

Television, emotion and prison life: Achieving personal control

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Abstract:

This article describes the precarious and sensitive relationship prisoners have with television; it focuses exclusively on the voices of male prisoners to identify how they relate to their viewing experiences within the prison space. This article foregrounds the chief emotional responses prisoners articulated in relation to both prison life and television; boredom, frustration, and happiness. This discussion offers readers an emotive perspective on the 'pains of imprisonment' (Sykes 1999). This typology has traditionally underplayed the role of affect. Like other recent prison research this paper calls for a centring of emotion to more fully understand imprisonment. Television plays an important and valuable tool for prisoners' coping strategies. It is co-opted as a therapeutic tool or 'protective device' (Layder 2004:26) to mitigate against the harms of daily life and supply social and psychological nourishment within the prison space.

Key Words: Television, prisoner audiences, emotion, boredom, pains of imprisonment, control, therapeutic¹²

The Affective Turn and Prisoner Audiences

The affective qualities of prison life have been routinely documented in sociological commentaries, but have often been obscured from full view from readers and consumers of these discussions. Instead the emotive qualities of the prison experience have been embedded in a technical discourse which relates to the 'pains' or 'harms' of incarceration. As a result these terms have become shorthand for the felt experiences of prison life. This has meant that Sykes' (1999) typology of prison 'pain' has inadvertently shrunk the complexity of the personal and emotive features of imprisonment. Crewe's (2011) more recent review of Sykes' 'pains of imprisonment' is productive as it expands and widens the

typology suggesting that the contemporary experience of prison has further burdens on the prisoner. These include 'uncertainty and indeterminacy', the 'pains of self-assessment' and of 'self-government'. Crewe's assessment points to these as a series of 'frustrations' (2011:520) and this calls for a need to acknowledge the emotive impact of incarceration more explicitly.

More recently there has been a growing raft (including this article also) of emotive work and thinking within the field of imprisonment - see for example Crewe et al (2013), Liebling (2012), Crawley (2004). Crewe et al's (2013) interrogation of the emotional geography of prison life is particularly helpful. Their work has begun to provide a productive framework for contextualising emotions in prison settings. The role of 'emotion zones' highlights how the space can influence and be influenced by emotions, and thus create 'spatially differentiated emotional domains' (ibid: 4). These emotional maps can provide valuable evidence about the ways in which organisations are operating and performing and thus begin to provide a deep understanding of social relations between all actors within the prison space. There is however more work to be done on establishing a framework to explore the interface between social relations and emotion. This paper offers more evidence to support this statement.

In the same ways the sociology of audiences has also struggled to identify a direct dialogue about audiences' emotive use of media. The field of social psychology has offered some empirical evidence to capture how audiences are 'affected' by media texts (particularly television) and more specifically how audiences actively use media to manage their moods (Zillman 1988, Perse and Rubin 1990, Anderson et al 1996). These studies are however limited as they fail to fully integrate the role of the context and setting in which audiences are placed i.e. the home or the prison. Two models have however been useful in capturing the role of the everyday settings in which audiences find themselves. The first is the 'uses and gratifications' model developed by Katz and Lazarsfeld (1955) and later refined by McQuail, Blumler and Brown (1972). This model provides a framework for understanding some of the 'rational and emotional needs' of audiences (Silverstone 1999:143). Following on from this framework was Lull's (1990) development of the 'social uses of television' typology. Developed from research of observing and interviewing how families use television in their homes, Lull was able to chart the 'structural' and 'relational' responses to watching television at home. However these models for using television provide typologies that still limit an emotive vocabulary which sufficiently capture the felt experience of watching television. Moores (2006) has begun to explore some of this in his own work. Using phenomenological approaches influenced by geographers Moores (ibid:1) is able to draw on the 'emotional aspects of day-to-day existence'. The emotive features of mediated encounters such as watching television or listening to the radio permit an extended attachment to places outside our immediate physical space. Interactions with these televisual 'places' are highly emotive.

Overall these separate fields of inquiry are beginning to re-evaluate the ways in which responses to both prison and television have been captured by research. This article

contributes to this 'affective turn'. This paper consolidates the findings from a doctoral study which examined the role of in-cell television in a closed adult male prison in England (Knight 2012). This article draws on the emotive responses to prisoners' relationships with television.

Accessing Emotion with Prisoner Television Audiences

There has been a small raft of research which has explored the impact and relationships prisoners have with media (broadcast and print media) whilst in prison. All of these studies have drawn on the 'uses and gratifications' model demonstrating that the use of media in prison has a direct impact on social relations, the ways in which prisoners construct and manage their daily lives and how prisoners use media to access care. In summary these include Lindlof (1985), Vandebosch (2000), Jewkes (2002), Knight (2001), Gersch (2003), Bonini and Perrotta (2007) and Grant and Jewkes (2013). In addition, each of these investigations have employed and continued to interrogate the 'pains' model originating from Sykes' original study.

This body of prisoner audience research is valuable but 'accounts have not gone far enough' (Liebling 1999:149) in capturing the feelings and experiences or 'affect' of the temporal and spatial qualities of cultural life with in-cell television in prison. As Jewkes (2002) purported, there is a need to understand the complexity of prisoners' relationships with mass media in relation to identity and power for example. As a result, emotions are embedded within both agency and structure and thus can also become hidden from view and are recycled into the 'pains' discourse described at the beginning of this article. In doing so rich accounts of imprisonment which do not feature emotive responses can present an 'emptied-out vision of the social world' (Layder 2004:9). This article begins to offer a consolidated dialogue which centres the felt experiences of prison life in an attempt to further enrich the vision and understanding of the prison world.

A Theoretical and Methodological Framework for Interrogating Emotion

Prisons provide an unusual context to conduct audience research (Jewkes 2002:x) Moreover the traditional models, such as the uses and gratifications model, for investigating audiences can according to Gersch generate peculiar effects in the prison environment,

The notion of 'escape' gains special meaning in the prison context, where the media are one of only a few links for inmates to the outside world. (2003:53)

As a result of these kinds of observations, researchers of prisoner audiences have been uncomfortable with the frameworks and typologies of audience behaviour derived largely from research on audiences in domestic settings. One example is Jewkes' modification of the 'uses and gratifications' model defined by McQuail, Blumler and Brown (1972) to account for how the structural features of the prison can impact on prisoner agency and their responses to their incarceration. Here Jewkes reviewed this to capture the 'meanings

and motivations' of the male audiences she was investigating, with a view to 'exploring the 'internal' gratifications' (2002:116). Jewkes argues:

The combined product of psychological dispositions, sociological factors and situational context that specific uses of media by audience members has thus completely overlooked...In an attempt to embrace a more situated theory of subjectivity that can offer insights into the role of the media in expressing identity, identification and difference. (2002:10)

Her work moved away from the deterministic typology of uses and gratifications model to highlight how prisoners' *motivations* can capture the role that media has in their lives. Through conversation she was able to document the ways in which the male prisoners interpreted and made sense of their experience and also of themselves. The *meanings* they reported provided a view of their subjectivity and how it is negotiated within the prison setting. In a similar way, Vandebosch (2000) highlighted that prisoners had 'media-related needs' and increased degrees of dependency on media use. A common finding across most of the prison audience, including my earlier research, is that prisoners actively draw upon media resources in powerful and active ways during incarceration. All of the studies challenge the view that prisoners are passive both to the system and to the messages they consume through mass media. As much broader research on audiences has shown, media consumption is an active phenomenon in which audiences negotiate power, meanings and identity (Silverstone 1999).

Media use helps to fill time with meaningful activity. Broadcast media can help to minimise boredom, in relation to the inescapable 'empty' time that prisoners routinely endure especially behind their cell doors. Upon review of prisoner audience studies, boredom and the experience of the prison cell remain underexplored. These studies had not sufficiently mapped time and space in relation to media use or the kinds of 'excursions' (Moore 2006) prisoners were making. This earlier work informed this extended investigation into in-cell television. It was able to further explore the impact of in-cell television on social relations in prison life in one closed male adult prison. Data collection was carried out using two methods: semi-structured interviews with nineteen prisoners and nine staff, and nine structured television use diaries completed by prisoners. Data presented in this article is drawn directly from the interviews with prisoners as well as entries made by prisoners using television diaries. It departs from earlier prisoner audience research as it examines how television use in prison is *felt*, as well as appreciating and acknowledging the broader structural elements of prison life *with* television and how it is managed, for example by staff. As a result this study was able to extend upon broader discussions in sociological commentaries about the 'pains' or 'harms' of imprisonment in terms of these affective dimensions. The emotive lens therefore provides a revised view of prison audiences by demonstrating how prisoners use television as a mechanism for achieving personal control.

An ethnographic research strategy (Moores 1993, Jewkes 2002) was adopted to study prisoners as audiences of television. A single closed adult male category B prison was identified to undertake the research. I was a regular visitor to the prison and was familiar with the prison and its people. Access was approved from the governing governor of the prison³ and I was able to visit as often as I felt necessary to undertake the work. As a visitor I could draw prison keys and was therefore confident and competent to visit the prison without supervision. Recruitment of participants was relatively straightforward and spent a lot of time talking about my research to prisoners and staff. Refinement of my sample was necessary in order to capture a range of diverse prisoners in terms of what kinds of access they had to television, as some had none. This emerged over time and I was able to carefully select and construct a range of prisoners in the interview cohort of this research. All of the interviews took place in private, either in a private room or in the prisoner's cell. Naturally I alerted staff of my whereabouts and sought their advice and approval of entering a prisoner's cell. The interviews that took place in the prison cell permitted a direct opportunity to observe the lived conditions of the cell. On some occasions I was able to enjoy watching television with the interviewee and chat about the programmes. I believe the interviews that took place inside their own cells provided the richest accounts. This is because out of all the spaces across the prison setting, the cell is the most private. This is not absolute privacy but enough for an interviewee to feel more relaxed and less guarded. Participants were able to illustrate their narratives with props and cues from the material possessions surrounding us, such as photos, letters, CDs and their own artwork. Moreover, I was also able to gauge a sense of how some of the prisoners lived with their cell mate, and outside the formal interview I was able to also meet their cell mate. A total of six of the interviews provided the sample with three sets of couples who were interviewed separately. These rich cell-sharing interviews formed the basis of excellent opportunities to build a direct insight into how prisoners share a cell and thus triangulate not only across different interviews but also with cases such as couples. Elsewhere I have reported how these cell sharing arrangements are managed by prisoners (Knight 2014). In hindsight, the richness of these couple accounts should have been developed more widely across this research and would have gone some way to help galvanise the 'domestic' context of watching television much more acutely.

The design and development of the methodology (including the analysis) was further informed by Layder's (2005) theory of 'social domains'. His 'adaptive' approach was used to interrogate the data from semi-structured interviews with prisoners and from television use diaries. Layder's (2006) 'social domains' theory was useful in providing a diagram of social reality which provides a constructive synthesis of structure and agency. Furthermore it provides an extension of these dimensions as what he calls 'domains' of structure and agency; *contextual resources*, *social settings*, *situated activity* and *psychobiography*. Layder identifies the personal aspects of social life as psychobiography (the self) and situated activity (interaction). These components are directly felt and experienced by social agents. The contextual resources (rules and conventions) and social settings (formal and informal

institutions) are impersonal and remote from the individual yet influence them continually and dynamically. Social life for Layder is a complex mix of influences captured within these domains. This model can enable researchers to interrogate aspects of social life that are not so accessible via other theoretical models. Hence, the fields of emotion were enabled by the use of domains, by allowing a review of relationships or 'linkages' between concepts of emotion, television and prison life. Rather than condense social life based on either structure or agency or starkly the prison and the person, it has been possible to expand upon the 'linkages' between the four domains Layder defines. As a result, this study captures how television use in prison is *felt*, as well as appreciating and acknowledging the broader structural elements of prison life *with* television. This article offers a distinguished and novel insight into some of the direct emotive responses male prisoners described in this study; boredom, frustration, and happiness.⁴

Boredom

Boredom is poisonous, it is mental poison. You can easily get distressed and suicidal in here. TV keeps you occupied. Even just changing the channels using the remote, it keeps you focused. (Leon- prisoner)

Boredom is considered a feature of everyday life in prison which can in some circumstances develop and evolve into deep anxiety and disorientation for some prisoners (Vandebosch 2001; Liebling 1999). Boredom has never been the focus of prison studies, yet boredom is regularly cited as a causal feature in offending behaviour and crime (Ferrell 2004). Characteristics of boredom include the experience of monotony, the lack of novelty, the absence of meaning and constraint which lead to sleepiness, restlessness, anxiety and hostility to the environment (Barbalet 1999; Smith 1981). Studies have noted that those most prone to boredom are men (Zuckerman 1979), people with lower intelligence (Robinson 1975), those with poor mental health (Caplan et al 1975) and extroverts (Kagan & Rosman 1964). It is therefore no surprise that male prisoners correlate with some of these characteristics.

Analysis of television activity diaries that were designed to capture what prisoners were watching and in what timeframes, highlighted how many prisoners watched large quantities of television each week. On average, findings from the diaries indicate that male prisoners watched over 60 hours per week). However only this exceeds the amount of time prisoners in this study were permitted to engage in work, training or education or formal activity (approx 20 hours per week). Simon described that:

Nowadays they keep you locked up longer, now the workshops have gone, that cured some boredom... (Simon- prisoner)

Alleviating boredom was repeatedly related to all of the prisoner respondents' direct use of television. The strict prison routine means there are few opportunities for prisoners to experience deviations from the routine shaped by the timetabling of un-lock and bang-up (locked in their prison cells). This routine is peppered with activities restricted to work, education, gym, and visits. Given these constraints, boredom and the fear of it has an important impact on how television consumption is managed by the individual. Equally boredom itself was not just a situational outcome of the immediate prison experience, but was also described as a product of prisoners' mediated encounters; watching television for some was also considered boring (Jewkes 2002, Klapp 1986).

The freedom to access activity inside prison cells is extremely limited. Prisoners in this study report that time spent locked up in their cells is increasing. Bang-up especially is a hot-spot for boredom to manifest,

... when I am sat in my cell there is either three things I can do, you can either watch TV or listen to a CD or something like that, or I could exercise or I could be reading or writing, there are three different things you could do in your cell. There is nothing much really you can do in a cell. (Ned- prisoner)

Boredom is not necessarily an exclusive feature of being locked inside their cells. But for some it can be a permanent and 'total' experience; or 'hyper-boredom' (Healy 1984). Ned identifies that constraint and opportunities for arousal remain constantly and perpetually limited. As Barbalet (1999:631) asserts, boredom 'emotionally registers an absence of meaning', and seeking out television highlights his need to find something meaningful. To achieve this Barbalet suggests that 'meaning both requires and constitutes sociality' (ibid). Mediated encounters enable access to a world beyond one's own immediate spatial context (Moore 1993). Being able to stretch and reach social relations and interaction via television has important positive effects on well-being and improved mental health (Seeman 1996). Moore (1996:49) suggests that television provides a 'permeable' external boundary', which otherwise would be closed off from the outside world. The public world is permitted to enter the prison space via technologies like television, radio and, under more controlled conditions, telephone and letters. As Moore (ibid: 54) continues to suggest, 'viewers remain physically rooted in the domestic [prison] realm ... these "excursions" are acts of imagination ... a "technological extension" of human reach across situational boundaries'. This enabling feature of television provides prisoner audiences with the psychological capacity to 'escape' from their harsh conditions and seek out social relations in order to counter debilitating emotions like boredom. Television can therefore provide a 'softer' emotional zone where the brutality of the prison is distanced.

As I have commented elsewhere (Knight 2014) cell sharing also brings its challenges and adds further constraints to the ability to make their own kinds of choices and seek out activity or material that *they* find meaningful. All the prisoners in this study were mindful of boredom and most associate it with a series of harms such as depression, self-harm, suicide

and stress (Liebling 1999). Boredom, for them, is therefore dangerous, so finding ways to resolve the onset of boredom or avoid the sensation of being bored is necessary. Their relationship with television thus becomes a viable route to minimise this emotive response (Zillman 1988). Boredom accentuates other unpleasant emotions and feelings, such as frustration, fear and sadness, and so television use can help them to achieve 'personal control' (Layder 2004) and be an antidote to boredom;

It feeds your brain, just a little. It is occupying boredom. (Carlton- prisoner)

The need to stay mentally agile and alert was commonly associated with the potential role that television has in the prison context (Zamble and Porporino 1985; Cohen and Taylor 1972; Johnson and Toch 1982). Stuart, for example, was increasingly fearful of psychological deterioration, explaining that 'you become *cabbaged* here with the boredom and depression'. He talked about the dangers of boredom:

I find that if I'm left alone, that's when I get bored my mind goes, it is why I am in here, it pisses me off it gets me thinking and that is not a good thing to do. (Stuart- prisoner)

Being incapacitated by boredom brought on by isolation, loneliness and lack of activity can act as a trigger for 'thinking time', something some of the respondents were actively trying to avoid. These moments are not necessarily boring, but the amplification of thinking about one's self, and others is distressing. This is considered dangerous, as Ned explains, watching television serves as an activity that offers a useful distraction from focusing on the conditions of incarceration:

... when you're watching the TV you're not thinking about your toilet being near you, or you're not thinking about being locked in that room for the time being. You are channeled on watching a programme. So if it's exciting I think you forget about all those things. (Ned- prisoner)

Others describe the relaxant qualities that television can offer:

... helps me to chill out and relax. It does help boredom and aggression. I let steam off through nature programmes. I've got to watch it in an evening. Nature is soothing, a calming programme. You feel you are there with them, it is relaxing and chilled and you forget where you are. (Malcolm- prisoner)

Other mechanisms to aid relaxation were reported by the significance of sleep, as Ryan explains 'I get bored and go to sleep. I sleep my sentence away' and Simon describes sleep as a 'bird killer'. The experiences of time in prison have been previously reported as

different from time experienced outside prison (Sykes 1999; Cohen and Taylor 1972; Jewkes 2002; Cope 2003), and invariably time in prison is routinely 'problematized' or 'alienating' (Martel 2006:596). Prisoners experience a routine which can be described as fixed and rigid and they have no power to change it within the prison itself (situated). Broadcasting schedules (mediated) also operate on a timetable (Scannell 1996, Silverstone 1999). Moreover the sensation of boredom can make 'time appears to stand still' (Barbalet 1999:637). Television can fill this void and lessen the stillness boredom can reproduce. The television use diaries highlight that time is regularly filled with television programmes, but this does not mean that television itself can lessen the boredom. Filling time with television also has its costs and risks. Klapp (1986:3), for example, takes the view that information society brings about degradation resulting in boredom. Exposure to information at high speed means that the 'slow horse of meaning is unable to keep up with the fast horse of mere information'. Thus, meaning can be lost and dilute into 'noise', resulting in what Klapp terms the 'banalization' of modern life (ibid:2). There is little said about the impact of space on boredom, yet this evidence suggests that the 'excursions' through television are not only important to bend time, but also valuable for adjusting the experience of space.

Feeling disorientated was also common. Planned and unexpected television events can help sharpen moods:

Here I have no structure or routine and I get bored, so I get in bed and fall asleep. But then no sleep all night. On Tuesdays there is nothing on, but oh there is *Shameless* [comedy drama] which is brilliant, then there is soaps oh and that Holloway thing [prison documentary]. (Mick- prisoner)

Mick found he was watching a lot of television, especially at night, and his routine began to move away from the routine established in the prison and became directed by broadcasting schedule. This is in sharp contrast to the rigidity of routine that is often earmarked for prison routine. He began to distance himself from the prison schedule. Unlike many of the respondents, Mick felt he didn't need to plan and organise his viewing:

I watch that much I don't need a TV mag. On BBC there is always a film at 11.10pm, it is on and is predictable. Basically I know what the schedule is. I know what they are and it bores you. It plans it for you. It is a break from the routine when I'm not watching. You get set in your ways, being like this in jail, it breaks up routine. A routine round the TV routine. (Mick-prisoner)

Mick suggests that broadcast schedules can be monotonous and this is especially heightened by imprisonment. Television viewing becomes habitual, which soon can be translated into feelings of boredom. The 'rituals' (Scannell 1996) of broadcasting therefore generate unconstructive emotive responses and in particular the predictive nature of

broadcasting reinforces boredom. Instead predictability is considered a risk of television viewing,

Pete talks about these paradoxes in relation to the popular game show *Deal or No Deal*:

I can do without it but it is on, it does get monotonous, same old thing but there is entertainment value. (Pete- prisoner)

The lack of novelty for Pete is tempered by the entertaining value this programme can offer him. Accessing novelty is a way of reducing boredom (Klapp 1986). However boredom can arise in encounters of over-stimulation, where meanings can become disordered. The quest for excitement in viewing is also important, but the television schedule doesn't always deliver,

Television can be boring sometimes, like I said. Saturday nights are swings and roundabouts sometimes it is really exciting. Sometimes I watch *X-Factor* and it drives me crazy and I think that's crap. (Ned- prisoner)

For Ned, exposure to large doses of television in the hope of finding novelty is symptomatic of his need to overcome boredom. His dissatisfaction with Saturday night viewing occurs despite his persistence in watching with hope of experiencing novelty. As Anderson (2004) suggests, 'listening-to-get-through' (2004:748) or watching in the hope that television can deliver, allows viewers to comprehend and make sense of unfolding time. They acknowledge that events within prison will largely remain the same, but having a meaningful mediated encounter can make this prospect more bearable. Excitement is also identifiable in respondents' references to soap operas and sport. As Pete explains,

Soaps and prison go well together. There is something to look forward to until the next time, like the cliff hangers. (Pete-prisoner)

Soaps also provide substance and material for chat and conversation with fellow prisoners, staff and their friends and family (Lull 1990):

I get very excited and say to my family 'did you see'? (Sunny- prisoner)

These 'did you see' moments provide meaning to the act of watching television. Soaps and sport were also reported as helpful in minimizing isolation and providing content of talk (Wood 2009:57). The temporal and spatial qualities of mediated television content helped create a sense of intimacy by bringing people close (Horton and Wohl 1956), also an opportunity to witness events that others are also witnessing at the same time (Meyrowitz 1985). These effects can be important for increasing excitement. For example if a 'big' soap

storyline is resolved or an important high profile football match is being broadcast, there will often be verbal and physical outbursts such as shouting and banging on cell doors (Gersch 2003).

Boredom signals and triggers the need for action. As Layder (2004:27) describes emotions appear in a queue and a social agent's 'need claims' orders how these should be dealt with; for example boredom demands urgent attention.

Frustration

It is hard been locked up in a cell, bloody hard - (Ned- prisoner)

Like boredom, frustration is an unpleasant sensation and leads to emotions like anger and fear. Irwin and Owen (2005:104) describe the 'arbitrary' and disorientating nature of prison rules. Accounts within penal research often feature prisoners' frustration and expressions of anger as well as acts of violence (Snacken 2005:306). Frustration can evolve from boredom and again signals the need for action (Layder 2004). Observations of frustration indicate that incarceration manifests deep anxiety brought on by deprivation, particularly related to the restriction of autonomy (Irwin & Owen 2005; Sykes 1999). Television use, therefore, can serve as an outlet to channel frustration, but can also be the cause of it. The demands on a person's internal locus of control (Rotter 1954) can be assisted through watching television, especially given the kinds of long term 'transitional' attachments (Silverstone 1999a) these individuals would have formed with television. Going to television to receive 'care' is a method to soothe their angst. When television fails to offer a resolution to these feelings they can be compounded (Layder 2004). Fear of violence in prison is common (Snacken 2005; Sykes 1999) and so 'keeping your head down' is common argot amongst prisoners. It was repeatedly used by the interviewees in this study, as a way of avoiding risks (social and psychological). Television viewing can sometimes provide essential respite and restoration from disorientating and debilitating circumstances. Viewing can provide a legitimate withdrawal into the privacy of one's cell and thus reduce the risk of contamination from prison culture (Bonini and Perrotta 2007; Crewe 2006; Jewkes 2002a).

Some respondents were clear about the 'therapeutic' role television can have for reducing frustration. They acknowledged that life in prison without television would probably increase their frustrations. For Carlton it would be 'long and frustrating. I've never not had TV...In Gambia I didn't watch TV, but I had chance to walk around in the sun'. Television can provide a space to eliminate frustration and find 'security' (Moore 1993:48; Silverstone 1999a:19). Carlton continued to explain that 'you dispose your frustrations through TV. It occupies the mind enough to take away bad feelings as well'. These 'bad feelings' were regularly reported and respondents recognised the danger they could pose,

But if they take that away from you, boredom will drive you to do things that you wouldn't even consider doing. I won't let myself get in that state. I'll go

and say something to someone, some people don't there is a lot of pent up frustration. (Ned- prisoner)

Conflict can be a consequence of boredom and thus risk taking behaviour can generate meaning (Barbalet 2004; Roy 1960). For Ned, taking responsibility for his emotions and well-being was important for staying in control, yet he was unable to accomplish 'inter-personal control' (Layder 2004:13) of other people in the same way. The value of television is attributed here to the role it has in reducing stress and maintaining discipline (Anderson et al 1996). Adopting a rational rather than emotional response is something that men in particular are expected to do. As Williams (2001:96) suggests there are 'cultural prescriptions concerning the emotional 'styles of both men and women' and men in particular are expected to have 'mastery of unruly bodily passions and 'irrational corporeal impulses' and adhere to 'feeling rules' (Hochschild 1983). Paradoxically, these disclosures also signalled degrees of reflexivity. They acknowledge their emotions and find ways (sometimes with television) to heal the harmful effects of emotions like frustration, anger and fear. Disclosures of stress were also commonplace and respondents described how they avoided certain mediated encounters, for example Ned and Shaun are news avoiders:

I find news rather boring, I do personally, but other people watch the news to find out what's going on in the world and I have got more things on my plate... (Ned- prisoner)

I don't watch news, who wants to listen to news? I don't care what's going on out there, I just don't care. I sometimes read a newspaper like [local], *Inside Time* is better for in here. Like the Michael Jackson death, it is a big thing in the media and on the front cover of the newspapers, so my girlfriend tells me. I am in a way disconnected and media still allows me to interact, or not as the case maybe at the minute. But I don't care at present, as soon as you come through those gates the world has ended. (Shaun- prisoner)

Other research has also indicated that people who are stressed and depressed avoid news to evade conflict (Anderson et al 1996). Making the right television selections is therefore an opportunity for respondents to manage their emotions, by directly avoiding or extracting what they consider to be the nourishing qualities of television broadcasts. Carlton, for example, preferred watching conflict sport like boxing and cage fighting rather than see conflict through news reports:

Carlton- It's the fighting instead of looking at it, it is the tension release, it's not going to affect my life the same way.

VK- *So what about TV news?*

Carlton- Yeah they tell you all the bad stuff in the world.

As Zillman (1988) found, people who experience stressful situations are more likely to seek out 'exciting' material from television.

Frustration was also expressed towards the provision and availability of television for prisoners. During the fieldwork stages of the research, Freeview digital boxes were made available to enhanced prisoners as an additional reward for their compliance and good behaviour. I witnessed the removal of these boxes for all prisoners on an occasion when I visited to carry out an interview. Officers walked down the landing, entering the cells, filling black bin-liners with the digital boxes as the prisoners and I looked on. Some prisoners questioned the officers, but most remained quiet and acquiesced. The rationale provided at the time was related to 'security' in that the boxes were considered unfit to maintain a secure prison.⁵ Questions around fairness appeared in some of the interviews with prisoners, most expressing frustration at the ways in which television and its associated digital products like Freeview are provided or not (Irwin and Owen 2005). Leon, who had also witnessed this incident at the same time, described that television,

... solves loads of problems. They cost £50, say, and it saves you hundreds more such as staff, paperwork, suicides. It is a well meaningful privilege. It is better to be proactive than reactive. People just don't realise. All the people involved in helping people it saves money from all angles. It is integral and essential; there is a large amount of good for prison and inmates. (Leon-prisoner)

Discrepancies and reliability of broadcast services made available were also mentioned as well as the quality of receptions. Will couldn't always tune in to terrestrial channels:

I am blessed for our BBC1 is tuned in, we pay 50p for a TV each week, but you rarely get BBC1 and 2 in here. All they need to do is press the reset button to change it. Just get someone to fix it. It's fuck you jack, I'll watch TV. (Will-prisoner)

As frustration mounts, so does hostility towards their keepers, particularly when discrepancies arise. The desire to take control of these kinds of situations reminds these individuals of the constraints in which they are placed. The extent to which prisoners can achieve personal control is regularly denied.

Happiness

I get great pleasure from watching wildlife. (Joshua- prisoner)

The salience of emotive responses like happiness and joy rarely feature in the published literature on prison life. I did not therefore expect to come across expressions or descriptions of happiness and joy during this investigation.⁶ Despite the condition and experience of incarceration as painful, moments and periods of serving time in prison are sometimes flooded with contentment. Above all, the ways in which the respondents here do their best to avoid helplessness or the sensation of boredom, frustration, anger and fear in striving for ontological security can help to galvanise this further. Achieving happiness, albeit momentarily, could indicate moments when security and assurance are accomplished and identifying these adds value towards understanding the self-directed techniques prisoners adopt to cope and adapt to life in prison. Achieving happiness and joy in these circumstances can be aligned to Layder's theory of personal control,

Personal control is the means through which you make a difference to your world and have some say in the decisions and actions that shape your future life experiences... (2004:34)

This can also be combined with Csikszentmihalyi's (1999) theory of 'flow', which can assist in describing how happiness is accomplished. Ritual activities can allow 'flow' to occur. The act of watching television is ritualized and 'one has to be in control of the activity to experience it [flow]' (ibid:825). The gratification and security one can accomplish from watching television may result in the immediate feedback the activity permits. Fondness for programmes provided a route for identifying happiness. For example Bill relished a surprising discovery,

Like last night there was a big game on, Chelsea, but it wasn't in the *TV Times*, one of the lads told me, I was really pleased ... it was a nice surprise, I was very happy about that. (Bill- prisoner)

Bill was also surprised and relieved to discover that:

When I first came I was pleasantly surprised that we got TVs and a kettle and a toilet that flushes.

The role of relief and surprise in this context means that his basic needs could actually be accommodated. Bill realises that television can provide him with a familiar activity, which also relates to his pre-prison circumstances. Television allows him to 'reach' those other outside places.

Finding ways through incarceration and adapting to prison life and its routine is essentially softened by the kinds of choices prisoners can make by consuming television. 'Good' times are identifiable in the prisoner narratives, as Joshua describes,

I've watched one documentary on one channel, switched it over, *Panorama's* on, switched it over, *Dispatches* is on. That's a great night for me; it's like going to a club. Do you understand what I'm saying? (Joshua- prisoner)

Joshua's comparison to television viewing with a night of clubbing relates to the kinds of social and emotional outcomes this activity can evoke, such as sociability, intimacy, thrill, excitement, fantasy and joy. As Moores (2006:7) suggests, 'place gets pluralised' brought about by 'habitual movements' or migrations using media (Ibid: 16). Shaun, who at the time of interview didn't have an in-cell television, talked about the same kinds of pleasures derived from reading *Harry Potter* books,

It takes you away from your cell; she is so descriptive, so brilliant- with twists and turns... Books create a TV inside your head. (Shaun- prisoner)

Also for Sunny the same kind of effects can be achieved through television:

I am not addicted to TV, but sometimes I don't feel like I'm in prison when I'm watching. (Sunny- prisoner)

Being able to travel without actually physically moving (Moores 1996:54) is a powerful psychological outcome; with the body constrained, the mind can be given an important outlet or 'mind-scape' (Cohen and Taylor 1976), in which the sense of deprivation can at least be postponed. Accessing and finding meaningful television content arouses happiness and sensations for some,

I like *X-Factor* to watch the singers develop. Like that girl who sang 'Hallelujah'. It was beautiful; it was music I could relate to. (Bill- prisoner)

For Bill, the emotive responses this event creates allow him to access emotions that are not frequently available to him in prison, nor are expected to be displayed (Crawley 2004, Hoschchild 1983). For Leon, some programmes allow to remain socially and emotionally connected to his family. Moores (2006:6) explains that 'at-homeness [can] be modified and multiplied'. For example, Leon explained that children's television and films help him stay close and intimate to his family, despite how painful it is being away from them. The conversation soon turns to the memories of his family

He likes *Thomas* and *In the Night Garden* so we talk about those programmes. We watch them on the out. After I have finished cooking we all curl up on the couch with our son, then we might watch a movie. You see there is not much on to watch and film wise it varies, so sometimes it is refreshing when

something does come on. I have the same sort of interest about films as I do other things- family stuff. (Leon- prisoner)

Recalling these types of moments was common among the respondents, and that the habitual nature of viewing in domestic settings brings a sense of intimacy that can affirm contentment and the comfort that life is still ongoing outside. However, some respondents were cautious about how much of this kind of activity could be useful to them in this environment, and were careful to note how these kinds of pleasures from television should be handled. Happiness can soon turn sour and lead to frustration, anger and sadness. Being close to others through the facilitative effect of television is a welcomed respite from negative emotional states such as boredom and frustration. The danger of doing this though, is that it also makes some mindful of isolation and separation from the outside world. By delaying gratification, despite the pains it may bring in the short term, avoiding certain television content can defer a monopoly of pathological emotions (Csikszentmihalyi 1999:821). Mastery over all emotions does not necessarily mean that happiness is the ultimate panacea. Williams (2001:118) suggests that 'to manage our emotional life with *intelligence*' and thus happiness may have to be stifled in order to achieve personal control.

Ron described his fondness of sport, particularly boxing, cage fighting and football. Searching out and consuming sports programmes provides important references in terms of his identity. Ron was coming to the end of a long sentence. Finding ways to prepare for his release and re-entry into the community means that his only access to his preferred resources, i.e. cage fighting and boxing, is through television and occasionally through friends and family on the telephone. Unable to participate, as he used to before prison, television intermittently provides him with important routes to affirm his identity. This provides Ron with contentment but also some frustration that he can't access more cage-fighting through television:

... it sort of came on for a couple of weeks and then it stopped. This is over the last couple of months, it came on and there was me thinking, I would sit there and watch that every week quite happily. (Ron- prisoner)

In order for Ron to sustain his expertise in this area, he spends time combing newspapers for information. Others also reported fandom in similar ways, by making adjustments to their viewing routines to fulfill their interests whilst in prison. For example, Joshua takes radical action to watch the documentary, *FBI Files*:

Joshua- That's on Channel 5. I may sound a bit of a saddo here but it comes on here, usually it comes on at about 11 o'clock at night but recently it's been starting to come on, they've been starting to put it on at 4 o'clock in the morning.

VK- *So what have you done?*

Joshua- So I wake up at 4 o'clock in the morning to watch it.

Unable to time-shift using other forms of technology like on-demand, VCRs and downloads, results in adjustments to viewing. Striving for pleasure by using television is a powerful technique to manage his life situation and Joshua's adjustment to satisfy these needs is a stark example of this (Layder 2006:29).

Similarly, outlets for laughter provide an important cathartic response to the restrictions placed on the individual. Crawley (2004) observed that humour and laughter play an important role in facilitating communication and uniting people in particular circumstances, especially those that present threat or danger (2004:50). She also observed that humour plays a significant role in adapting to difficult circumstances by providing a mechanism of defense against distress and disorientation (ibid: 87). Laughter and humour therefore are preferred to crying and breaking down, which can be considered weaknesses in the prison context. The 'feeling rules' professed by Hochschild (1983) emphasises how certain emotions receive more credence than others and this become expected and normalized within the 'emotion zones' across the prison (Crewe et al 2013).

Comedy programmes and comic features of some programmes provide meaningful benefits to counter deterioration of the self. Leon explained that much of his viewing included comedy because they 'bring you laughter, that makes you younger'. Leon dedicated much of his time in his cell to his own strict timetable, punctuated and marked by television viewing. Leon described an extensive exercise regime that he followed each day whilst watching situation comedies during the lunchtime bang-up period. Attention to his physical well-being was important for Leon to cope with prison life and securing a healthy lifestyle would help him to see himself through his long sentence. The physiological sensations of fitness and laughter have important outcomes for self-directing and governing Leon's mood,

... like exercise it releases endorphins, like hormones, and TV does that for you sometimes too. It releases your mind. Like the gym it does three things, physical release, looking good gives you gratification and a mental release. TV is working you out mentally, it stops letting the memories get to you. With TV I am in another world. It is mental torture in here, so you need somewhere else to escape, to cope and not breakdown. If you don't have TV in these cells the walls talk to you, we need external input we are social beings, we need this. (Leon- prisoner)

Leon, as Rose (1999) suggests, knows what is good for him, he is an 'expert' on himself and by acting upon his own needs, television can provide a route for him to stay healthy.

Satire allows some respondents to take on 'oppositional' readings (Hall 1980) of mediated texts and position themselves against established and dominant agendas. Drawing on Irwin's (1970) typology of prisoners' adaptation; the 'deviant' may resist certain

ideologies through mediated routes and thus enjoy these kinds of pleasures (Lindlof 1987). In addition, laughing *at* events on television as opposed to *with* the narrative can bring small pockets of power to these kinds of audiences; this was especially pertinent in relation to talk shows like *Jeremy Kyle* and *Trisha*. Malcolm enjoyed the *Simpsons* because he liked the ways in which ‘they take the mickey out of them [characters]’. Finding subversive or deviant routes through television texts can mean that principles of ‘flow’ or happiness (Csikszentmihalyi 1999) can still evolve. Enjoyment of tragedy and other people’s demise is also relevant and akin to the kinds of pleasure. Ang’s (1993:6) female viewers of the soap *Dallas* described as the ‘tragic structure of feeling’, in which happiness can only ever be fleeting and witnessing problems becomes pleasurable. Soaps and reality television were useful for prisoners to engage with tragedy. As Malcolm explained he enjoyed the ‘bitchiness of the contestants’ in *Dragon’s Den* and the hardships of the participants in *Wife Swap*. Male characters in soaps were often addressed with fondness, particularly the central villain or rogue:

I like Phil Mitchell the way he carries himself all the wheeling and dealing.
(Mick- prisoner)

I’ve always watched *Hollyoaks*, it is a soap for my era. It relates to things I know about. Like Warren he’s a local gangster. (Shaun- prisoner)

Personal identification and fondness of criminal characters and crime fiction through television provides direct access to contextual resources (Layder 2004). These audiences are able to draw on cultural references and knowledge which help to confirm their own social positions. For Lee taking an oppositional reading to the police soap/drama is important for his own identity as a criminal and prisoner. Adopting this code means that some prisoners may orientate themselves towards values of a criminal hierarchy (Crewe 2006; Irwin and Cressey 1962; Clemmer 1958).

Conclusion: Television as Intervention?

This article has demonstrated that taking ‘excursions’ with television can provide a ‘protective device’ (Layder 2004:26) to control and regulate emotive responses of prison life. The findings highlight that psychological deterioration is frightening for many prisoners and emotions like boredom can amplify this. This article also stresses that mediated encounters are both risky and productive for the prisoner audience and thus great care is taken to self-regulate and control their viewing in order to nourish and care for themselves within the prison space. These findings align to wider debates about mechanisms of governance or ‘soft power’ in prison settings (Crewe 2011b). As criminological commentators like Bosworth (2009) and Crewe (2011b) report administering direct control of people in prison has begun to shift towards initiatives that promote regulation of one’s

own life situation. This is further amplified by the reduction of resources for staffing; hence it can be argued prisoners are being increasingly abandoned by the state and are expected to take care of themselves. However in a setting where access to resources is limited the concept of self-care becomes problematic. Television, in part, provides a quasi-therapeutic mechanism, which reliably provides some opportunities for prisoners to self-care. Prisoners' attempts to re-create and establish a place that can bring comfort and security are reliably satisfied by television. The problem for prisoners is not just of *time* as much of the literature purports, but also of *place*. In order to achieve ontological security the prisoner needs to control as much as they can, their time and also space. The prison environment makes this extremely hard to achieve but with television they are, in many instances, able to find a safe place which can reproduce an 'at-homeness' feeling (Moore 2006). Television is not merely a mechanism for 'escape' where it enables prisoner audiences to travel outside the prison space without actually moving. It provides an outlet to actively work on their emotional repertoire and confidently regulate a complex range of feelings about life in prison. The everyday life in prison is not the same as everyday life in the outside world; there are countless distinguishing features of prison, which make this experience a unique one. These features are, however, subtle and sometimes difficult to observe, especially to the novice outsider. The use of television in prison does corroborate much of the ethnographic work carried out in domestic settings and as this article has demonstrated some of the everyday practices with television are continued here. The normality of prison life means that television viewing offers a 'mind-scape' (Cohen and Taylor 1976) to manage the routinized and complex nature of prison life.

This essay has demonstrated how prisoners' mediated encounters with television can be framed within an emotive dialogue. As Crewe et al (2013) suggest understanding 'emotion zones' is an imperative and invaluable framework for exploring the complexities of prison life. Scholars both in criminology (Crewe et al 2013) and media studies (Moore 2013) are more recently finding geographical explanations helpful in exploring the emotive and lived experiences of space and places. There is a further need to explore these 'emotion zones' more systematically and capture the interplay between situated and mediated encounters in order to sustain an emotive dialogue in relation to prison life. In particular, the lived dimensions of the prison cell, until this research into in-cell television, remains relatively under-researched – yet there is still more to do across this enterprise. Practice and policy, that is sensitive to the lived experiences of the prisoner, could benefit from widening their evidence base to ensure custody is both safe and minimizes the harm it can cause.

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Notes:

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² A version of this article appears in Knight, V (forthcoming) *Remote Control: Television in Prison* Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan.

³ Ethical approval was achieved from De Montfort University's Health and Life Sciences Ethics Committee as well as support and approval from Her Majesty's Prison Service.

⁴ Pseudonyms are used to protect the research participants. The research took place within one closed adult male local prison.

⁵ Freeview was therefore withdrawn but in 2010 the prison switched to digital reception and this meant that a selection of Freeview channels were reintroduced as 'standard' provision for to all television sets in the prison. This features as part of the Ministry of Justice digital regeneration programme in England and Wales (2011).

⁶ My experiences in the field were diverse, and I can recall many instances of laughter within and outside the interviews with prisoners and also staff. I routinely observed 'banter' within the prison and often found that this lifted the mood. On other occasions the atmosphere could be austere and tense.