thoughts during that first night? What happened the next day? How long did you stay on the induction wing for? Did you dissociate during those first 24 hours, if so, how often, what was the duration and intensity? What was triggering these episodes?

2. **Can you describe a typical day for you in prison?**

   Prompt: What time did you go to sleep and wake up? What was your usual morning / afternoon / evening routine? What would be a typical routine for you whilst being 'locked-up' in your cell? What was the hardest part about being locked in your cell? Was there any positives about being locked in your cell? Where would you go when allowed out of your cell? How freely did you mix with other prisoners and prison staff? Did you feel safe walking around the prison? What was the hardest part of being out of your cell? Was there positives to being outside of your cell? Would you experience dissociative episodes more frequently in your cell/the wider prison environment or equally frequent?

3. **What did you find particularly negative or positive about prison life?**

   Prompt: What aspects of the prison environment and prison population were difficult to deal with? loss of liberty, having personal items removed and replaced with prison issue, not being able to see loved ones, boredom and mundane routines, lack of personal safety, overcrowding, lock-up hours, denial of heterosexual relations? Are there any other aspects of prison life you would consider important? Were you victimised because you were new (by staff or prisoners)? Have you been victimised (insulted or assaulted) by another prisoner? Were you ever victimised (insulted or

assaulted) by a member of the prison staff? Do you feel that the prison staff safeguard your welfare appropriately? Were you ever sexually abused or assaulted? Did you have insulting remarks made against you or your family? Do you think that these negative aspects of prison life made you dissociate more or less than outside of prison? Did you use the Listener scheme? What helped to get you through your sentence? What positive aspects of prison life were there? Opportunities to learn new skills? The chance to re-evaluate one's life and priorities? Get treatment for drug addiction or mental health issues? Being safe from community violence and victimisation? Do you think that these positive aspects of prison life caused you to dissociate more or less than outside of prison?

4. **Were you able to cope and adjust to prison life?**

   Prompt: What strategies did you develop to make time go more quickly? Did you take drugs or other intoxicating substances? Did you self-harm, have suicidal thoughts or behave anti-socially towards other inmates and prison staff? To what extent did you get involved in prisoner activities such as using the library, being employed, accessing rehabilitation programmes etc? What was your relationship like with the other inmates? Did you develop a close friendship with any inmate or member of the prison staff? What aspect(s) of the prison culture did you find it most difficult to fit into? How often did you feel afraid and what mainly brough this on? Do you feel that your mental health needs were being met and dealt with appropriately whilst in prison? Do you think that your dissociative episodes acted as a barrier to you coping and adjusting to prison life?

Section 2: Imported characteristics of prisoners

I would like to understand a little more about your life experiences leading up to your imprisonment Once again can I remind you that you do not have to answer any questions that you may feel uncomfortable with and you have the right to withdraw from the interview at any time.

5. **I would like you to try to describe your relationship with your parents/primary carer as a young child. If you could start from as far back as you can remember?**

   Prompt: How old were you during these first memories? Can you describe your memories around this time? Did you feel secure? Can you remember any adverse or traumatic event(s) that took place during these early years, if so, how did you react and feel about them? Which parent was you closest too? When upset which parent would you go to? Was there any periods of time during these early years when you were not being looked after by your primary carer(s), if so, what were the circumstances and can you explain what happened and how you felt? Can you remember any occasions in these early years when you may have experienced a dissociative episode?

6. **I would like you to choose five adjectives or words that reflect your relationship with your mother starting from as far back as you can remember in early childhood?**
7. **Can you now do the same for your father?**

   Prompt: As far back as you can – say between aged five and twelve. Use each word to explore maternal themes emerging.

8. **Did you ever feel detached, rejected or unloved as a young child? Can you explain why you felt this way?**

   Prompt: How old were you when you felt this way? What caused you to believe these things? Why do you think your parents behaved in the way that they did? Did you ever feel pushed away or ignored? Were you ever frightened or worried as a child, if so, how would you react or feel? Did a parent or other adult in the household often or very often swear at you, insult you, put you down, or humiliate you? Did a parent or other adult in the household often or very often push, grab, slap or throw something at you? Did you often or very often feel that no one in your family loved you or thought you were important or special? Did you often or very often feel that your family didn't look out for each other, feel close to each other, or support each other? Did you often or very often feel that your parents were too drunk or high to take care of you or take you to the doctor if you needed it? Were there any occasions, that you can remember, when these feelings of detachment, rejection or being unloved would trigger a dissociative episode?

9. **Were your parents / primary carer ever threatening with you in any way – maybe for discipline, or even jokingly?**

   Prompt: Did your parents/primary carer ever threaten to leave you or send you away? Did they ever give you the silent treatment? How did this make you feel? What type of punishment would your parents/ primary carer use against you or your siblings? Did you ever have such experiences with other members of your family? Do you feel these experiences continue to affect you now as an adult? Does it influence your approach to your own relationships? What is the relationship now between yourself and your parent(s)? Can you remember any of these incidents triggering dissociative episodes?

10. **To what extent did your siblings and wider family contacts such as grandparents influence you as you were growing up?**

    Prompt: Can you describe your relationship with these important people? Why do you feel that they were an influence on you during this time? How close were you to them? Were you able to go to them if distressed? Did they provide anything that your parents / primary carer did not? Did your relationship with them change as you got older?

11. **Tell me about your life at school?**

    Prompt: Did you like school? How did you get on academically? Did you have a favourite subject or teacher? What was your relationship with the other children and teaching staff? Did you ever play truant, if so, where would you go? Were you able to go to school throughout your childhood and adolescence?

12. **Describe your friendship groups when you were growing up?**

    Prompt: Did you have lots of friends or fewer close ones? Were you all roughly the same age? Why did you choose to be friends with them? How often did you meet up and where did you go? Were you mainly influenced by others or were you considered to be the group leader? Can you describe the relationship you had with your closest friend? Did you ever get in to trouble with the law, if so, explain how? Were you a part of a gang, if so can you describe your life as a gang member?

13. What was it like where you lived growing up?

Prompt: Can you describe where you lived and what it was like: urban vs rural area; poor vs affluent area; mainly white vs mixed race area; working class vs middle class area; young population vs older population; safe vs gangland area; youth orientated activities vs youth deprived area; safe place to live vs unsafe place to live.

14. How would you describe your mental health growing up?

Prompt: How resilient were you coping with stress? How would you react to stressful situations? How would you deal with these stressful events? Were you ever taken to the doctors because of your mental health? Did you ever drink alcohol or take drugs to help you cope with stressful situations? Did you ever self-harm or feel suicidal because of stressful events in your life? Would you dissociate as a coping strategy when you felt stressed?

Appendices 8: Staff Interview Schedule

Department of Criminology and Sociology
Faculty of Arts, Culture and Education

Prison Staff Interview Schedule

Section 1: Familiarity and orientation

1. **Thank you for kindly volunteering to be a part of this study. Could you tell me what motivated you to do so?**

I would first like to understand a little more about your role within the prison setting and the prisoners that you are working with. Can I remind you that you do not have to answer any questions that you may feel uncomfortable with and you have the right to withdraw from the interview at any time.

2. **In a typical day what would be your role and responsibilities within the prison?**

   Prompt: What time do you start work or what are your typical shift times? What routines do you perform during your shift? Do you have a role as a key worker? Can you describe some of the 'contact' opportunities you have to talk informally to prisoners (i.e. during meals, rehabilitation, education, exercise)? What would constitute a typical conversation that you would have with inmates? Do you think that prisoners are generally open to discussing their feelings with you? How does the prison and you generally manage prisoners behaviour? What do you believe is the best part of your job? What's the most negative aspect of your job? What was the motivation for you wanting to work within prisons? What strengths, skills do you believe you need to have to be able to do your job? Have you come across any differences between how you manage the behaviours of young adults (18-24 year olds) and older prisoners? Do the younger inmates pose any additional challenges for you compare to the older prisoners? What changes have you experienced within the prison system since you started working, do you consider these changes to be good or bad?

3. **How would you describe your relationship with those prisoners you work with?**

   Prompt: Is it always important to maintain a 'professional distance', and how difficult is it to maintain? How much autonomy do you think you have when forging relationships with prisoners? How common is it for you to be looking after inmates who have already served a prison sentence with you? Do these prisoners represent any further challenges and how are they likely to behave differently to those serving their first prison sentence? Do friendships ever form between prison staff and inmates? In what ways are you able to support prisoners through the relationship that you develop with them? In what ways are you able to sanction prisoners behaviour through the relationship that you have developed with them? How do you typically get to hear about an individual prisoners history? How common is it that a prisoner will talk about what was happening in their lives prior to imprisonment with you? How do you manage your own prejudices? Do you think it is less or

more difficult to develop relationships with the young prisoners (18-24 year olds), why is this the case?

4. **Can you describe a typical day in the life of the prisoner?**

   Prompt: How long would they be expected to be locked in their cells for over a twenty-four hour period? What recreational activities within the prison do inmates have access too? How often do they get to see loved ones through visits? How freely are inmates allowed to write letters or make telephone calls to loved ones? How are prisoners supervised throughout their time outside of their cells? How free are inmates to wander around talking to other prisoners? Do you believe that there is enough stimulation throughout the day to keep most prisoners occupied? How is it decided what privileges an inmate can expect?

I would like to understand a little more about prisoners mental health and coping strategies within the prison setting. Can I remind you once again that you do not have to answer any questions that you may feel uncomfortable with and you have the right to withdraw from the interview at any time.

5. **What types of prisoner mental health issues do you deal with on a day-to-day basis?**

   Prompt: What are the main mental health issues that you face from prisoners? Have you seen a general increase or decrease in mental health vulnerabilities over the recent past, why do you think this is? Do you believe that you are adequately trained and prepared for dealing with prisoners with mental health vulnerabilities? Do you think that most prisoners bring mental health vulnerabilities with them into prison, if so, what do you believe brought them on? What aspects of the prison environment do you believe are likely to bring on or exacerbate existing mental health vulnerabilities? Are prisoners generally open to talking about their mental health vulnerabilities? How do prisoners with mental health vulnerabilities typically react to imprisonment? What services are available within the prison setting to support and treat prisoners with mental health issues?

6. **What types of coping strategies do prisoners employ in prison to help them serve their time?**

   Prompt: How do most prisoners cope with prison life? Are there specific things that the inmate can do to cope and adjust to prison life? Can you describe how prisoners pass the time when they are locked in their cells? What types of activities do they engage in? Sleeping, reading, art and crafts, television? To what extent do you think that prisoners use absorption (day dreaming, fantasy involvement) as a way of passing the time? How common is it that prisoners will employ destructive coping strategies such as violence, self-harming, substance abuse and suicidal ideation as a way of coping with imprisonment, why do you think they resort to these behaviours?

7. **Have you heard of the term dissociative disorders, and if so, what is your understanding of these disorders?**

   Prompt: Have you heard of the terms dissociation, depersonalisation, derealisation and identity disorder? If so, what do you think is meant by these terms? Where did you get your understanding of dissociative disorders from? Are there any training courses available, that you know of within the criminal justice system, that covers dissociative disorders?

8. **Here are a number of common externalising symptoms of maladaptive dissociation, can you tell me which ones, if any, you have noticed among prisoners?**

   Prompt: The prisoner may switch suddenly from being animated, talkative and engaging to being withdraw, sullen and unresponsive / that after talking to the prisoner, you realise that they did not hear anything you said / prisoners report feeling detached from their surroundings as if there is a veil between themselves and the outside world / the prisoner appears to be going through the motions of doing an activity but it is clear that their mind is somewhere else as though they were a robot / they sit or stand for prolonged periods in what seems like a 'flat', 'lifeless' or catatonic state / prisoners report that their hands or feet have become larger or smaller / they appear 'glassy' eyed as though not really conscious and appear to be staring through you/ the prisoner will look and act towards you like you were a stranger or alien to them / they laugh or become agitated without showing any emotions.

I would like to understand a little more about the prison environment and characteristics that the prisoner may bring with them into prison. Can I remind you for a final time that you do not have to answer any questions that you may feel uncomfortable with and you have the right to withdraw from the interview at any time.

9. **Using your own personal opinion can you describe those aspects of the prison environment and prison culture that you think prisoners find the most difficult to cope and adjust too?**

   Prompt: What do you believe is the impact of loss of liberty, having personal items removed and replaced with prison issue, not being able to see loved ones, boredom and mundane routines, lack of personal safety, overcrowding, lock-up hours, denial of heterosexual relations? Are there any other aspects of prison life you would consider particularly challenging? If you could change one thing about prison conditions what would it be?

10. **In your opinion, what types of experiences or characteristics do inmates bring with them into prison that may hinder or prevent them from adjusting to prison life?**

    Prompt: What do you believe is the impact of insecure early attachment relations between child and parents, adverse traumatic events through childhood and adolescence, being taken into care, lack of formal education, poverty, drug and alcohol abuse, gang membership, racial and ethnic identity, sexual orientation.