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Through the prison walls: Using published poetry to explore current UK prisoners' narratives of past, present and future selves

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Paradoxical subjectivities: Hardened and reflective selves in the prison environment

The hierarchical power relations which infuse all elements of the prison environment throw up considerable challenges for conducting qualitative research. Classic studies of incarceration, including Goffman (1961) and Foucault (1977) have highlighted the operation of power, status and stigma in secure settings. In Goffman's (1961) influential account of the 'total institution', he argued that stigmatised status is fostered through formal degradation ceremonies such as court proceedings, with inmates stereotyped as 'generically criminal'. Once confined, it is argued that prisoner's encounters become structured by forms of systemic power which positions them, via sentence plans or psychologist reports, as uncomfortably visible, examinable and correctable (Foucault, 1977). The acute and intimate level of surveillance and control enforced within the prison environment has also been argued to create a barrier to authenticity and emotional expression (Crewe et al, 2013). This in turn effects relationships between inmates and staff, as well as the perceived security of the environment from both sides, creating a climate which Hobbes (1999) termed as 'diffidence' or one of generalised mistrust and wariness.

These elements of the prison environment have significant implications for research. Lack of trust, and a familiarity with reproducing 'enforced' narratives can impact on establishing rapport with participants (Bosworth, Campbell, Ferranti & Santos, 2005), as well as potentially interfering with any attempts to rebalance power in the research process (see Reavey, 2011). In such a context it could be expected that individuals participating in qualitative research would be willing to only disclose certain aspects of their story. This paper will explore the possibilities of using already existent arts practice, specifically poetry, within the hierarchical environment of prison. We will explore some potential contributions of

poetic inquiry in exploring some of the 'harder to reach' aspects of imprisoned individuals' subjectivities, while considering the implications for future desistance from offending.

Despite these challenges, however, there has been a growth in research which has aimed to explore the subjectivity and emotional experiences of prisoners. Much of this research has taken a narrative approach, aiming to explore how people in prison understand themselves, their histories, and their future beyond the prison environment (e.g. Maruna, 2001; Jewkes, 2005; Presser, 2008; 2009). The emerging picture of subjectivity in prison is complex. Some research highlights a potentially fertile moment within prison for offending individual's experience of self, a "crisis of narrative" (Maruna, Wilson, & Curran, 2006, p. 3) that could potentially promote the reformulation of identity. In exploring experiences of religious conversion in prison, Maruna et al (2006) draw on Goffman's (1961) work discussing the 'mortification' of self involved in incarceration, where the material trappings and social associations of pre-incarceration life are stripped away on imprisonment. In this view, the 'marginal situation' (Berger & Luckmann, 1991) of prison requires the acquisition of new skills, practices and ways of being, and may lead to greater self-reflection. Cohen & Taylor (1972) similarly highlighted that the status of prison as a both a separate and marginalised space, can promote existential reflection in those incarcerated.

At the same time, however, many studies have outlined how the prison environment promotes a particular 'hardened' form of the self, engendered through surveillance, labelling and negotiating relationships with inmates and staff (Hartman, 2008). Jewkes (2005) for instance, discusses the role of 'fronting' and 'masking' in prison in order to maintain a tough persona within the prison system to enable survival. Other researchers have highlighted that not all prisoners engage in this behaviour, with others experiencing feelings of hopelessness,

despair and powerlessness, usually leading to withdrawal/denial to acknowledge their presence in prison both emotionally and spatially (Liebling, 2004). Cohen and Taylor (1972) similarly argued that prisoners continuously work to accommodate to prison life and negotiate methods of both resisting or yielding to its demands to preserve a sense of identity. Such negotiations can include denial of stigmatised 'inmate' labels or attempts to neutralise them with focus on socially-valued and accepted versions of self such as 'father' or 'mother' (Opsal, 2011; Benson, 1985). In contrast, Yablonsky (2000) found some inmates appear to relish this stigmatised label and regard inmate identity status as a 'badge of honour'.

These factors further interfere with the structure of the therapeutic context and the ability for inmates to meaningfully utilise supportive or rehabilitative interventions and form positive, healing alliances with therapy staff. Identity work has been argued to be central to successful desistance, meaning such alliances are crucial. Leibling & Maruna (2013) explored identity crises in inmates, and found that those in the early stages of confinement especially struggled to survive psychologically or find meaning in their environments. Inmates complained of loss of love, meaning and identity and reported these as pressing needs. Reflective of these complaints are statistics from the Ministry of Justice (2014) reporting a 69% rise in suicide rates since 2013; similarly, 70% of the prison population have been found to experience mental distress, some of which is identified as stress and maladaptation within prison (Social Exclusion Unit, 2002). These outcomes are not inevitable. Maruna (2001) identified successful desistance narratives as including the narration of a core, good self, separate from the offending behaviour, which was characterised as an external, depersonalised evil 'it'. This duality was paired with narratives of empowerment (from others) and redemption (following self-reflection) to generate positive possible futures. Stevens (2012, 2013) also explored narrative transformations at Grendon, a prison run along

therapeutic community lines. Through the adoption of different roles in the community, the prisoners were enabled to reconstruct their narrative trajectory, as well as envisage and practise a new capable, responsible and confident 'replacement self'.

Taken together, we can see here that prison is a complex environment, which both prompts existential reflection, and also prevents the expression of emotional experiences. Within the mistrustful and power-infused relationships which dominate in prison, expression of emotional experiences which disrupt a hypermasculine 'masked' subjectivity can be seen as a potentially risky activity for inmates. At the same time, however, central to both good mental health, and the possibility of future desistance, can be seen to be an engagement with just the forms of self-reflection that are being prevented by the practices of many prison environments.

Poetic inquiry: Mining the seam of arts practice in prison

Within this relatively problematic picture, arts practice is an established routes for exploring and expressing subjective and emotional experiences within the prison system. Myriad arts programmes are in place in prison, including visual art, creative poetry, dance, drama and music. These usually take place as part of educational courses delivered by voluntary sector organisations (The Prison Arts Coalition, N.D), rather than being explicitly located within research or therapeutic practice. Reviews of practice (Hughes, 2005; Cheliotis & Jordanoska, 2016), suggest that art programmes can reduce the felt effects of coercion and provide a space for relatively 'free' expression. It has also been noted that these qualities of arts programmes can help to shift inmates' sense of self, providing space to shape identity changes and contribute towards the process of desistance (Kougiali, Einat & Liebling, 2017). These authors note that art forms within secure settings are perceived as a means for expression in

contrast to forms of treatment or education, which are often experienced as imposed from the 'system'. These artefacts are, therefore, a rich source of data for qualitative researchers aware of the constraints of prison research outlined above.

For this paper, we are going to examine one seam of creative expression by prisoners: poetry. In using poems as data, this research can be seen to sit within the tradition of 'poetic inquiry', which has been gaining ground across the social sciences (Prendergast, Leggo, & Sameshima, 2009; Galvin & Prendergast, 2015). Perhaps the most common use of poetry in research is the presentation of data in poetic form (Butler-Kisber, 2002; Furman, 2006). These include creating 'found poems' out of interview data or field notes, which aim to explore, highlight and more evocatively highlight aspects of the data. Some such forms of poetic inquiry have a specific commitment to amplifying silenced voices, such as the feminist method of 'I poems' (Koelesch, 2015; Mikel Brown & Gilligan, 1992). In this method, researchers construct a poem from the 'I' references in the interview to create a picture of 'how she speaks of herself before we speak of her' (Mikel Brown and Gilligan, 1992, p. 27–8). Mikel Brown & Gilligan (1992) devised this method to amplify women's voices and counter gendered tendencies to self-effacing narratives, through which women submerged their own subjectivity into those of others. By pulling out the 'I' statements from their context, these authors aimed to bring forth these submerged subjectivities.

Other researchers have used poetry as a form of reflexivity (Butler-Kisber, 2002), including developing poetic practice as a part of reflexive journal practices. These forms of poetic inquiry tend to emphasise the reflective, emotional and dialogical qualities of poetry, which can be used by researchers to more fully explore their own relationship to research praxis (Butler-Kisber, 2002; Leavy, 2015). Furman, Langer, Davis, Gallardo, & Kulkarni (2007)

describe combining together different approaches, using poetry as a form of data itself, a presentation of data, and a form of reflexive inquiry as well. Autoethnographic uses of poetry, some of which are generated for the research (Gallardo, Furman, & Kulkarni, 2009) and some of which pre-exist the research (Furman, 2004) have also been used. There is also a tradition of participatory poetry, generated within the research process (Prendergast et al, 2009). As Sjollema & Bilotta (2017) also note, however, less often used in poetic inquiry are what they call 'community poetry'; poetry by marginalised groups which already exists, but is not generated by researchers. It is this gap that this paper explores: the potential for utilising poems generated outside of the research process.

Using prisoner's poetry: Inside Time

The data discussed in this paper was gathered for a study looking at the experiences of currently imprisoned individuals in the UK. The research question was: "how do current inmates in UK prisons narrate their past, present and future selves?" The poems studied were published in Inside Time online magazine. This publication is produced in consultation with former prisoners and their families, and aims to prioritise the experiences and knowledge of current and former prisoners. Current prisoners contribute to the magazine, through writing articles, letters and poetry. The magazine and website has a dedicated section for poetry, which exists as a ready-made archive of experiential material exploring prisoners' reflections on their experiences, relationships, histories and hopes for the future. Around 15 poems are published every month.

As rich accounts of experience produced from the point of view of the offending individual, and in their own terms, this form of data can be seen as fulfilling 'participant-led' principles of qualitative research (Banister et al, 1995). These accounts are produced outside

of the research process, which could act to reduce the power differential between the researcher and the researched; personal dynamics and the potential morphing of accounts to suit the perceived aims of the research are removed from the research process. Such issues of power and voice can be seen as particularly important in research with offending individuals, as well as other disempowered groups (e.g., see Bolton, Pole & Mizen, 2001; Sweeney et al, 2009). Such claims for the veracity of this data set for use in qualitative research must however not be taken as a claim that these poems are somehow more 'real' or 'authentic' than accounts generated in research. Although these accounts may have been produced outside of an immediate research context, they have still been produced for a particular purpose, publication, and the events portrayed are still of course open to multiple retellings and alternative accounts in different contexts (Crossley & Crossley, 2001). The audience of Inside Time is a largely composed of other prisoners, and the publication context is one which explicitly aims to empower and give voice to prisoners. Beyond this, there is no information given on the context of production; some of these poems may have been produced within therapeutic or education settings, others privately. It is possible, however, that there may be an imperative to produce normative desistance narratives (Maruna, 2001) as this context remains within the broader prison system to some extent.

Analysing the poems

The focus of the analysis was hence on the depictions in the poems of past, present and future selves. Key word searches relevant to this topic were conducted on the website, including; 'prison', 'self', 'identity', 'who am I' and 'mirror'. Poems were then filtered according to the criteria that all material should be: written solely by the inmate; focused on internal experience; written by adults (18+); published in the last ten years; include some focus on

time before, during or after prison; the author was, or is, incarcerated in UK prison. There were 27 poems gathered for analysis, each with a different author.

Narrative Thematic Analysis (Furman et al., 2010) was employed as an analytic approach, as this focuses on subjective meaning and narratives assigned to experiences and how broader social contexts may interpolate these meanings. This approach places participants' subjectivity and hermeneutic engagement with their experience as central to the research process (Hatch 2002; Creswell 2003). Narrative approaches posit that individual experience may be embodied through text and recoverable through analysis for understanding the structure of lived experiences (van Manen, 2007). A five step method of Narrative Thematic Analysis (Furman et al., 2010) was utilised to code and analyse the data, including: 1) reading the data; 2) open coding for key words and phrases; 3) finding connections and organising codes into themes; 4) deviant case analysis to explore alternative interpretations.

Poems were initially categorised into the temporal categories of before, during or after prison, before being refined into: "Bringing in a double": Dualisms of the self before prison, "Jekyll and Hyde": Ambivalent maintenance of duality in prison; and "Architect of my own prison": Post-prison duality as non-functional. Central to all of these themes was the idea of duality of self, and so this was further refined. We characterise here the duality described by participants as that between two experiences of the self: a) the 'held self', an authentic self that the authors' described as an emotional core; and b) the 'cast self', a less authentic self enacted to survive.

Emotional, reflective and transportational qualities of poetry

The poems examined for this research provided a rich resource of depictions of ambivalent and complex subjectivities. In considering the particular role of poetry as a form of data for qualitative analysis, we will here explore three aspects of the poems. Whilst the themes detailed above are present, our exploration of the data here is focussed on the implications for qualitative arts research in psychology. These are the vibrancy and availability of emotional expression, the promotion of self reflection, and the capacity for imagining, reimagining and transporting the self.

Excavating emotion: Embodied and sensory metaphors of divided selves

Many researchers have noted the difficulty in eliciting emotional narratives from people currently in prison due to norms of masculinity, 'fronting' and 'masking' emotions within the prison environment (Jewkes, 2005). These poems, published publicly, were in contrast a rich seam of emotional and sensory metaphors encapsulating deeply felt and profound emotional experiences. Many authors employed metaphors which encapsulated a divided and contradictory sense of self, including metaphors of internal war:

Extract 1:

I am two warring tribes,

Two opposing sides,

Of one troubled mind,

That's divided by the distance you find between the two ends of the spectrum.

(Mullins, 2014)

Or evoking a dramaturgical experience of the self (Goffman, 1959):

Extract 2:

You see I wear a decorative mask, It's like a chore, a simple task,

I hide beneath it, it's my shade,

...I pick up my mask and on it goes,

All of a sudden I start to feel free,

Because I don't have to be confused little me,

I know this mask will never be real,

It just stops me feeling those feelings I feel,

The feelings of doubt, the feelings of shame

The feelings of shock, and the throwing of the blame

(Gordon, 2011)

Here Gordon uses the imagery of the 'decorative mask' to evoke the protective and false nature of the 'cast self'. Like a masked ball which traditionally marked the inversion of usual constrictions, he here describes how this 'mask' enables him to escape and survive feelings of shame and doubt. Both of these authors evoke a sense of divided experiences of the self: one, which we have called the 'held self', is constituted across the poems as an emotional and authentic being, overcome with feelings of shame, guilt, and shock. The other, we are here calling the 'cast self' is often associated with offending behaviour and is also often described as a fake, inauthentic self constituted for survival:

Extract 3:

...When I can't deal with my real life,

I just bring in a double,

It's my life in two halves,

They're welded together,

Two contradictory characters,

Together forever,

I have never just been me!

…It was necessary evil used only for defence,

But it's become my undoing.

(Williams, 2013).

Similarly to Gordon, Williams here describes the creation of a 'double' as a 'defense' against "real life". This 'double' is described as a proxy version of himself, sent out to act in the world while the other half retreats. Impression management (Goffman, 1959) can be seen to be employed here, as these authors describe adapting to norms of violent culture (Anderson, 1999) which require them to demand respect in order to deter victimisation. The dual construction also mirrors Maruna's (2001) theory of narrative desistance, whereby the offending behaviour is seen as apart from the self, and a consistent authentic self is constructed as existing beyond the offending behaviour. Encapsulated in these rich, metaphorical, poems are the emotional, ambivalent and fragile nature of holding these two versions of the self whilst in the 'marginal situation' (Berger & Luckmann, 1991) of prison. The intensity of the prison environment in ingraining the 'cast self' into the everyday experiences of inmates is illustrated by Tattum:

Extract 4:

Afraid to go to the shower,

On the yard, you look away, feel their eyes on you,

Even in your cell you feel their power,

Done the first few months, grown hard and cold,

On the yard, your eyes on them, now they look away,

Settled in they say, made yourself fit the mould [sic],

It drains your strength your will,

(Tattum, 2012)

Here the 'mould [sic]' of prison identity is depicted as ingraining itself into Tattum's very embodiment, until 'grown hard and cold', he is able to negotiate the prison environment. The intensity of this environment where 'even in your cell you feel their power', was elsewhere described as leading to a feeling of losing the 'held self', the more emotional, authentic part of the self. As Williams said:

Extracts 5 & 6:

I can't even tell them apart,

They're now woven so deeply into my soul and heart,

There's two jigsaws with only one box,

No reason or rhyme.

(Williams, 2013).

...And if I can manage to put 'em back together,

Would I like what I see?

And could I even make it alone with only one me?

(Williams, 2013).

Williams here describes developing reliance on his 'cast self', to the extent that he can no longer easily distinguish between this and the 'right me', what we are calling here his 'held self'. From an image of temporary repair (welding) we now have an image of deeply worked interdependence ("woven so deeply"). The 'art' of living, of making and remaking the self through everyday interactions, action and experiences (Brown, 2001), can be seen here to have inscribed his 'cast self' more and more deeply into the core of William's narrative identity. Duality still remains, but as a melange of potentially incompatible elements ("two jigsaws"), with unclear boundaries between the two, previously separate sources ("with only one box"). Contained within this image is both the promise and impossibility of future coherence. With similar ambivalence, Williams also describes both craving and fearing coherence; implying that the construction of his 'double' or 'cast self' as separate is partially protective as it allows him to bracket off parts of his experience and behaviour from a core identity. Coherence would require him to both see all of these behaviours as a part of himself ("would I even like what I see"), as well as allow the more fragile, emotional parts of him to be more open to the world ("could I even make it alone").

It is remarkable, perhaps, that within the contexts that these authors describe, they publish these poems which discuss fragile and emotional experiences. This in itself highlights a strength of the form of poetry in exploring, excavating and encapsulating emotional experiences and complexities of subjectivity.

Engaging the mirror: Poetry as personal dialogue and reflection

A second feature of the poems examined, which perhaps highlights another potential use and strength of poetry as method, is the preponderance of images of mirrors and reflection. As noted in the previous section, a common theme across the poems was to create multiple

characters to represent different aspects of the self, such as Jekyll and Hyde. This in itself highlights a potential role of the poetic form in promoting a multiple, dialogical form of the self (Bakhtin, 1981), which has also been noted to be facilitated through engagement with fiction (Shipman & McGrath, 2016). For instance:

Extract 7:

You may be more streetwise than me,

With alot more brawn than brain,

…We both feel the same pain,

I see in your eyes pure hatred,

A glowing and daring stare,

A lit-up sign saying "leave me alone",

And a growl that warns beware,

I just feel I don't know who you are anymore,

….And if you don't recall who I am anymore,

I'm the man facing you in the mirror

(Frederick, 2011)

Here Frederick moves to position his 'cast self' as separate and 'other'. The 'held self' occupies the 'I' position in this poem, while the 'cast self' is personified in the second person. The final line then reveals that this other, external person is the same as the narrator of the poem. In this switch, Frederick evokes some of the complex literal and metaphorical functions of a mirror, which Foucault (1986) explored as an interplay between self and other; visibility and absence:

In the mirror, I see myself there where I am not, a sort of shadow that gives my own

visibility to myself […] Starting from this gaze that is, as it were, directed toward me,

from the ground of this virtual space that is on the other side of the glass, I come back

toward myself; I begin again to direct my eyes toward myself and to reconstitute

myself there where I am [...] it makes this place that I occupy at the moment when I

look at myself in the glass at once absolutely real, connected with all the space that

surrounds it, and absolutely unreal, since in order to be perceived it has to pass

through this virtual point which is over there. (p. 24)

Foucault here therefore positions the mirror as a tool for making the self visible, both towards

oneself and also as one is seen by others. It is a way in which we position ourselves in space,

in the world as others see us, whilst also remaining ephemeral, a mere image. The repeated

presence of mirrors in the imagery of the poems seemed to contain these functions, as

through the medium of poetry, the prisoners explored their self in relation to both their own

sense of self, and the moral conditions of the wider world:

Extract 8:

Revolting, debauched and abhorrent shit streak,

The mere sight of you makes my skin creep,

What a sight you are, a right shameless sinner,

Last horse in the race, unlike me, I'm a winner,

…Never have I seen as disreputable sinner,

The worst truth of all is by God, it's a mirror.

(Jolly, 2011).

An acknowledgement of the failings of their offending identity ("revolting", a "shameless sinner", with "more brawn than brain"), also comes with a sense of distance, of seeing this version of themselves through glass, apart from an integrated lived experience. Arguably, the process of the poetry itself here can be seen as helping to facilitate this process. Through creating different characters to represent and explore their different experiences of self, the authors can be seen to be engaging in a 'polyphonic' (Bakhtin, 1986) reflection on their own subjective experience. Within the context of prison environments which are consistently described as preventing and shutting down engagement in reflective practices of the self, this points to the value of poetry as both a personal practice and research method.

Reflecting on the past, and projecting to the future

The final aspect of poetry which was clear from those examined for this study, was the capacity to allow the authors to reflect imaginatively on experiences outside of the limited time and space of the prison. For some, this included reflection on past trauma and emotional blunting, as they explored the origins of their offending behaviour and 'cast selves':

Extract 9:

You see it started so tall and free,

It lived with its fellows,

Under the canopy,

Their weapon of choice, the JCB,

…Hacked down mercilessly,

Axe chopping its roots,

Dying was the decree,

Caged and bound,

Headed for the slaughterhouse,

…Would it accept its fate as its destiny?

(Ahmad, 2014).

Here a rich imagery is created of security and protection ('with fellows', 'under the canopy') to be followed by a brutal termination. Uses of descriptors such as 'hacking' and 'chopping' indicate not only exposure to damaging and unpredictable events but also a sense of disregard for Ahmad's safety, growth, and even bodily integrity. This indifference is embodied in the image of the JCB, which encapsulates blind, encompassing destruction, as well as deep, excavating change. Loss is portrayed here both through the felling of a 'giant/so tall', and the axing of the roots, the life force of a tree, and by extension a core part of Ahmad. This transformation can be understood as a narrative breakdown; the dissolution of this apparently secure, 'canopied' world and facilitate revision of personal beliefs ('caged and bound') and direction ('accept fate', 'headed for slaughterhouse'), as well as the renewed need for self-protection.

As well as such evocative explorations of past emotional trauma, authors also contemplated projecting themselves into the future, beyond prison. Many expressed concerns that the self they had constructed in prison would be unable to adapt again to civilian life, due to their offending past:

Extract 10:

I can't but think will I ever fit back in?

There's one massive problem,

My dreadful sin.

(Anon, 2014)

While others expressed concern that they would be able to find and build on their deeply hidden 'held self':

Extract 11:

I'm always something contrived,

I'm not even sure,

If the real me is alive.

(Williams, 2013)

These examples seem to support Maruna's (2001) assertion that prison can lead to a 'crisis of narrative', which can, through the self reflection explored in the above section, potentially lead to emotional healing. It appears that as some authors attempt to reintegrate into society, they do indeed begin seeking an 'acceptable' identity separate from crime (Maruna, 2001). This attempt at separation is seen in this author's reference to his 'dreadful sin' which indicates both disapproval of past actions and a recognition that these actions were his own.

Here authors associate the restructuring of identities and subsequent return to 'humanity' or their 'held self' to the achievement of personal change and growth. Mullins describes this process of restructuring and associates his 'held self' with positive change:

Extract 12:

Hindered only by my own pessimistic mental projections,

…I am the architect of my own cat A prison,

That keeps me bound, confined and trapped within this position,

Where I am unable to grasp and to reach my goals and ambitions.

(Mullins, 2014)

Mullins here positions his 'cast self' as a construct which limits possibility; he describes this position as both of his making (architect), but also as limiting of change and growth. By using the metaphor 'Cat A', the highest security prison, he underlines the severity of his felt self-restriction and the difficulties of escaping this pattern, as well as highlighting the potency of his desire for change.

Other authors used the poems as a place in which to imagine reintegration with the 'held self', characterised as a transcendence or journey to an 'unknown' place:

Extract 13:

Stepping forward into the unknown is a scary thing,

Because most of my life I've lived in sin,

…Blinded by darkness,

Trapped inside of me,

…My mum says its never too late

Give yourself a chance", she says,

…I can definitely see the light,

But taking that first little step,

Will be one hell of a fight.

(Smith, 2010)

Or in a contrasting but similar metaphor, as a return home:

Extract 14:

But he was stronger than he thought

And even when he lost, he learned

Then when he discovered

He was not alone

Slowly, the man who wasn't there

Returned

(Jarrett, 2015)

These images of hope, change and a positive imagined future demonstrate the potential power of the imaginary medium of poetry to facilitate the development of 'hoped-for' selves in these imprisoned individuals. Within the limitations of the prison environment, with the constrictions outlined above on potential expressions and versions of subjectivity, this can be seen as an important tool for people in prison. As researchers, it also highlights the potential potency of poetic forms of expression in helping us to understand the ways in which people make sense of their past, present and future selves.

Conclusions

This paper has explored one example of using poetry as a way to explore subjectivity and emotional experience in secure settings, whereby hierarchical power relationships might inhibit or block the discussion of such experiences. Through Narrative Thematic Analysis of offending individual's poems, three key ways in which poetry might help to access these parts

of offending individual's' subjectivity were explored. Firstly, as highlighted by multiple authors (Prendergast et al, 2009; Boden, 2013; Furman, 2004), poems as a metaphorical 'feeling-picture' (Leavy, 2015) brought the emotional, visceral parts of the author's experiences to the fore. The metaphorical language used particularly highlighted a dual 'held' and 'cast' self, similar to the process highlighted by Maruna (2001) in describing desistance narratives. In contrast to the problems outlined in research and therapy within prison environments (Kougiali et al, 2017), the authors here disclosed and discussed their emotional experience, without guidance or prompting from professionals. This finding gives credence to the view that arts practices within prison could be a rich seam of experiential data which could help to mitigate the power relations which infuse prison relationships.

In addition, we noted that many of the poems included images of mirrors and reflection, which we explored here as a potential for poetic forms to be used to facilitate personal reflection and engage in dialogue with the self (Bakhtin, 1986). Finally, the capacity of poems, and other forms of creative and arts expression, to transport, imagine and reimagine beyond the confines of the current environment were explored (Shipman & McGrath, 2016). Considering the particular constraints of the prison environment, in promoting a hypermasculine 'cast self' (Jewkes, 2005), this capacity of transportation can be seen as another potential use of poetic forms for exploring subjectivity and emotional experience with imprisoned individuals.

One implication from this research is that it may be useful to remove professional focus from changing inmate 'behaviours', which this data suggests are perceived by inmates as the 'cast self' functioning effectively for self protection, and instead focus on creation of 'safe spaces' (Crewe et al, 2014) within the prison environment. These might serve to foster

atmospheres where inmates are able to be gradually more authentic while retaining a sense of personal security, and start to explore alternative identities and behaviours associated with non criminality and personal progression. Stevens (2012) has demonstrated it is possible to provide such spaces within prison showing that creating places where inmates are treated as individuals using first names and reference to positive capacities ie; 'student' rather than deficit-focussed terms ie: 'offender'. It is argued that these spaces allow the mutual suspicion and diffidence associated to the prison environment to be laid aside in favour of attributes such as balanced power distribution and trust, which are more favourable to the therapeutic process, introspection and positive change (Ward and Brown, 2004).

It can be argued that using art-based methods and data, such as found poetry, can mediate understanding of individual lives and representations of self or as Richardson (2000:11) notes recreate lived experience and emotional responses in a way that allows for 'silenced' voices to be heard (Denzin, 1997). Despite their benefits, such data have not been used extensively for research purposes. On issue may be that while other forms of qualitative inquiry have established strategies guiding analysis and categorisation of findings, there is less such guidance on the ways poetry can be analysed and presented. Such an analysis would heavily depend on the interpretation of data in a way that is dissimilar to the, most often, chronologically linear and temporally ordered nature of interview transcripts. An additional limitation that needs further examination is the way such data can be analysed, as research principles and elements emerging from artistic styles and linguistic devices are often entangled. It is suggested that a clearer analytical methodology and strategy is formulated in order for data that can contribute to our understanding of lived experience can be further explored and presented.

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