

White Collar Criminals' Experience of Imprisonment in England and Wales: Revisiting the 'Special Sensitivity' Debate

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Abstract

This article explores white collar criminals' experience of imprisonment in England and Wales. Based upon interviews with 13 convicted offenders *after* they had completed their imprisonment, it is the first study to date of this kind in England and Wales (all others have been based in prison). It offers a unique impartial insight of prisoners' experience, beyond the influence of the prison walls. The paper explores the experience around the largely American 'special sensitivity' debate, over whether such offenders are more sensitive to prison. The research uncovers both positive experiences, labelled 'good', but also negative, labelled 'bad' (non-violent experiences) and 'ugly' (violent experiences). Overall the findings reveal it is difficult to apply the special sensitivity hypothesis universally to this group of offenders.

Key words: White collar offenders, prisoners, special sensitivity, experience of prison

Introduction

There is a substantial body of research exploring the impact and experience of imprisonment on offenders, largely built upon the dominant populations of those convicted of acquisitive

street crime and violent offences (Liebling, 1999; Crewe, 2009; Fassin, 2016). There have, however, been very few studies of white collar criminals and their specific experience of imprisonment (Benson and Cullen, 1988; Payne, 2003; Kerley and Copes, 2004; Logan et al., 2017). Stadler (2010:iii) notes, “virtually no research has investigated the attributes and experiences of white-collar inmates within the prison environment,” supporting Benson’s (2007) reflection that:

“...we know little about how white collar offenders experience incarceration. This lack of knowledge has hampered the debate over whether regulation or criminalization is the best way to respond to white-collar crime because we have little idea of how prison as well as other forms of legal punishments actually affect the people on whom we impose them.”

The small body of research that has been published has largely centred on North America and the debate concerning ‘special sensitivity’; whether white collar criminals are more sensitive to imprisonment than ‘traditional’ criminals or the opposite, ‘special resiliency’, where they are better able to cope (Logan et al., 2017). Much of that literature is also based upon surveys, rather than interviews with prisoners (Kerley and Copes, 2004; Crank and Payne, 2015; Logan et al., 2017). The research also tends to focus upon the impact on offenders in terms of status, employment, relationships, rather than their actual experience of prison (Benson, 1984; Kerley & Copes, 2004). There is also a body autobiographical works published by famous white collar criminals exploring their experience of imprisonment (see for example Archer, 2005; Hunter, 2009; MacShane, 2014; Kerik, 2016; Middelhoff, 2017).

Since Sutherland (1940) coined the term white collar crime in reference to privileged business leaders, its definition has become nebulous, often encompassing persons of high status, low status, occupational crimes and non-occupational crimes (Benson and Moore, 1992; Nelken

2007:737; Weisburd, Waring and Chayet, 1991). This study uses Jordanoska's (2018:1431) definition: 'an offense committed through the use of fraud or deception in the context of the offender's legitimate occupation in an organization.' It is based on interviews with 13 offenders convicted for acts of fraud or bribery during the course of their occupations, after imprisonment, representing the first such study in England and Wales for this type of offender. Prior similar research interviewed offenders during their incarceration and only touched on their prison experience. This study is unique in that it focuses on the experience of prison, and the interviews were conducted after the offenders had been released, so enabling more coherent reflection and open commentary outside the immediate pressures and influences of the prison environment.

The research aimed to uncover and convey the nuanced range of white collar offenders' experiences of custody and how they adapted to those experiences. These are prisoners who have generally had little experience with the criminal justice system and particularly prison, who one could imagine might find the whole experience a profound shock and difficult to cope with. The notion of a differentiated experience of imprisonment for white collar offenders underpins the 'special sensitivity' argument whereby commentators have argued that the experience and consequences of incarceration can have a specific and differentiated nature (Stadler et al., 2013). Payne (2015) cites Feeley's work on how white collar offenders may experience a range of atypical collateral effects of being sentenced to custody because the typical profile of the white collar offender is substantially different from "conventional" prisoners (Benson and Moore, 1992; Payne, 2015). These effects may range from accentuated present and future orientated reactions to audience perceptions, stigmatisation, the loss of status, the loss of social position, employment prospects, and the impact on families (Benson, 1990; Dhami, 2007; Goldstraw-White, 2012; Klenowski, 2012; Klenowski, Copes and Mullins, 2011). The 'special sensitivity' hypothesis argues that experiencing imprisonment could garner specific detrimental effects to the resettlement of white collar prisoners, or that

the prison environment may be particularly destructive as the restrictive prison experience is so remote from their usual experiences of freedom and stability in family life (Stadler, 2010:72). This view was manifest in the judiciary with American judges affording white collar offenders special leniency (Mann, Wheeler and Sarat, 1980).

The 'special sensitivity' hypothesis has been challenged as a speculative notion that lacks empirical grounding (Benson, 1990; Logan et al., 2017). Detailed research by Benson and Cullen (1988), which traced the subjective experiences of white collar criminals, suggested that they possess personalities and social resources that enable them to adapt and cope with incarceration, advocating 'special resiliency' instead. Stadler, Benson and Cullen (2013:1109-110) later concluded that the special sensitivity notion represents a faulty premise: "... what we know about white collar offenders comes almost exclusively from anecdotal research ... and a few quantitative studies conducted more than two decades ago." The judiciary too seems to have changed its views with increasing numbers of white collar offenders receiving longer custodial sentences (Stadler et al., 2013:1092). Logan et al. (2017) also found through a survey that compared 942 white collar inmates with 1046 from the general prison population, white collar criminals were less likely to develop feelings of hopelessness and they were no different to the general prison population in terms of mental health disorder treatment.

The academic debate thus far has largely been focused on a blunt optic around the presence or lack of a special sensitivity hypothesis (see Payne, 2015). However, the validity or otherwise of the special sensitivity hypothesis remains largely untested, particularly through qualitative approaches and certainly in the UK. This paper contributes to the debate by exploring the experiences of the 13 former prisoners. The paper will begin by exploring some of the research on white collar criminals and offenders in general and their experience of prison. It will then set out the methods used for this research. The findings will be presented dividing the

experiences of the interviewees between the ‘good’, the ‘bad’ and the ‘ugly’. The paper will end with a discussion of the findings in relation to the ‘special sensitivity’ hypothesis.

Research into White Collar Criminals and Offenders in Prison

Studies based upon interviews with convicted offenders in general are surprisingly rare given the extensive breadth of research in criminology. Gill (2005:306) observed, students of criminology ‘...maybe surprised to learn that the subject has not been dominated by studying offenders and gaining insights from them to inform policy.’ In particular, field research into the prison and resettlement experiences of white collar criminals has been largely ignored (Hunter 2009). Table 1 lists the most significant interview based studies undertaken to date. The interviews for this body of work were predominantly conducted in prisons.

There is a lively debate over the benefits and disadvantages of conducting such research. On the one hand, some researchers in prisons have found many inmates to enjoy the interview and open up to the researchers (Liebling, 1999; Goldstraw-White, 2011). On the other hand, several writers have noted how the environment of prison on the offender may influence the prisoner to impress and to not offer the most truthful accounts. Regarding her own research, Schinkel (2014:584) observed, ‘...the fact they were interviewed in criminal justice premises, is likely to have put pressure on the interviewees to distance themselves from their past behaviour.’ In the context of the present research, the advantage of interviewing offenders after their release is that they are able to more objectively reflect on their experiences beyond the institutional influences and understand how it has shaped their subsequent lives. However, other challenges arise, the most significant of which is actually finding the offenders and securing their consent for interview. Time may also have eroded some of the memories the offenders wish to forget.

Table 1. Previous qualitative studies based upon interviews with ‘white collar’ related offenders

Study	Number of Offenders	Type	Gender	Country	Interview Context	Insights on Prison Experience
Cressey (1953)	133	Embezzlers	Male	USA	Prison	No
Breed (1979)	100	General WCC	Male	UK	Prison	Yes
Zietz (1981)	100	Embezzlers	Female	USA	Prison	No
Benson & Cullen, (1988) Benson (1985 & 1990)	30	General WCC	Male	USA	In the field under the auspices of probation and parole office	Yes
Jesilow et al (1993)	42	Healthcare fraudsters	Male and Female	USA	In the field	Yes
Gill (2005a & 2005b)	16	Fraudsters	Male	UK	Prison (bar one and other methods tried)	No
Dhami (2007)	14	General WCC	Male	UK	Prison	Yes
Goldstraw-White (2011)	41	General WCC	Male and Female	UK	Prison	Yes
Klenowski et al (2011)	40	General WCC	Male and Female	USA	Prison	No
Gray (2013)	1	Political corruption	Male	USA	Public lecture	No
Free & Murphy (2015)	37	Fraud offenders	Male and Female	USA	All bar 6 in prison	No
Schuchter & Levi (2015)	13	General WCC	Male and Female	Austria and Switzerland	In the field and on the telephone	No
May & Bhardwa (2018)	31	Fraudsters linked to organised crime	Male and female	UK	Prison	No
Jordanoska (2018)	7	Occupational fraudster	Male	UK	Prison	No

Impact and experience of imprisonment

Most of the previous interview based research (Table 1) examined the aetiology of white collar offending, the motivations and pathways and only touched on the prison experience. In comparison, there is a long standing academic tradition of empirical research into the experiences and effects of incarceration for the general prison population. These studies of

'prisoner society' have largely been undertaken in correctional establishments in the United States and focused upon the impact of incarcerative regimes where power was severely felt. For example, the classic *Society of Captives* study by Sykes (1958) was an ethnographic account of power in a New Jersey state maximum security prison whilst Cohen and Taylor's (1972) *Psychological Survival* focused on long term imprisonment where enclosed totalitarian power relations shaped the prison experience. As a result, these early studies encapsulated the prison as being an exemplar of total power and control. Prisoners were illustrations of powerlessness kept totally controlled and contained by the institution. Nevertheless, particularly evident in Sykes (1958) work was the implicit problematic nature of power in that prison authorities are deemed to have to act in a coercive manner and create a number of strategies of inducement and encouragement to maintain order. As such power and control of the institution over the inmate was essentially deficient with prisoners' various experiences of their incarceration shaped by the exercise of power by the authorities and the resistances, negotiations and acceptances of power by the prisoners themselves in their own subjective experiences and practices in prison.

Understanding the experiences of incarceration for white collar offenders can also shed important new light on criminology's current understanding of the relative harms of incarceration and various experiences and coping mechanisms of offenders. Thus far the relative psychological and emotional impacts of imprisonment and the behavioural and cognitive adaptations employed to survive the loss of liberty have largely been focused on the most marginalised and stigmatised in society or with long term and extreme prison conditions (Cohen and Taylor, 1972, Sykes, 1958, Appleton, 2010). Only recently with Crewe's (2009) seminal ethnographic study of everyday prison life have we understood the rich and complex relational "innards" (Crewe, 2009:1) of imprisonment. For example, Crewe's (2015) framework for analysis as to the relative experiences and impact of penal power highlights how its constituent parts of penal "depth, weight, tightness and breadth" enables researchers to

analyse how structural trends of punitivism, risk management or managerialism play out empirically in the locale amongst different offenders.

More recent studies into the experience of prison (Crewe, 2009; Fassin, 2013) have also highlighted how Sykes' study into the "pains of imprisonment" have been reconfigured. Penal control is afforded by much softer techniques of psychology, incentives and earned privileges than outright brutal coercion. Consequently the drawing up of penal control has become less visible and more clouded in strategies of incentivization, opportunities to develop oneself and a focus on the quality of prison relations between staff and inmates. As a result the experience of incarceration has moved beyond an analysis of whether it is 'hard' or 'soft' but rather focuses on the variety of ways in which the prison regime ensures or fails to encourage order and compliance. Furthermore, an additional level of the pain of the experience of prison stems from the multiplicity of ways in which carceral frustrations and pains can arise from techniques which stress incentives, relationships or seemingly human conditions.

Taking his cue from Downe's (1988) study of British and Dutch prisons, Crewe remarked how the "*depth*" of prison has to be conceptualised in broader terms than merely referring to length of sentence. The subjective experience of incarceration is therefore more about what it felt like than merely how long it lasted (Crewe 2015:54). Penal "*breadth*" refers to the penalties beyond the prison, but which are a consequence of imprisonment, for example, restrictions on voting rights and employment opportunities, professional banishment and ruined curriculum vitae (Crewe, 2015:60). The psychological harm of feeling remote and being buried by incarceration could result from exposure to the sharply contrasting realities between the realities of prison conditions and the world outside. Using an alternative metaphor, King and McDermott (1995) argue that the "*weight*" of imprisonment could be experienced as a burden bearing down on the inmates' shoulders. They attributed this weight to the levels of degradation and quality of the prison regime, which incorporated the multiplicity of ways in which guards used their authority and power. More recently Liebling and Arnold's (2004) study of the moral

performance of prisons has highlighted the need to bring forth the subjective and differentiated dimensions of an offender's individual experience. In this vein, Crewe (2015) explained that negative experiences are not only borne from overt power or brutality, they can also arise from the 'lightness of prison regimes', wherein minimal or absent power and a disordered prison experience can cause anomic anxiety and pain.

More recently academics have focused upon the notion of "tightness" of penal power. Crewe's (2015) analytical framework, highlights how establishing order in prisons through penal power has increasingly become 'softened' in terms of minimising the use of coercion and the threats of violence. However, he is also keen to highlight that such a softening of penal power does not necessarily equate to a less oppressive or controlling 'tightness' of the environment. Even in these less harsh environments, penal power ensures compliance through an actuarial logic of risk assessments, behavioural evaluations, judgements and labels that are highly consequential for prisoners (Crewe, 2015).

Finally, the experience of incarceration is not homogenous or uniform over time, with prisoners adapting and experiencing different aspects of the prison environment as they journey through the system. For example, Fassin (2017:101) noted how French prisoners were lulled into a false sense of the genuine carceral experience by the relative comforts of the arrival unit, only to experience significant "incarceration" shock after 10 days when it was replaced by "*being placed in a dirty cell with mattresses taking up most of the floor, abandoned by their cellmates*". Importantly, Fassin's work highlights how particular aspects of the prison environment can serve to both exacerbate or ameliorate prisoners' experiences of loneliness, bewilderment and pain.

Methods

The target population for the study encompassed any persons convicted for occupational corruption offences involving fraud or bribery. There was, however, no readily available list of

such offenders. The first task of the research was to create a database of offenders sanctioned for occupational corruption crimes using a variety of secondary data sources including law databases, websites of relevant regulators (for example, the Serious Fraud Office and the Financial Conduct Authority) and general media searches. The search was limited to the period between 2004 and 2013. Each person identified was added to our database with their relevant offending details. The completed database included 465 offenders. Commercially available people tracing tools were then used to complete 165 offenders' addresses. Letters were sent to these individuals inviting them to participate in interviews. The recruitment method initially secured 13 volunteers. Some participants had built up their own networks and were keen to introduce other members, which led to a further 4 participants. Thus a total of 17 participants were recruited without accessing the criminal justice system. Table 2 sets out only the key participant data relevant to this paper in order to protect their anonymity. The list excludes the four participants who were not imprisoned. All the interviews took place in neutral locations or at the participants' homes. They were all recorded and later transcribed for coding and thematic analysis.

Table 2. Interviews, their offence and their type of sentence

Participant	Judicial outcome	
	Offence	Prison type
Frank	Fraud	Open
Graham	Fraud	High security
Jayne	Fraud	Open
Nigel	Fraud	Open
Brian	Bribery	Open
Harvey	Bribery	Open
Jim	Fraud	Open
Morris	Fraud	Open

Paul	Fraud	Open
Carl	Misconduct in Public Office	Open
Carole	Misconduct in Public Office	Open
Tony	Fraud	Open
Walter	Bribery	Open

White Collar Criminals' Experiences of Prison

This section discusses the findings of the thematic analysis of the interviews under three headings: the good (positive aspects of the prison experience), the bad (negative, non-violent experiences) and the ugly (negative, violent experiences). The discussion is shaped by Crewe's (2015) analytical framework to draw out aspects of the participants' accounts relating to depth, weight, tightness and breadth of penal power.

The Good

Jesilow, Pontell and Geis (1993) found amongst incarcerated physicians those who downplayed the experience or even found it pleasurable. More recently Logan et al. (2017, p 21) highlighted the positive experience of Bernie Madoff in prison, where he revealed he was treated like a 'Mafia Don' and felt safer than on the 'streets of New York'. Our interviewees also highlighted the positive aspects of their carceral experiences. Frank, for example, embraced the experience, describing it in glowing terms and as something like 'rehab', a treatment that weened him off the drug of money and power, and brought his family closer together by appreciating the basic, simple priorities and qualities of life:

Prison was actually very, very good for me, very good for me. In fact I think it was probably the best thing that ever happened in my life to be honest. Frank

Helping other prisoners

One of the most positive aspects was the participants' willingness to assist other prisoners both informally and formally. As most of the sample were well educated and highly skilled persons they had attributes that enabled them to adapt to prison life and gain respect from their communities through helping others. It enabled them to engage voluntarily in socially productive activities, thereby providing their own minds with relief from the everyday weight and tightness of their conditions, and assisting in rebuilding their self-esteems:

And you all help each other. I had some people who had reading difficulties, and I'm quite good at maths - nothing to do with what I did, I mean, you know. And they had difficulty adding up and that, so I helped them while we were in prison, you know, and on computer courses. I've done a lot on computers, 'cause my work was that way round. So yeah, I was happy to help them. Morris

...she admitted she couldn't read or write. And said look, I really want to write a letter to my kids, can you help me? I said yeah, of course I will. So she took me under her wing. And then she started pimping me out to write other letters for people, do application forms. I didn't realise how many women couldn't read or write, didn't have a clue. Jayne

Graham also saw his education as an opportunity to cement his position in the hierarchy and garnish favours to make life more tolerable. Though bound by the restrictive environment of a high security prison, Graham coped so well with carceral tightness that he found himself in charge of an office:

So I had the office, I was the head one. I had two people working for me. So I'd end up doing all the home leaves for people. I'd speak to them and write letters for them, because some of the poor bastards can't even write, so I'd write letters home for them and they'd ask me to read stuff for them. I'd ended up dealing with all kinds of fucking

problems.... So in the end I was like one of the top people in the prison there, and I'd always get to the front of the dinner queue, I'd always get two lumps of extra chicken. Anyone if they left would come and bring me a load of sweets or biscuits and say thanks very much. So I got where I wanted to be. Graham

Similarly, once Tony and Jim had been relocated from the highly restrictive reception prisons to open prisons, they found more formal positions teaching fellow prisoners:

(# prison) was better because I had a job, I was helping out the teacher to teach IT, because I am really good on computers, really good. Basically so I spent all my time in, well five days a week basically teaching IT to people. Tony

Got to (#prison), looked at it, and I thought right, peer partner job for me my boy, this is what I've got to do. It was quite good, because you help people read and write, teach them to read and write. Good for me because it got me out the cell, and I think perhaps there were a couple of people I helped. Jim

Health and pastimes

Prison provides opportunities to improve health and fitness, and plenty of time to pursue pastimes whilst reflecting on important aspects of one's life:

Sometimes, yeah. But I got on the juice to get really big while I was in there, because it was everywhere. I went up to 16 stone in there. I'm still benching now. I was benching 140. It's for your protection. Graham

What prison does, the same as if you had a massive coronary or something, it gives you a chance, you get plucked out of your life, you're fed and watered, you generally lose a bit of weight and get fitter, and it gives you a chance to look at your life and go do you know what, that was really stupid. I don't like him, he was alright, I'm not going to do that anymore. So you have two chances of a life, which actually ain't a bad thing. That's what I've found anyway. Frank

To pass the time the participants read a great deal, watched television, listened to the radio, played computer games, went for walks, worked and socialised with other prisoners. Sharing these activities enabled them to develop strong social bonds and enduring friendships. It adjusted their world view to recognise qualities and value in people they would have hitherto dismissed as worthless:

My chess game got brilliant. I tell you what, some of the guys in there who you'd have never have thought were chess players. There was the one chap, Adam #####, who I still speak to, and he was an ex-boxer, and if you looked at him... He said, come on, let's have a game of chess. Yeah, no problem. Well, did he whip me or did he whip me in some order? I think we played about 300 games of chess and I beat him about 40 times, and I thought I was a good chess player. Just goes to show, you shouldn't always judge people by view. Jim

New friendships

The relationships and friendships formed in the prisons were a critical aspect of coping with the environment. Identifying people with whom they could connect, share and develop meaningful relationships became mini triumphs rather than, as would be viewed on the outside, serendipitous events.

You start seeing...you start meeting someone positive and someone you can get on with and you think great, this day, it's going to be okay today. Nigel

The prisoners formed themselves into small groups, sharing common activities, routines and ownership of locations:

I was lucky, there was a group of about six of us in Parc who got on well. If you can imagine, you had round tables bolted to the floor, and we had our own little table, we'd tend to form little groups of people and our little group was there. Jim

Friendships were forged with people, who they would have otherwise avoided, and lasted beyond prison. The sense of comradeship not only helped them during incarceration, reminisces and sharing experience after release helped them cope with the breadth of the penal sanctions as they sought to reintegrate into society.

I met some very nice people, all villains but some of them were very nice people. One of my friends now done a 20 year sentence for double murder, but you forge a code, I suppose it's like being in the trenches, I suppose being in the army, you form a connection with these people that people that have not gone to prison can't comprehend, because you've suffered prison and it is a horrible place and you suffered it and you got through it. So there is a bond between us that is quite strange. Frank

But prison is a funny place and I've had some good fun. I've never cried so much but I've never laughed so much either to be honest. And that gets remembered, when you're out with them, when I see them now, when we're all out, we go and have a drink or whatever, it normally ends up a few too many drinks, but we spend most of the night laughing our heads off about stuff that's gone on. Frank

Open prison

All the interviewees ended up in open prisons except Graham who remained in a high security institution for the duration of his incarceration. Open prisons are low security institutions where prisoners are trusted to serve their sentence with minimal supervision. These 'softer' regimes were characterised by a reduced depth and weight of the penal power. The contrast with their dehumanising experiences of provocative staff, arbitrary rules and simmering violence in high security establishments was acutely felt:

So I ended up five months in a category B prison being a category D prisoner which was hell. That was hell. That was the worst experience of my life. It was just the whole place. I mean it was violent; it was just the whole place. It really was full of...it was full of scumbags and I was in the middle of them. It really was... It was a bit like the... I just don't know how I ended up there. I used to wake up every morning thinking what the hell am I doing here? I was with the lowest of the lowest of the low and it was a terrible prison, terribly run prison. Facilities were diabolic, filthy dirty, the food was unbelievable and I shouldn't have been there. And that was the worst, and they wouldn't move me. Frank

The reduction in the depth and weight of penal power were experienced through less surveillance and authoritarian controls. They were replaced by increased trust, greater freedoms that led to more sociable and productive carceral experiences. The participants felt safer as violence became a more distant concern. However, the lower levels of alertness and the diminished demands for compliance were accompanied by the slowing of time and increased boredom. Tony compared open prison to a holiday camp:

It was an open section of a prison, so I could go out whenever I want, go for a walk around; it's more like a lower version of Butlins. That's wasn't too bad, but I wouldn't want to do it again.... It was nice, I mean it's different. As I said the other place was at the time went a bit quicker because I was working all day, but there was more violent people around me in (Cat B prison), than the (open) one. It was less violent people around me, so I felt safer, but the time went a bit slower because I was less busy - well I read a lot of books. Tony

The participants emphasised the positive aspect of open prison and did not complain about the relatively minor restrictions on their lives. They did not feel the tightness of penal power described by Crewe (2015).

You can do whatever, you know, whatever you so desire. You're not allowed access to the internet, and we all know why, there's obvious reasons, you know. And that's about it...and no alcohol. Which is, again, standard...But yeah, I mean, you can't fault it. I mean, the taxpayer is looking after them extremely well. And you get good meals, you get a choice of four or five items each day. You get pretty well whatever you want.... Sky TV ... from quarter to seven in the morning until half past eight at night, you were free to wander round wherever you wanted to. Morris

Paul appreciated the ease of life and the freedom to make decisions and undertake everyday activities that are taken for granted on the outside:

...once you get to open conditions, is not that bad. You get three meals a day, your own room, you're earning wages, you know, I got £15 a week for working in the laundry. You can order things in to make life easy, they do a weekly list, and you can order things, obviously biscuits, chocolate, things to make life more comfortable. You can order from an Argos catalogue, you can order clothes from H&M, it's comfortable,

and you can survive it. I could survive in prison if I knew that was what was going to be for the rest of my life. Paul

The Bad

Some of the literature on white collar criminals' experience of prison highlights the negatives, such as Payne's (2003) six Ds: depression, danger, deviance, denial, deprivation and doldrums. This study also found a variety of negative experiences of prison. These were, however dominated by their recollections of the physical and psychological shocks associated with their initial periods in high security establishments.

'Alien' world

Prison is a world that is completely different to what the group of interviewees had previously experienced and this caused quite a shock to most of them, particularly at the initial reception for the first few days. They did not regard themselves as real criminals, so the first shock was accepting that they were now in fact criminals and prisoners. Walter initially could not accept that he was one of these 'alien' others:

I got them to put me into the medical wing. And they put me in there. I asked whether I would be there for my full term, which would have been lovely because it would have meant, yeah, I don't get association with all the prisoners, lovely, I don't want to mix with a load of criminals [laugh], right. That's my view, I'm not a criminal, I didn't do it. So I may have been sent to prison but that doesn't mean that I want to associate with a load of criminals. Walter

Harvey had a similar experience, trying to persuade a prison officer that he was not a criminal:

Mr ###, you are guilty. I said, no, I'm not. I said, ... I'm not guilty, I've never been guilty. I've been set up. Oh no, on paper you're a criminal and you're a registered criminal now. I said, aye, fair enough, that's your thoughts, I think different. Harvey.

For Frank it was like landing in North Korea, a place he had occasionally imagined but never expected to visit:

In prison I can only liken it to being landed in North Korea where everything that you've ever thought about decency and officialdom, and tidiness and cleanliness and just sheer decency has gone out the window. And it's a world that exists in your own world. I started off in a prison in my own town, and I lived in my town all my life, so I've been there for 40 odd years, and I walked past this place many, many, many times. Often walking past there; I wonder what's going on in there at the moment? Now I'm in it, now I'm in the place, I could not believe, the shock of the total opposite of what I expected, and the total opposite to what anyone has experienced in their life before. And the fact that no one prepared us for it. And the fact is that there are more and more normal people going to prison. When I say normal, people like myself who are not set out to be criminally minded. If you're going to be a criminal, if you're going to rob banks, if you're going to do something you know is wrong, drug dealing or whatever, prison is always on the radar somewhere. It's always somewhere. So you mentally prepare because you're probably dealing with other criminals who have been in one and they are telling you how to tuck your money away, do this, do that, keep a boxful of cash for the wife in case you go down, that's her running off money. Whatever. Frank

The stark contrast between prison and the privileged world of one white collar criminal was observed by Graham. The new inmate was more concerned about his chickens than his immediate prospects:

He goes, yeah, I need to get out for the day. He (prison officer) says, sorry? You ain't going anywhere for three months, first of all. You're not allowed out for three months. But this dude's coming in asking for a day out. Sorry mate, you want to what, sorry? ...So this fellow (prison officer) said, listen, let me tell you something, the prison service, the government and we don't give a fuck about you or your chickens, you're not going anywhere for at least three months, now piss off. Oh, you should have seen his face. Graham.

Prisoners

Many of the anxieties expressed by the interviewees arose from the fear of the unknown, especially the unpredictable behaviour of other prisoners. They had never previously experienced such a wide range of personalities, attitudes, pathological conditions and behaviours in close proximity and in such a short time scale:

When I was first arrested and it hit the press, I had hate mail coming through at home. One of the pieces of hate mail had said, you're going to get your comeuppance, you're going to go to Winchester, you're going to lose absolutely everything, you'll be locked up with a big black man and you'll be fucked repeatedly by him. Right. I got moved into this cell, and... I'm ...put in with is a big black gentleman ...Hard to try and get to sleep... Walter

So when you're in this environment whereby you have to get on with people, people you don't like, people who may smell, people who are just...some of them are scum of the earth, some of them are really nice, some of them are really decent. Jayne

Nigel had been a police officer, but unlike Graham, he immediately sought the protection of Rule 43, segregation in a vulnerable prisoners wing. This meant he had to associate with sex offenders and the whole experience took its toll on him psychologically:

I was on the VP unit, straight away, I walked in there, I want VP, vulnerable persons, because of my... They said why? Well, I'm an ex-cop. Right okay... But you've got your child sex offenders in there, ex-judges, ex-solicitors, ex...all sorts of people who are vulnerable. There's ex-cops on that unit which I got chatting to, got to know, and you hear their stories and it gives you a bit of reassurance, although you're in this dark, dark place, not a nice place to be, mentally more than anything. And I think this whole process is the mental. Nigel

Graham also highlighted the challenges of being in a place with large numbers of people with mental illnesses. He developed an empathy for those he regarded as suffering from psychological disorders:

There's people in there with clear mental illnesses that shouldn't be in prison. No one gives a fuck about them. If they play up they go on the block, they're punished. But they're playing up because they're fucking bonkers. It's not because their mind set's in the right thing so you can therefore say we can justify putting him on the block because he's being an arsehole. This person's mad, and that's why he's acting the way he is. He's not acting like that because of anything other than he's not right. Graham

Prison officers

The participants' perceptions of prison officers were predominantly negative. They regarded many of the officers as incompetent life failures and bullies, who made sure that the weight of their penal power bore down on the prisoners:

I would say very, very few are any good. Very, very few, less than ten per cent. Most of them...I don't know how to explain it. I think the best way to explain it; no one ever sets out to be a prison officer. To become a prison officer you've either failed somewhere else, you didn't pass the police exam, or you've tried everywhere and this was the last attempt, or you've come out the army and this is something you're just doing while you get your pension, so they don't really care anyway, just seeing their way through time. So most of them are pretty useless. Most of them are bullies. Most of them...especially if they think you've got money or they think you're a bit clever, especially white collars; they like to be able to impose their position on you by making your life difficult. They respect the drug dealers for some reason. They like the drug dealers, but they don't like the normal nice people. Frank

Walter experienced a cruel hoax, where he thought he was going to be released under Home Detention Curfew with an electronic tag:

And I was applying to get my tag and I was desperate to be out on a tag, because it meant I would be home. And one of the officers got hold of a form for me to be interviewed to go onto tag, had it signed as if it had been signed by the person responsible for it. When I went along for where it said, it was a hoax. Walter.

Prison conditions

Poor conditions, particularly in the high security prisons and grossly unhygienic behaviour of prisoners clearly added to the weight of the carceral experience:

Well, put it this way, [prison name] is known for cockroaches. I'm in the block and this cell's a fucking mess..... I'm laying in bed, it's about 12 o'clock at night and I've felt this thing go... I thought, what the fuck's that? I've put the light on, they're fucking everywhere. And they were like that, they were big. So I kept trying to kill them. I kept a load in a bag, and I named them.

Trouble is, in the showers what happens is you'll go in the shower and there'll be a big fucking turd land in the showers. Because what people do is they go out on their home leave and then they plug a load of stuff, and then to get it out they go in the shower and shit it out on the floor and get it out. They were doing it all the time in there. Graham

Preparation for life outside

The breadth of the penal consequences of their crimes continued into the lives after release. Although the participants anticipated difficulties, the majority did not really know what would happen until they felt the consequences. Some were welcomed back into their families and were quickly provided with jobs. For others, the fall from grace in the eyes of society was acutely felt. They were divorced, ostracised, impecunious, banished from their professions and struggled to find work. Prison had in some ways protected them from this real world sense of worthlessness. The shock of release was second only to the shock of their initial induction into the prison system. The time post release is perhaps where the sensitivities of some formerly privileged business people and professionals are most prominent and enduring. The lack of

support in preparing for life outside is a recurring research theme (Moore 2012). Our participants felt that there was insufficient support within the prisons to assist them practically and psychologically in dealing with this transition:

Well, coming out of prison is far more difficult than going in, far more difficult, for that reason; you're not sure how you're going to be accepted. None of my friends from school I kept in contact with, I just cut myself off from everybody. Not that they've tried to get in contact with me because they probably believed what was being read in the papers. And I mean you're living with... When you first come out of prison you believe that everyone...like I said, I can spot a prisoner a mile away. You believe that everyone can see that you're a prisoner or an ex-prisoner, ex-offender. So you have very little confidence to walk about in the street. That doesn't go...it's easing but it doesn't go away. And even now, working in the local...and people locally know, oh, that's that guy that went to prison. It's very difficult. You're nothing. Frank

...and I was now out, back in the public domain and that felt really weird, because you felt everyone was looking at you because you had prisoner written on your forehead and things like that, and there wasn't. It took a lot of time to adjust but working back out in the community, because I was a low ebb in my life, yeah, I only felt I was capable of shovelling the crap out of a ditch. Nigel

The ugly

We classified the very worst of the participants' experiences as 'the ugly'. As noted by Payne (2003), these were dominated by fear of violence, experience of violence or witnessing acts of violence. For most of the interviewees, proximity to an atmosphere of violence or actual violent incidents was utterly alien. The initial induction into prison experience was a fearful time for

most of the participants. It was particularly challenging for the four participants who had either been police officers or had worked in prisons. Carl who had worked as prison officer was particularly concerned:

Oh yes, it was definitely an eye opener and of course I was absolutely scared shitless when I first went in there but it really is...it's just once they find out that you're... Carl.

Graham, a former police officer, had been advised to invoke Rule 43, i.e. enter a segregated wing for his own protection. He decided he did not wish to be viewed as:

...that geezer over there, he's either a sex case or a copper or a grass. So I blended in and I was chatting to everyone. Graham

Graham and another ex-police officer supported each other in deciding to enter the general prison population. Informed by their career experiences, they both recognised the heightened personal risks and immediately made preparations to blend into the environment by adopting the persona and acquiring the tools of archetypal hardened criminals:

(The other PC) ...was a big lump, but he shit himself, oh, no, going to jail. I said, a couple of things, you don't go on the rule, as soon as we get in there we make a couple of shivs (home-made blades) and we just watch each other's backs.... Went in, got our packs.... So we've got the toothbrushes out, once we got celled up started sharpening them fucking toothbrushes away, get that fucking nice edge on them quick. So you've got that in case anything happens. I carried that round for three years, one of them.
Graham

Violence in prisons between prisoners and prison officers is a well-established problem in most prison systems (Wolff et al, 2007). For Graham as an ex-police officer violence was a constant threat and he had multiple experiences where he had to engage in violence to defend himself. He was convinced that he had to develop a reputation as someone very willing to be violent when provoked:

One geezer tried to blackmail me. I had people round me protecting me, but one geezer tried to blackmail me, so I had to feed him a tin of tuna in a sock. So I had to knock half his teeth out and he went to the infirmary. Then another geezer tried, and me and another copper who was in there give him a shoeing, and he got sent to the infirmary. Graham

Graham also witnessed a horrific attack by one prisoner against another:

He run over to this bloke and started stabbing him in the neck.these gangs. But he just started stabbing this bloke, and then he fucking run off into the yard. He must have thought he was on the street, he was going to leg it and run home. Then he realised...Graham

Jayne who came from a typical middle-class, white collar background just didn't fit in initially and that led to conflicts and physical assaults. She learnt to adjust her attitudes and behaviour to the new social norms whilst developing a friendship with a 'dominant prisoner' who protected her.

At first I was very badly...I didn't fit in at all, I didn't speak properly, I didn't act properly, I didn't look properly, I didn't wear the right clothes, I didn't have the right swagger, I just didn't have any of it. I remember I'd been there about three, four days, I got a broken jaw and two broken ribs because I wanted to use the phone to speak to

home. So no, I didn't fit in very well at first. But then I was very lucky. There was a very...it's like queen bee at prison, her name was #####, really butch lesbian, archetypal, what you expect from prison, you know what I mean? It's just like Cell Block H shit, really, really butch. Jayne

However, for the majority of our participants, violence proved to be a rare vent. What bore down on them more than actual violence was the fear of the unknown and the anticipation of violence, which had been stimulated by portrayals in the press, television and the movies:

I was always looking over my shoulders thinking when will there be a knock on the door and what would happen if I get arrested on site? When I got arrested that was really scary, because the first time it was like what is going to happen? When I first had, I knew I might be going to prison I was like, what's going to happen in prison, will I get beaten up, will I get stabbed, will I get killed? All the bad stuff you see all off movies and all that, all the negative sides, but then it wasn't as bad as I thought. Tony

Conclusion

The stories related by the fraudsters and corrupt in our research are in many ways similar to the accounts of many 'street criminals' who enter the prison system for the first time (see for example, Crewe, 2012). The participants did not conform to the caricature of the career criminal, the gangster who accepts prison as an occupational risk and perhaps as a badge of honour. The contrast in caricaturisations of the street thug and the white collar criminal may be the origin of the special sensitivity hypothesis: a penal system designed to control thugs, thieves and murderers is likely to be especially harmful to middle class fraudsters. However,

such is the varied nature of the prison population that this characterisation is a grossly inaccurate typification. The research shows that the absence of career criminal aspirations and street orientated worldliness does not mean that they are not able to cope with prison. The results accord with Stadler, Benson and Cullen (2013) in not supporting the special sensitivity hypothesis associated with white collar criminals, suggesting 'special resiliency' instead.

The participants we interviewed experienced the depth, weight, tightness and breadth of penal power and oppressive circumstances as others do. They too found their own ways to adjust to the pains of the carceral world, both in the initial high security establishments and later in open prisons. They did not feel the depth, weight and tightness of penal power as others might. This is in part due to the open prison environment experienced by the majority of the sample. It is also due to their rules compliance orientation: they recognised the need for the tightness of institutional rules and accommodated those rules, even helping others with bureaucratic burdens.

In some ways the participants prospered compared to other prisoners. One, Frank, even described it as the best thing to happen to him. After the initial shock, all the participants proved adaptable, and all except Graham avoided being drawn into the criminality and violence of prisons. The participants' social learning, education and prior experiences equipped them with the agency to make moral and practical choices. Several of the participants found ways to be socially useful and productive, using their education and skills to help and teach others. Their eyes were opened to the realities of prison and what it felt like. They were able to compare their own advantages with others less fortunate. They observed with some empathy how others, particularly those with psychological disorders, struggled to function in the conditions. They engaged constructively and meaningfully with people they would otherwise have actively avoided, and with whom they forged enduring, supportive friendships.

There is one aspect of the breadth of the penal system that privileged, middle-class criminals may experience more acutely than others, and that is the fall from grace. Here we must distinguish between white collar people and white collar criminals. The guilty finding is likely to be a heavy burden for many hitherto respected business people and professionals irrespective of whether the offence involves violence, dangerous driving, shop-lifting, fraud, bribery or insider trading (Button, Shepherd and Blackbourn, 2018). It can therefore be argued that privileged persons are likely to be especially sensitive to the criminal label because of the relative scale of their fall, but the point we want to emphasise is that this does not make them especially sensitive to imprisonment.

This paper responds to the call by Stadler et al., (2013) for the resurrection of penal research into white collar offenders by presenting important research findings. Our conclusions derive from a small cohort of convicted white collar offenders who volunteered their participation in the research. Their reflectiveness and compliance orientation may mark them out as model prisoners. We need to be mindful, therefore, that the findings cannot be generalised either to those imprisoned for white collar offences or to privileged persons imprisoned for any offence type. However, we can conclude with confidence that the special sensitivity hypothesis cannot be applied universally to either group: as in the broader prison population, some will be sensitive and some will not. On the contrary, although the realities of carceral experiences for both groups is nuanced and heterogeneous, our findings tend to support Stadler, Benson and Cullen (2013), indicating that white collar offenders often possess attributes that mean they are capable of successfully adapting to imprisonment.

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