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'An Investigation into the Mass Communication Consumption in a Closed Male Young Offenders Institution'

An Investigation into the Mass Communication Consumption in a Closed Male Young Offenders Institution

Abstract

This essay provides an account of some research carried out at a Young Offenders' Institution, into mass communication use and consumption in a closed prison institution. The research indicates that all forms of communication are limited, restricted and controlled in this type of situation. This restricted access can lead to boredom and stress, all of which have serious implications for bullying, self-harm and suicide in prison. The findings also suggest that the prisoners have an intrinsic drive and complex need to remain in contact with the wider community, as a result of incarceration. These needs can be satisfied and often diverted via choice and selection of various communication systems. However, as choice and selection is limited there is an adverse impact on identity, and particularly the individuals' ability to maintain and manage cultural identity, in the face of incarceration. This essay therefore advocates the need to improve communication access for young offenders.[1]

Key words:

prisons, audiences, identity, boredom, coping

The use of mass communications is part of everyday life in industrialised societies: but what about on the 'inside'? This question inspired me to carry out research into mass communication use in a prison, Glen Parva Young Offenders' Institution in Leicester. Coincidentally, at the time I embarked on this study, Yvonne Jewkes had just completed her study of 'media, masculinity and power in prisons' which was published later in the book *Captive Audiences* (2002).   Jewkes' study (2002) alerted me to important methodological and theoretical issues in relation to doing research (1) into the *use* of media and (2) *with* prisoners in prisons. In particular it was evident during the empirical research phase of my project that the context, being the prison, smudges the definition of what media (mass communications) are and what their primary forms are. As a consequence, for the purpose of this article, mass communication refers to mediated

forms of communication such as television, radio, music, video, newspapers, magazines, literature and internet. However, in addition, the term also needs to include primary forms of communication such as telephone and letters. Since this research maps the access of all forms of communication, the differences and similarities between communication systems can be understood by how they are used and what symbolic significance they may have to the prisoners who took part in this study. But beyond this, as Jewkes highlights,

> the study of media consumption among prison inmates might not only illuminate aspects of the social world of the prison, but also indicate why it is that media are so important to all of us in providing channels of communication, information and entertainment, and in forming identities, positioning ourselves in relation to others within social hierarchies and creating a sense of ourselves in time and space.[2]

Rationale

The initial concern and impetus for this research project was to offer an alternative to the current theories and debates within the Media and Cultural Studies discourse. I sought to challenge the primary emphasis of the 'domestic' environment in which audiences are traditionally understood and researched (Morley 1992, 1986). Research and theory in this area frequently reiterate that '*mediated communication* is a quintessentially domestic activity'[3] (Lindlof & Meyer 1987, Morley & Silverstone 1990). Hence, the domestic sphere has been considered to be the standard locale for using and consuming communication, from TV to telephone. Conversely, Jewkes (2002) suggests that:

> media resources and texts have been employed by 'ordinary' people- in contexts other than that of the family or household, and particularly as sources of individual identification and resistance to the dislocated and disempowered- remain important but under-researched areas.[4]

In addition, Johnson (2004) has commented that 'no one has systematically studied the role of TV in prison adjustment, but it is common knowledge that TVs are widespread in prison and are … lauded by officials as a way to keep prisoners passively engaged.'[5]

My aim was to map the *use* of mass communications in a prison institution and explore how this activity helped or hindered prisoners during incarceration, especially during periods of isolation and boredom. The empirical research revealed some interesting nuances which affect the ways in which we should explore mass communication use or consumption, as well as carry out research in a prison situation. Unlike Jewkes' study (2002), which focuses on qualitative data in relation to identity, specifically masculinity and power, in this study I use both quantitative and qualitative data to explore the use of

mass communications; my research reveals a continuous struggle to get and maintain access to mass communications. I also found that to motivate prisoners to talk about their use and consumption of mass communications the actual context of use often proved more important than the content of what they used. This is because, contrary to what appears to be popular belief, access is limited, restricted and controlled.

Research Venue and Methodology

Glen Parva Young Offenders' Institution (YOI) houses approximately 750 male prisoners at any one time; they are aged between 18-21 years old. This prison holds both remand (awaiting sentence outcome) and convicted (sentenced) prisoners. I sought access to the prisoners via approval of the institution's Governor, and the fieldwork was facilitated by the Education Unit. This meant that the empirical work was carried out in and sometimes alongside educational classes. These types of access allowed me to access a large number of prisoners in a short space of time and I could ask the prisoners to take part in the various stages of the research. In addition, repeat visits meant that I could also access the same prisoners I greeted on previous visits. The limitations of having restricted access to the Education Unit were that the sample was not entirely representative of the prison population in this institution. Large sections of the prison community at Glen Parva also have employment within the prison; with the remaining prisoners locked in their cells (banged-up) when prisoner activities were running during the day time.

Quantitative and qualitative data were collected using four research techniques: diaries, questionnaires, focus groups, and semi-structured interviews. Basic data were gained by the use of diaries in which volunteers recorded their mass communication use for a two-week period. The participants were given a sheet for each separate day. They were asked to record the type of mass communication they used into hourly time slots set out on the sheet. Alongside this diary method, semi-structured interviews and questionnaires were administered. The synthesis of the resulting data provided rich personal accounts which described the experiences of using and accessing mass communications in this kind of environment. The research instruments had different principal intentions. Each research tool was designed and implemented to meet a set of criteria based on the outcomes of a literature review, which included research, theory, commentary on mass communications and the sociology of imprisonment. Four key areas were identified as the focus of my study, resulting in a model which provided the framework for the methodology and analysis of the data. These areas also included some important research questions pertaining to audiences in prison:

1. *Everyday Life in Prison:* This notion offered an alternative to the domestic setting in matters of audience reception and uses of communication systems. The research sought to provide a contrast / comparison to the 'politics of the living room' (Cubitt

1985, Morley 1992) and to examine the 'circuit of culture' (du Gay 1997) by considering:

- *Availability* of mass communications

- *Ability* to engage with communication systems

- *Negotiation* techniques apparent in the prison setting

2. *Taste and Choice:* This mapped and recorded the individual tastes and choices of male young offenders through their mass communication use. It explored any patterns of use by considering the experience of time and lifestyles in prison, by acknowledging:

- *Routes* chosen to subscribe to identities (Clifford 1997)

- *Effects of Deprivation* on choice and consumption of mass communications (Sykes 1970, Goffman 1959)

- *Media Rich or Media Poor?* Indicators to establish whether the prison environment has an abundance or scarcity of mass communications (Hagell and Newburn 1994)

3. *Needs:* This examined the personal needs of prisoners in terms of mass communication use by considering:

- *Uses and Gratifications:* These were taken to include diversion, personal relationships, personal identity and surveillance (Blumler and Katz 1974).

- *Para-Social Interaction*: The importance of belonging to a wider, social community and formulation of intimate relationships with media personalities and characters as if they were 'real' people (Horton and Worhl 1956 and Meyrowitz 1985).

4. *Consequences of Incarceration:* This examined the role and importance of mass communications to male young offenders and the effects this had on:

- *Collective identities:* To recognise the problems with identity management in the prison environment (Moores,2000).

- *Degrees of media dependency:* To highlight the importance of media and other forms of communication in a prison setting (Vandebosch 2000).

- *Morale and Self-esteem:* The extent to which mass communication systems can improve these (Liebling & Krarup 1992).

The research tools were designed to allow me to explore these key themes, and to enable me to triangulate quantitative with qualitative data and vice versa. Since the research was small scale, in that it was located in one prison over a limited time scale, the investigation was designed to open up a debate about audiences inside prison and to provide informed evidence that might lead to more extended investigations on these issues.

The focus group sessions were an important and valuable stage in evolving my research methodology. These helped me to be introduced to prison from a prisoner perspective and hear about their experiences as prisoners *using* mass communications. They also allowed me to explore *access* and *availability* of mass communications in this institution and thus form an outline of everyday life in prison, from the perspective of a young male prisoner. From the diaries and focus groups, I was able to generate lists and schedules of a typical day in this prison. These enabled me to map the kinds of processes involved in gaining access to mass communications in prison. This then helped me to draft, pilot and finalise the questionnaires, and the interview schedules and to develop the diary schedules to suit the prison context and also the participants. This approach enabled me to design questions that were relevant to my own criteria or model, but also be appropriate to the context of *this* particular prison, at that particular time.

To begin with, then, *focus groups* (semi-structured group discussions) with two separate groups of prisoners (convicted and remanded) were held. The aim was to build an understanding of 'everyday life' in prison; and to establish how mass communications are accessed, made available and negotiated within this institution, as part of this. These also provided data in relation to how everyday life in prison is structured, organised and regulated through the prison regime.

Mass Communication diaries followed the focus group sessions. The diaries were personal records; they mapped each individual's use of and access to mass communications over a two week period. They also of course provided evidence of personal or individual choice and taste in mass communications, such as the types of music listened to and the choice of television programmes. They also identified different locales of mass communication use within this environment; such as in-cell, outside cell on units, and in education.

Mass Communication questionnaires were administered. The completed questionnaires confirmed individual preferences, such as individuals' choice of newspaper, their preferred genres of television programme, film and music, the levels of access, and their reasons for use of mass communications in prison. Finally, they also allowed me to explore the relations between levels of morale and self-esteem, and mass communication use.

The s*emi-structured interviews* drew together evidence from focus groups, diaries and questionnaires. Here, the primary focus was on the 'consequences of incarceration' and on personal 'uses and gratifications' of mass communication use. In addition, individual perspectives on the differences between media use in prison compared to 'home' on the outside were also considered. The interview data provided evidence to enable me to triangulate the findings from the focus groups, diaries and questionnaires.

Analysis of the data was developed and refined as I became more sure of my own research model (based on relevant literature) and of the data themselves. Processing the quantitative data (such as the proportions of prisoners who have in-cell television) was a useful opportunity to both remind of the central issues that relate to access to mass communications in prison. This enabled me to become more confident in my interviewing technique, particularly for subsequent visits to the prison, thus enhancing the depth of the stories that the prisoners told about their experiences. Analysis was originally framed around the model I set out in the inception of the study. However cross references of data between different research tools, such as between questionnaires and diaries, allowed me not only to refine my understanding of the data I had gathered but also to pursue further secondary data, for example from official prison policy literature or other kinds of research. Thus matching, checking and cross-referencing allowed me explore the consumption of mass communications in prison on a number of levels, which included personal, cultural, institutional and societal themes. Jewkes (2002) has identified the need to address the relationship of media at several different levels: the 'microsocial, meso-sphere and macrosocial'[6] I believe that I have been able to provide a map of mass communication use in a prison context, which echoed Jewkes' levels.

It was evident that I myself, and my beliefs, played a significant resource in the way I have analysed the data – especially the qualitative data. As Denscombe (2003) suggests, 'the researcher's identity, values and beliefs cannot be entirely eliminated from the process … the researcher's self is inevitably an integral part of the analysis, and should be acknowledged as such'[7]. Consequently I acknowledge that my interpretations of the data (in the shape of comments on questionnaires and texts from interviews) were shaped by the identification of 'patterns and processes, commonalities and differences'[8] (Miles and Huberman 1994) which I believed I could see in the data.

In addition to this in-house research the national prisoner newspaper *Inside Time* enabled me to request responses from prisoners in other HMP institutions. A letter from me was published which generated some detailed and lengthy responses from the wider prisoner community. This enabled me to relate and triangulate my findings to wider responses from prisoners in other prison institutions to some of the findings that emerged from my study.

Finally, I maintained a personal record of my visits to the institution. This record did not feature as a resource in my final thesis, but instead helped me to shape my ideas and recognise issues about *doing* social research with prisoners (see King and Wincup

2000). Here I noted my personal observations and feelings about carrying out the fieldwork. I found it useful to document how I as (1) a researcher and (2) a female in a predominantly male environment managed and coped with the task of exploring the research phenomena. I found at times that prolonged periods of listening to and interacting with the people that took part in my study both emotionally rewarding and also draining. It was often outside the 'interview' or visit for example that I was able to observe and assess evidence of the processes described to me by the interviewees or participants and also how my presence could invoke responses from those individuals I came into contact with.

Significant Findings

In this essay I can only deal in any detail with a few of the project's findings, but in order to give them a context within the overall scope of my study, I set out in brief the main outcomes of my entire project:

1. Everyday life in prison is governed by routine and strict regime, in which access to communication systems is regulated by the incentive and earnings privilege system (IEP). As a consequence, the types and frequency of communication use are related to good conduct and behaviour. This could be entitlements to in-cell television rather than communal television on the prison wing, and association time where prisoners are let out of their cells to use the telephone, watch TV and videos and interact with other people. The incentive system is based principally on obtaining and maintaining communication access and opportunities.

2. The need to communicate is magnified by the nature of incarceration as there is an intrinsic drive or hunger for individuals to remain in contact with the wider outside community (both interpersonal and mediated). Communication needs are established before imprisonment, isolation from the outside world increases the desire to communicate, and individuals thus become more communication-dependent. In particular accounts of 'bang-up' time indicate that prisoners go to extreme lengths to try and satisfy this desire.

3. The prison environment can be described as 'communication poor', as there is limited access to all forms of communication. The privilege system enables prisoners to become more 'communication rich', by earning access to in-cell TV, income to buy telephone cards, stamps, magazines and newspapers and more regular opportunities for association time. Furthermore, this is often complicated by the differences in the abilities of prisoners to understand this system and behave in a desirable manner, and inconsistencies in the application of prison rules and regime by staff throughout the prison.

4. Boredom is a significant and complex experience of imprisonment and use of communication systems serves as a diversion and a stimulus, and thus reduces

stress.

5. Consumption of mediated forms of communication such as television is significantly lower than consumption on the outside. Conversely 'lads' lifestyle' magazines (e.g. *FHM, Loaded, Maxim)* and pornography are consumed at an increased rate compared to the outside. Magazines are frequently circulated amongst prisoners, thus having more readers per magazine than the outside. They also serve as 'currency' in the absence of cash inside prison, magazines and telephone cards are exchanged for other goods. Cultural consumption alters and shifts as a result of imprisonment.

6. Both prisoners and the institution reproduce a version of domestic routines. Clock or scheduled time is reproduced and imposed by the institution and its staff in routines like the working week (Monday to Friday) and weekends and the timing of activities such as meals and education or work. Secondly, prisoner consumption of mass communication such as peak viewing of television and listening to music and radio at weekends is typical of domestic routines outside.

7. Understanding and interpretation of institutional practices and policies is not uniform. As a result some individuals are more aware of entitlements than others, consequently this can bring about further anxieties, isolation and stress.

8. Consumption of mass communications indicates and reinforces broad 'collective identities' such as the young male heterosexual 'lad' cultures, especially through media such as magazines and music. However the evidence suggests that there is diversity in choice and selection of music, which reinforces individuality rather than collectivity.

9. Imprisonment does not completely 'mortify the self' (Goffman 1959) as individuality and cultural identity are evident and negotiated through choice and taste of communication systems, particularly through preferences in music and print media. There is however a shift from previous consuming behaviour, as individuals adopt behavioural patterns according to their immediate circumstances and environment.

Based on these general outcomes, this essay discusses three of the major issues that emerged from this research. I hope that these may contribute to important debates in relation to penal policy by raising new concerns about the 'state' of our prisons. The three issues are: 1. Everyday Life in Prison: Access to and Availability of Mass Communications; 2. Consequences of Incarceration, and 3. Boredom

1.   Everyday Life in Prison: Access and Availability to Mass Communications

According to Vandebosch's (2000) account of 'degrees of media dependency'[9] or levels of importance or need, prisoners have a need for and actively make a choice to have some media system in their own personal space or cells. Furthermore everyday life is punctuated and exists not only with and along side mass communications but as many commentators have begun to suggest 'the relationship between everyday life and the media is in fact more than this and that media *is* everyday life'[10] (see also Morley and Silverstone 1991 & Silverstone 1994). O'Sullivan et al suggest that media saturation and its constant presence in everyday life emerges from the accompaniment of hardware, like television sets, video recorders, in certain settings particularly the domestic. O'Sullivan states 'statistically and culturally, it is deviant to live without at least one TV. More than 80 per cent of households in Britain now have at least one video cassette recorder.'[11]

Key debates about the presence of mass communication in our lives have suggested that we have integrated these technological systems into our everyday lives and it can be argued that we have become reliant on their use, function and presence in our everyday lives. Involuntary removal of persons from these everyday locales such as the home or work, to a prison institution can, according to Vandebosch, increase a prisoner's dependence on mass communications due to the actual process of imprisonment; more specifically the removal of civil liberties and freedom. This is because prisoners need to interact socially with a wider outside community precisely because they are physically not part of it. The removal of liberty deprives or limits prisoners of purposeful activity. This hinders their ability to retain meaningful links or any sense of belonging beyond the prison walls. As Jewkes describes the situation, 'prisoners are concerned about being cut off from the outside world to an extent where they fear that on release they will be as aliens in an unknown world. The benefits of having wide access to the media of mass communications…'[12] are obvious.

Thus the potency, relevance and value of mass communications in prison is accentuated by the experience of incarceration. Incidentally the experience and meaning of everyday life shifts to adjust to this phenomenon, especially in terms of preserving, limiting and avoiding the fear of losing autonomy, becoming contaminated and assaulted and the trepidation of personal deterioration and breakdown (see Jewkes 2002, Cohen and Taylor 1972, Sykes 1970).

The dependence on communication is magnified by the experience of incarceration because it can help to eliminate boredom and provide opportunity for para-social interaction (Horton & Wohl, 1954, Meyrowitz, 1985), and which evidence in my study extends to wider outside monitoring of cultures the young men associate with, for instance. The participants' responses in the questionnaires and semi-structured interviews suggest that prisoners' talk about celebrities and characters in soaps (usually based on their opinion of them) indicated that para-social interaction was much more significant and relevant than what it would appear to be on the 'outside'.

Opportunities for this are highlighted in the popularity of 'lads lifestyle' magazines such as *FHM, Loaded* and *Maxim*. The usefulness of these magazines provide contemporary information, updates on many facets of a 'lad culture' which they seek to remain part of. Imprisonment partially deprives these young men of being physically 'in' this culture, consuming these types of magazines allows them to sustain an identity that is broadly associated with being young and male of which ideologies especially in relation to heterosexuality, based on the dominant presence of half naked women, can be constructed and vividly mobilized. These types of magazines not only provide reading material, but are also used as texts in the shape of pictures that can be openly displayed on their cell walls as motifs of their identity[13].

My data suggest that this institution is what Hagell and Newburn (1994) would define as 'media poor' in terms of access, availability and ability to use mass communication systems; yet there is at the same time an increased interest to communicate and interact with and sustain links the 'outside', either through direct interaction with others or through maintaining knowledge about the 'outside' to construct their identity. In the absence of mediated forms of communication reliance on interpersonal communication such as letters from outside, speaking down the toilet to fellow prisoners (in neighbouring cells) and 'catching a line' (sending messages on string from cell windows), demonstrates the lengths individuals go to, in order to communicate. Forsythe (2004) highlights how communicative opportunities in prisons were traditionally (and still remain to be) restricted. His exploration of Victorian prisons provides some explanations for this:

> the purpose of restricting communication was to deprive the prisoner of the solaces and reinforcements of association and ensure that all communication was consistent with purposes of discipline and reformation'.[14]

As I found in my study, the prisoners find ways to overcome these restrictions just like their predecessors a century ago. As I also found, Forsythe remarked that 'prisoners did not, of course, readily accept this prohibition on communication and devised most ingenious methods of making contact with their fellows.'[15] He lists methods like, 'Morse code', ability to talk 'without moving lips', developing facial expressions, and writing secret newsletters on toilet paper. The young men who participated in my study regularly observed the prison rules, but found ways of 'getting round them' or criticising them. As one prisoner noted, rules were sometime contradictory: 'prison sells blank tapes, but you are not supposed to swap anything, so we pass music on at our own risk.' It is apparent that the prison environment has both historically (and currently still is the case) and socially been synonymous with communicative poverty.

Based on this observation, access and ability to use mass communications are limited and consequently there appears to be an increased dependency on other more available and less traditional methods. It is worth considering evidence from an exercise in my focus groups, in which the young male prisoners were asked to note down key activities in a typical day. Combined with the data from the mass communication diaries, this

suggested that the average prisoner spends approximately 18 hours per day locked up in their cell. Forsythe found that the typical Victorian prisoner spent between 16 to 23 hours confined to the cells.[16] This is a further suggestion that incarceration embodies long periods of isolation and regulated and controlled schedules. This restriction applies to all types of communicative opportunities; this environment is not only 'media poor' but also communication poor.

The impact that communication poverty has on everyday life in prison affects prisoners' experience of time. Communication poverty hinders individuals fully engaging in the tempo of human existence. As Adam (1994) suggests, human existence is 'structured and punctuated by socially marked stages'[17]. Despite the 'institutional beat'[18] that is so overt in prison (such as when it is time to get up, go to work or education, eat meals, shower, have visits from friends and family and lights out), the ownership of this time does not belong to the prisoner, it is shaped and administered by the institution (Cope 2003). Therein, since mass communication use is limited, opportunities for prisoners to secure their own tempo or beat through choices in various media products like newspapers are reduced. Therefore dailiness, which can be understood according to Scannell (1988) as the 'unobtrusive ways in which broadcasting sustains the lives and routines, from one day to the next, year in, year out, of whole populations'[19], can become obscured; marked time is suspended or hindered. At this point prisoners' well being, autonomy and identity associated with everyday life subtly shift to bear the burden of incarceration.

Prisoners highlighted their reliance on communication systems by their awareness of its absence or scarcity for them, especially compared to their life outside prison. The prisoners' talk of their use of communication systems is overwhelmed by their concerns for access to them. One example to illustrate this – in a message on his completed two-week diary, one young man wrote:

I'm sorry to say I have no radio or TV, so it may be not be of much help to you. If it is no help I apologise. All it consists of is the basic everyday life of a prison in here with no TV, radio. It just shows you all we do is eat, sleep, read, go to education/gym and on association.' (Diarist 6)

Given the choice the prisoners in my study would like reasonable access to all communication systems. A large proportion of this sample (77%) had at least one problem using and accessing communication systems in jail. They realise the benefits that communication access has in reducing stress. One interviewee declared he was not stressed in prison but recommended that 'Everyone should be entitled to TV apart from bullies… [it will] shut people up….they'd be no shouting, less fighting and less stressful' (Interviewee 5)

Moreover, the stress experienced in prison is different from the stress of everyday life on the outside. Giddens (1984) suggests routine is important for sustaining 'ontological

security'[20] or the capacity to predict what will be. But despite the overt predictability of the prison regime in terms of marked time and activities, this 'ontological security' is destabilized. The TV schedule or guide is a good example: some prisoners valued them enormously. However, the function of the TV guide seemed to be redundant to some prisoners. In the first instance 'these cost money', as one prisoner explained, and another prisoner suggested that looking at one 'would only piss you off' in instances where prisoners do not have in-cell television. The television and more often radio schedule allow for only partial 'ontological security' since the removal of access and money to service them is constantly in threat. The opportunity to have predictable, regular and frequent access is constantly being challenged, thus making it into a luxury and contributing to these complex stresses.

Equally, the environment is often volatile, with a constant threat of violence and bullying, but there is little opportunity or physical space for prisoners to withdraw into. The prison cell, as many of the prisoners in my study highlighted is not their own, it is not private; it is a public space, which prison officers and officials can enter at any given time. As Jewkes emphasises, the prison cell or the remaining space is not the same as the domestic space, in which mass communication use can shape the environment and experience of that space. She argues that:

> the prisoner's cell is fundamentally and symbolically the same as it has always been. Although cosmetically different now that posters and photographs are allowed on the walls, in-cell television has been installed (in some institutions) and integral sanitation has been introduced…it still bears little relation to other environments in 'normal' life.[21]

Despite this, spaces and identities are re-presented to mimic 'normal' life with the public use of mass communications such as newspapers and magazines as motifs of the 'outside' world.

The limitations of 'ontological security' can be extended to other communicative links, as one individual pointed out:

> if you get a bad letter or phone call … like if something happens to your family and nothing can get done. Some people take the piss and that's what spoils it for the genuine cases … the screws think you are pulling a fast one and only if it is in writing can something be done.' (Interviewee 8)

The lack of communications and inconsistent 'ontological security', combined with a sense of loss of valued goods such as freedom and autonomy, illustrate how distorted and extraordinary the experience of everyday life in prison is. It also demonstrates how complicated is the relationship which prisoners have with mass communications.

2.   Consequences of Incarceration

My research suggests that the frustration of isolation and boredom is magnified by the prison situation and as a consequence individuals will alter their consuming behaviour in order to mobilize their selves in a confined world. This is affected routinely by prison policy on access to mass communications. The seriousness of stress in this environment is evident in the significant amount of bullying, violence, self-harm and suicide within the prison population**.** Lyon (cited in Bryans and Jones 2001) describes the 'hallmarks of vulnerability in young people' as 'experience of loss, isolation, lack of support, low self-esteem, sense of powerlessness/ helplessness and uncertain future.'[22]

This echoes the work of Liebling and Krarup (1993) whose analysis of reasons for suicide attempts in male prisons, found that prisoners described domestic issues (31%) such as 'contact problems' as a major causal factor. For situational problems such as regime, boredom, bang-up and visits, 50% of Liebling and Krarup's study described these as reasons for suicide attempts.[23] The findings from my research do not suggest that improved communication will prevent these scenarios from occurring. However communication use and access is a significant and crucial factor towards improving 'ontological security'. Different communication systems are used for very different reasons; the pleasures and escapism of magazines and music, or the direct contact with family and friends in letters, telephone calls and visits help to reduce or limit the problems which Liebling and Krarup highlight. One individual offers this description:

along with phone calls, letters are the most cherished form of communication in jails, the world over I suspect. The smell of a scented letter, the photos inside of your kids, the family that you may not have seen for years, these things are priceless, whilst we have language, letter writing will continue, no TV or prison officer can deny the power of language. (Letter Respondent 3)

Dooley (1991) also suggests that

isolation from contact from others is only likely to exacerbate feelings of hopelessness…there is a need dramatically to improve communication, both internally between staff and prisoners and externally between prisoners and the outside world…communication with outside could be facilitated by extending the access to telephone by prisoners and by more liberal visiting and access procedures.[24]

In line with this, some of the interviewees made recommendations for communication access in prison: 'we need more phones and privacy … so other prisoners can't hear you…I realise that the phone calls need to be taped … but still it should be private.' (Interviewee 4) The telephone points in prison wings are in public view for all to hear and see, and the lack of privacy adds to the anxiety individuals often feel. The transparency of the prison environment reinforces the notion that prisons are public spaces, not in the

ordinary sense in that anyone can access them, far from this, but where privacy is so overtly denied. Moreover, this illustrates how different the prison space is compared to the domestic space i.e. the home. Silverstone (1994) suggests that a communication system like 'television is a domestic medium.'[25] He describes the home as:

> a place of conflict and despair as well as of peace and security. It can be a haven or a prison…They are social, economic, cultural and political spaces. And they are technological spaces … we need to preserve our concern with television as a domestic medium.[26]

It is evident from the responses from the questionnaires and interviews that even when individuals get access, they still experience problems. The active monitoring and control of communication systems such as the telephone and letters is ostensibly for security reasons. However the establishment regime creates tension and additional anxieties, and the threat that their television and radio or opportunities to buy phone cards and stamps can be taken away, often without explanation, is always present in their minds. The 'us' and 'them' sentiment is magnified, and this resentment increases isolation, annoyance, anger and stress. The removal of opportunities to access the media arguably contravenes the Human Rights Act (1998). Under Article 10 or 'freedom to expression'[27], the access to media sources is a basic human right. However prisoners are not deemed as citizens because 'politically and institutionally, [they] have for the most part forfeited their rights as citizens; and prisons are seen as institutions which are set apart from ordinary society'.[28] Moreover, citizenship, in this context might also mean more than the ability to engage in political life. Imprisonment also denies communicative opportunities which can be extended to the ways in which people create and manage their own personal space and also time. Being able to physically move in and out of 'public' and 'private' locales is an important feature for individuals to construct meanings and understandings of their experience or situation. In prison the ability to manage and control their own space and time is ostensibly limited, denied and often altogether removed. A prisoner's ability to make sense of their time and space in prison is constantly in a indeterminate state.

In attempting to recommend solutions to this it is evident from my research findings that certain factors can and do contribute to prison stress, such as overt public control of communicative opportunities. In particular there is an intrinsic and complex need to remain in contact with the wider community via choice and selection of communication systems. As Sir David Ramsbotham has stressed:

> Everyone is encouraged to improve themselves and given the opportunity of doing so through access to purposeful activity. Nothing is more likely to encourage suicide or self-harm than being locked up in a cell the whole time, frustrated bored and idle.[29]

The abundance of time that prisoners are faced with highlights some of the difficulties in explaining how people generally use time. Linder (1970) suggests that a 'leisure problem'[30] has emerged in industrialised societies. The 'problem' is that in societies where time is scarce, additional time is still required in order to consume and be at leisure. The prisoners in this study have an abundance of time and are effectively required to engage in what Gramsci (1975) describes as 'forced leisure'.[31]   This problem is magnified because there are limited opportunities to consume valued goods such as mass communications. The idle nature of imprisonment can be explained by 'time surplus'[32], a culture in which there is too much time with very little to do. In essence, prisoners wait for activity and opportunities to do something in order to divert boredom, isolation and idleness. Likewise, during activity, they wait for the next opportunity to do something else. Engaging with mass communications partly diverts and possibly quickens the waiting process. As Adam (1994) indicates, waiting can be imposed upon individuals in order to exert power over them. In the instance of prison, the institutional regime directly and explicitly imposes long periods of waiting onto the prisoners.

3.   Boredom

The nature of incarceration increases the frequency of boredom, and periods of waiting and 'bang-up' time in turn increase isolation. These together decrease the opportunity to communicate on all levels. The findings from my research suggest that the vast majority (94%) of the respondents are bored in prison. Prolonged and repeated periods of boredom occur when time is in surplus (Linder 1970) and opportunities to engage in activities are limited (physically and economically) or even non-existent. In these instances prisoners expressed common desires for stimulation and communication mechanisms in order to counteract boredom and the waiting for opportunities of activity, such as tomorrow morning's newspaper, letters or next month's magazine. One individual explained that he was:

always beating boredom, prison is all about being bored. I do anything to pass a minute, so it goes quicker. I am constantly doing things to beat boredom like, roll a burn, take the piss, that's where bullying starts, bullies are bored. I write letters, have a wash, watch TV, brush teeth (laughs). I lose track of days, can't remember dates looking at a calendar is pointless. (Interviewee 4)

For some prisoners boredom might be displayed by anxiety and frustration with the inability to *do* something, as Cohen and Taylor (1976) suggest boredom is 'an invitation for action'[33]. However these feelings of boredom in prison are accentuated even more by the incapacity to engage in activities or tasks of their choosing. The burden of boredom in prison is experienced in a highly conscious way, to some degree prisoners can recognise the impossibility of participation in self-defining activities.

Ways in which prisoners in my research coped and managed with boredom was to strive to remain in regular contact with the 'outside' world, via other systems such as books, letters and radio (Meyrowitz 1986). This is especially the case within the perimeters of their own cells, where these periods of boredom are so starkly evident. The practice of seeking to or use mass communications, for some, assisted their quests to avoid, quash or reduce anxiety and frustration associated with boredom.

HMP Leeds Governor Tasker echoes this sentiment that 'televisions provide contact with the outside world and can help alleviate boredom'. In defence she argues 'they are not a panacea, but I think they have helped.'[34] However access to mass communications is dictated by the incentive and earnings privilege systems set up in prison, such as rights to an in-cell TV, frequency of 'association' time (time outside their cell), which in turn determines access to use the telephone, to interact with other people, have access to newspapers, magazines and have visits from friends and family from the outside. In this way access is fundamentally governed and determined by conduct and behaviour. Individuals have to earn 'points' to gain access to communicative opportunities, by behaving in an 'acceptable' manner. Consequently, for those prisoners who feel they need to prevent or limit boredom, they are further confronted with apprehensions about *getting on* in the prison regime of rewards and privileges.

Similarly privilege mechanisms are also apparent on the 'outside', within the domestic sphere. Desmond's (1987) notion of 'parental mediation'[35] is part of most children's experience. Children are typically punished for undesirable behaviour by removal of privileges such as watching television or listening to music. Alternatively they are rewarded for desirable behaviour by 'offering their children incentives to get good grades. The bribes range from CDs and clothes to large sums of money.'[36] The prison system translates this 'domesticated' routine, by acting as regulators of communication opportunities. However unlike most children on the outside, in the prison setting choice and alternative forms of stimulation are limited or nonexistent. In Ramsbotham's words 'there is virtually nothing with which to occupy prisoners in purposeful activity.'[37] It is useful to suggest then that for some prisoners the rewards and privileges, like in-cell television and access to newspapers are not taken as merely rewards or payment for desirable behaviour, they are important tools to enable prisoners to manage boredom and self-prescribed activity.

In some instances, seeking other ways to dispel boredom does not result in rewards, either because they are not available or even suitable**.** For some of the respondents, activities amount to having a 'laugh':

just have a laugh with others on the wing. Last night we were all shouting and one lad rang the alarm for a laugh, proper funny, saying he was suicidal and got took to the hospital (laughs out loud)' (Interviewee 2)

This is not just for comedy purposes. The extent these individuals (described above) go to, to have a laugh is also serious. In this instance the laugh is at the institution's expense and draws upon their awareness of the realities of what prison entails. The insider knowledge of the regime and routine, combined with their phenomenal sense of boredom becomes the basis for a prank to disrupt the monotony. Here prisoners have temporary power over the institution in an 'attempt to gain control'[38], by seeking ways their own ways to overcome anxiety and frustrations associated with boredom.

My research also indicates ways in which some prisoners make sense of the boredom they can experience. The prison environment prevents prisoners engaging with their choice of music, for example. In the instance of Dance music (the most popular music at this institution) prisoners can listen to it, talk about it and even dance to it, however their interaction with this kind of music is denied. Typically Dance music is received in or associated with clubs, thus with groups of people gathering voluntarily. Listening to this music reminds them of their own wider community, or as Jewkes (2002) suggests it,

> provides material for escapist or romantic fantasies, evoke memories and allow prisoners to transcend the confines of space and time. They reinforce a sense of humanity, uniting the prison population with the wider society in common experience.'[39]

Individuals explained that they liked and listened to 'Hip Hop [because] it's my culture', 'Jungle [I have] liked this since a young age' and 'Garage … lyrics … drugs involved, meaning me in a club.' Music serves as a reminder of certain scenarios which transport the individual directly to these past experiences. This 'effect' that music can have, can highlight that for some prisoners the ways in which they make sense of 'their' music requires them to use music and cognitive processes (i.e. memory). These might serve as a antidote to the kind of boredom they experience in prison. Moreover, music provides the listener with ways in which to mobilise 'cultural capital' or identity. In many ways boredom or the recurring incapacity to choose what to do can stifle the maintenance of one's identity. Boredom gets in the way of being able to use memory to be able to work on one's identity (see Cohen and Taylor 1976). As Miles (2000) suggests in his study of youth culture, the media assist in the creation of 'a generation of nostalgics and retro freaks.'[40] With the respondents' references made to clubs and drugs it is apparent in the light of Miles' comment that the immediate circumstances forces the prisoner to think about their favoured music in terms of how they usually consume it, meaning in the past and not the present. Music serves as a tool to evoke memories and thus be diverted from boredom, the frustrations and anxieties associated with boredom and the restrictive nature of incarceration. In addition, music is a route or mechanism for temporary escapism; they can transcend the confines of space and time. Paradoxically the escape is limited in that it only takes them to the past as the present and the future is postponed by the totality of the routine and physical nature of incarceration.

The dilemma of this boring experience was a common theme that emerged from my research. Despite the strong evidence to suggest that mass communication serves as a diversion from boredom or, as Lull (1990) highlights, 'background noise, companionship, experience illustration, common ground, anxiety reduction and agenda for talk'[41], the regulative and punctuated use of television and radio was deliberately avoided by some of the respondents in this study (see Scannell, cited in Morley 1997). Consequently for some prisoners, the activity of engaging with various media was not a satisfactory remedy for the anxieties and frustrations boredom brings about. For some the process of listening to music or watching television serves to satisfy needs in terms of surveillance, but does not reduce the sensation of boredom. For example, an interviewee remarks how he can monitor the kinds of information he prefers, but some information, like news broadcasts irritate him,

> 'TV and papers … find out what's going off ... don't like listening to the news … it's something you hear all the time … never liked it … you hear it more here and take it for granted.' (Interviewee 4)

Mediated information enables these individuals to make sense of and monitor *their* wider community, particularly outside prison and as Jewkes notes that mediated forms of communications like newspapers and news updates provide a 'seamless flow'[42] and thus contribute to a sustainable 'ontological security'. Paradoxically media broadcasts provide a routine such as 'news updates' which some of the respondents found to be annoyingly repetitive and a stark reminder of time. This conflict between needing to know what is going on and the routine of media broadcasting highlights a dilemma between doing time (serving their sentence) and being part of structural time that is associated predominantly with the outside. For some prisoners broadcast media mark time, but do not necessarily kill or squash time for the phase of imprisonment.

Another individual explained,

'I'm too restless…I get into trouble cos I'm deaf and don't hear them waking you up…I'm also used to working different shifts and my body clock is different…I don't like the routine here…I don't want to get out of the habit…there should be more discussion groups to help you cope and manage your time.' (Interviewee 5)

This interviewee is conscious of the routine imposed in prison, recognising the power it has on his time spent in prison, and does not want to get out of his previous routine, after all he will return to it when he leaves the institution. As Foucault (1977) highlights, 'power is articulated directly onto time, it assures its control and guarantees its use.'[43] The individuals 'do' time to serve their sentence and it is the power of the institution that above all controls this time.

Since 77% of the prisoners' typical day is spent 'banged up', boredom is most likely to occur in their prison cells. Individuals who have in-cell television and radio probably do

not need to look at a calendar, as broadcasts can do this for them (Scannell 1988). Here the marking of time is signified through punctuation of broadcasts. However, this is problematic because they are sentenced to a fixed period in prison, their ultimate aim is to complete this speedily and to return to the world outside. Consequently they are victims of time in two ways. Firstly, they have to serve time in prison for their offences and secondly the routine of prison life is monotonous, being the same everyday; the routine is total, and something over which they have no or little control. We can distinguish two types of time that prisoners may experience: linear time, and cyclical time. Linear time is unfolding time on an infinite continuum, whereas cyclical time is time that returns to the same point at which it began. The monotony of prison time is overtly felt as cyclical and repetitive. Similarly broadcasting in its nature is also cyclical, evident in the scheduled nature of programming on radio and television and also the daily and monthly periodicals event in print media. The ability to differentiate one day from the next is an insignificant and futile task, especially for those beginning their sentences or those serving lengthy sentences. In some instances routine exposure to the media only accentuates the totality of routine in prison. As Cope (2003) suggests prisoners become 'engaged in a process of 'time suspension' … to separate prison time from their time outside.'[44]

During the research visits to Glen Parva YOI it was noted that some individuals referred to the institution as 'Costa de la Parva'. Although a joke, this rhetoric displays an irony which is directed at public resentment that prisons are holiday camps, particularly when it is claimed that prisoners have lavish access to all sorts of communication systems. The popular concept is that imprisonment is a punitive measure set by the judiciary, whereby the process of confinement removes both freedom and choices. However the dilemma is that imprisonment should also address the rehabilitative role, as Prison Rule One stipulates that imprisonment will 'encourage and assist them to lead a good and useful life.'[45] Therefore the intensified boredom could render the rehabilitation of offenders as useless rather than 'useful'. Boredom is experienced by most from time to time and opportunities to select and choose activities to overcome this are usually accessible. It is the restrictions of the prison regime and frequency of communication use, such as television that can intensify this. Further consideration is needed to maintain a balance between punishment and routine and rehabilitation/curative measures in relation to access and use of communication systems.

Conclusion

Conducting this research has highlighted significant differences but also similarities in consuming behaviour of mass communications. In addition, my research suggests that our relationship with media and more broadly mass communications is altered, shifted and reconstructed according to the social and institutional practices of a particular locale. This shift in meaning has implications on audience research from a number of complex and inter-related factors that shape our experience as audiences and consumers. The

context can shape the experience and construction of how media and audiences are defined. As a consequence methodological approaches to designing and analysing audience research are deeply located in context, shift in definitions and the layers of which the social world is constructed. For the researcher to penetrate these layers, especially in a prison environment, it makes research with audiences difficult and often limited. Considerations of access to the institution, prisoners and research participants were repeatedly an issue, compounded by the time allowed, based on (1) institutional routine and regime and (2) the research deadline, cost to carry out the study and sensitivity towards maintaining ethical enquiry. In addition, although participants took part eagerly in my study, they constituted neither a random nor a purposive sample. Rather this was an opportunist sample, based only on my ability to gain access to the institution itself, by authorisation of the Governor, its close proximity to my place of work and home, my contact with prisoners through the Education Unit, and repeated access to the same prisoners throughout the course of the study. Because of the nature of the institution, this study does not touch upon adult or female prisoners. It would be interesting to compare these findings with the experiences of other prisons and prisoners.

This study shows, nonetheless, that audiences in prison are different to audiences outside prison. Imprisonment controls and often denies opportunities to access mass communications. Furthermore, audiences in prison experience surplus amounts of time, which then heightens the sensation of boredom through the creation of prolonged periods of inactivity. The lack of 'ontological security' poses significant problems for the well being of these types of audiences and the role and function of mass communications in the prison environment.

In the light of Prison Service's mission statement and the findings from this study it is imperative to clarify the communicative rights of prisoners in respect of mediated forms such as TV, radio, print media and information technologies such as the Internet, and interpersonal communication such as telephones, letters, visits and social interaction. Engaging with both forms of communication does not just combat boredom. However boredom is a significant, complex and common experience of prisoners, even when they do access mass communications. It is therefore necessary to reassess and consider alternative and less routine orientated programmes of rehabilitation, in order to provide more opportunity to communicate on all levels rather than individuals 'making do;' with the resources they have available to them, particularly during 'bang-up' time.

Fundamentally mass communications are channels and methods for bridging the gap between inside prison and the outside world. They are a fundamental and crucial mechanism for maintaining strong links with their own identity in terms of preventing psychological deterioration and severed links with the outside. Mediated communications do provide the cliché window onto the world, which also allows prisoners to transcend and take control of time and to some extent their experience of space. However, more importantly regular and direct interpersonal social interaction provides a significant lifeline and strategy for coping with and surviving incarceration.

[1] A version of this paper was presented at the 2002 MECCSA Post-graduate Conference at the University of Westminster.

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[7] Denscombe, M. (2003) *The Good Research Guide* p268

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[10] Jewkes, Y (2002) *Captive Audience* p22

[11] O'Sullivan et al (2003) *Studying the Media* p6

[12] Jewkes, Y (2002) *Captive Audience* p21

[13] The findings from this study did begin to reveal some central issues about the construction of masculinities in prison, especially in relation to use of magazines like 'lads' lifestyle' and pornography, in which Jewkes' (2002) study articulates. The focus of this paper is concerned the effects incarceration has on consuming behaviour in the everyday lives of young male offenders, especially in terms of choice, access and availability.

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[15] Ibid. p763

[16] Ibid. p761

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[25] Silverstone, R. (1994) *Television and Everyday Life* p24

[26] Ibid. p25

[27] Human Rights Act (1998) www.hmso.gov.uk/acts/acts1998 (accessed 5 May 2004)

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[30] Linder, S (1970) *The Harried Leisure Class* p11

[31] Gramsci, A (1975) *Letters from Prison*

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[33] Cohen and Taylor (1976) *Escape Attempts: The Theory and Practice of resistance to Everyday Life* pg 30

[34] Greenwood, L (2001) 'I don't hear wolf whistles now…' *The Daily Telegraph* 22 February 2001 p25

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[41] Lull, J (1990) *Inside Family Viewing: Ethnographic Research on Television's Audiences.* p54

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