‘Purposeful Activity’:
Masculinity and the Meaning of Prison Work Amongst Young Men in Three English Prisons

Martha Jo Morey

Fitzwilliam College

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Institute of Criminology

University of Cambridge

Supervised by Professor Ben Crewe

Declarations

This thesis is the result of my own work and includes nothing which is the outcome of work done in collaboration except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text.

I further state that no substantial part of my thesis has already been submitted, or, is being concurrently submitted for any such degree, diploma or other qualification at the University of Cambridge or any other University or similar institution except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text.

It does not exceed the prescribed word limit for the relevant Degree Committee.

Martha Jo Morey
September 2023

Abstract

This thesis explores the relationship between masculinity and work amongst young men in three Category C prisons in England: HMPYOI Swinfen Hall, HMPYOI Isis and HMP Wealstun. Prison masculinities research has tended to focus on spectacular and hypermasculine behaviours. This is in sharp contrast to the nuance and diversity suggested by contemporary sociological studies of masculinities. One explanation for the narrow lens through which prison masculinities have traditionally been studied is that prisoners' work experiences, both in prison and in the community, are often overlooked. By exploring prisoner masculinities, work experiences, and the relationships between them, this thesis endeavours to illustrate the complexity and multiplicity of prisoner masculinities, and the significance of prison work to studies of imprisonment.

This thesis is based on research conducted in three prisons over nine months and involved prolonged periods of observations in prison workplaces alongside 88 semi-structured interviews with young male prisoners. First, the thesis describes prison work provisions across the sites and outlines four 'purposes' of 'purposeful activity' identified by participants. It demonstrates that prisoners believe prison work *should* be rehabilitative but in practice find it is primarily a means of coping with the pains of imprisonment, and that the largely unfulfilled rehabilitative ideal has consequences for trust, legitimacy, and staff-prisoner relationships that are often overlooked in prison sociology. Second, the thesis presents a typology of prisoner masculinities and explores how different men use prison work as a 'masculinity resource'. It highlights the significance of work experiences – both in prison and in the community – to prisoner masculinities and demonstrates how distinct strategies for engaging with prison work shape prisoner society. These findings also suggest that it may be helpful to distinguish between prison work that is *purposeful* versus that which is *meaningful,* the latter being work that impacts prisoners' lives long-term because of its relevance to prisoner masculinities and aspirations for future work. Overall, by promoting more nuanced discussions around prisoner masculinities and highlighting the value of further research into prison work, this thesis hopes to demonstrate how greater consideration of these subjects can facilitate a deeper understanding of prisoner society and the experience of imprisonment.

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1. Introduction – 'Prison labour is back'

Just over twenty years ago, Christian Parenti wrote that 'prison labour is back' (2001: 247) in reference to the United States, but there is ample evidence that prison work is 'back' in England and Wales too. The last decade has seen successive Secretaries of State for Justice centre prison work, education and training in policy and rhetoric (Ministry of Justice (MoJ) 2010, 2015, 2016, 2021a, 2022). Kenneth Clarke wanted 'prisons to become places of hard work and industry instead of enforced idleness' (MoJ 2010), while Michael Gove argued that prison work and education were not only 'goods in themselves' but also a means of providing hope and purpose, because 'the more purpose there is in every prisoner's day, the more likely their prison is to be an ordered, safe and successful environment' (MoJ 2016). More recently, Dominic Raab focused on the economic and labour market benefits of improving the skills and employability of prisoners. In introducing initiatives to increase post-release employment, Raab routinely emphasised that 'ex-offenders with jobs are paying their taxes' (MoJ 2021), that such measures would help 'address local labour shortages' (MoJ 2022), and that increasing prisoner employability would be a 'win-win for business' (MoJ 2021).

The changing focus of prison work policies arguably reflects broader economic shifts in England and Wales (Rusche and Kirchheimer 1939). Scholars including Hatton (2018a) have suggested that prison work is shaped by wider economic contexts by drawing comparisons between several forms of 'coerced labour', arguing that they are a consequence of neoliberal economic policy, and should not, therefore, be considered separately (or as separate) from other forms of work or employment. Despite academic arguments for the consideration of prison work as a form of employment, there are legal structures in place in the United States (where Hatton conducted her research) and in England and Wales that distinguish prison work from other forms of employment. These legal provisions position prisoner workers in 'non-economic' relationships with their 'employer', and thus facilitate the low pay and relative absence of protections afforded to non-prisoner workers. Understanding the *purpose* of prison work – given its 'non-economic' status – is as complicated as defining it. Frequently changing narratives around prison work, within academic, political and practitioner spheres, highlight the malleability of the 'purpose' of prison work: it is a means of punishment, of supporting the economy and businesses, and of rehabilitating 'dangerous' or 'lazy' 'criminals'.

The political focus on prison work has not been mirrored within criminology, particularly in England and Wales. While the purpose of prison work has been considered in wider discussions about the aims of imprisonment (e.g. Bottoms 1990; King and McDermott 1995; Simon 1999), only a handful of studies have examined specific forms of prison work in this jurisdiction (Sloan 2016a, 2016b; Pandeli 2015). There are even fewer studies conducted in England and Wales that consider the practice of prison work as a whole (with Legge 1978, Simon 1999 and Shea 2005 notable exceptions), particularly from the perspective of the staff and prisoners that participate in it. As a consequence, very little is known about prisoners' attitudes to and experience of 'purposeful activity', about the impact it has on other aspects of contemporary imprisonment, or about the way prison work shapes prison life.

In contrast, prison masculinities have been the subject of a significant amount of penological research. While much of the early work in this field focused on prisoner *hyper*masculinit*y*, more recent studies by Crewe (2009), Phillips (2012), Maguire (2019, 2021a, 2021b) and others have demonstrated a multiplicity of more nuanced prisoner masculinities. In terms of policy relating to prisoner masculinities, while the term 'masculinity' is rarely used explicitly, it is often invoked through discussions of work, education and training. Parenti noted that contemporary forms of prison work have 'a cryptic appeal to traditional, positive notions of masculinity' (2001: 247) in that they act as 'the carrot of self-esteem…dangled out as a promise to a bunch of caged, over-crowded, and extremely vulnerable men' (ibid.: 252). The ways in which recent Justice Secretaries have associated employment, employability, education and skills with prisoners' masculinities and 'rehabilitation' underlines how enduring this 'cryptic appeal' apparently is. Michael Gove, for example, gave a 2015 speech about education titled 'the treasure in the heart of man' (MoJ 2015), and then in 2016 gave another in which he stated that:

> Education needs to give prisoners skills that will enable them to lead socially constructive and economically valuable lives. It should also provide prisoners with the chance to grow culturally and morally – to develop new interests and strengthen character. Critically, education should also help prisoners to acquire the social skills and virtues which will make them better fathers, better husbands and better brothers.
>
> MoJ 2016

Research by Crewe (2009) and Crewe, Warr, Bennett and Smith (2014), however, suggests a different kind of relationship between prison work and prisoner masculinities. Crewe's (2009; Crewe et al. 2014) research highlights different 'emotion zones' in prisons: spaces where softer and more inclusive behaviours are displayed. Prison classrooms and workshops are identified in these studies as examples of such spaces, and while there has been little research since that considers exactly how and why this is the case (or that details the nature of the masculinities that are facilitated in such spaces), Crewe's (2009) and Crewe at al.'s (2014) research suggests that these 'softer' behaviours are facets of pre-existing masculinities – that they are imports into the spaces rather than products of them.

Liebling (2014) described the purpose of prison sociology as making prisons more intelligible, and this thesis aims to further understandings of prisoner masculinities, prison work, and their relationship with one another. In this dissertation, I therefore explore how work shapes the way young men develop and adapt their masculinities while in prison. I consider young men's experiences of licit and illicit work both prior to and during their imprisonment, and analyse how different masculine adaptations influence the ways young men find purpose and meaning in prison work. I focus on young men for two reasons. First, although there is a large body of research involving teenage boys in youth custody establishments (Cesaroni and Alvi 2010; Earle 2011; Bengtsson 2015; Gooch 2017), few studies look specifically at young men in the adult estate. Second, there is a significant body of research examining young men's work and leisure experiences and how they have been changed by post-industrialism, the rise of conspicuous consumption and increasing labour market insecurities. These studies provide a theoretical foundation for the study of young working masculinities in prisons that has been overlooked by much existing prison masculinities literature. This field of research also highlights the significance to young masculinities of *locale*, in terms of work experiences and orientations as well as leisure practices (McDowell 2003, 2009; Nayak 2003, 2006; Walkerdine 2006; Ilhan 2012; Fraser 2015; Ellis 2016). This thesis therefore takes a comparative approach and examines the role of local and regional labour markets (both contemporary and historical) on masculinities and adaptations to imprisonment.

Parameters and key terms

There are several key terms and parameters to this thesis that require clear definition. First, the research focuses on 'young men', by which I mean men aged 18-30 years old. To some extent, this is an arbitrary age range, but I had practical concerns about selecting a smaller age range

as it might have impacted my ability to recruit participants. Second, 'work' is defined as both licit and illicit ways of making money, in addition to caring responsibilities and formal education and training courses. Third, 'prison work' and 'purposeful activity' are used interchangeably and defined here as any productive and organised activity – usually paid – that prisoners undertake in an establishment during their sentence. Work conducted through Release on Temporary Licence (RoTL) is therefore excluded, as it takes place outside the establishment, as are psychologically based interventions, including Offending Behaviour courses and those relating to substance misuse. In part, this exclusion is because participation in such interventions is usually mandated by Offender Managers as a consequence of particular offences and risk relating to conduct outside prison. Prison work, by contrast, is theoretically selected by the prisoner, and eligibility for most opportunities depends on his or her conduct and risk in prison.

The other important distinction in this thesis, which will be developed throughout the dissertation, is between 'purpose' and 'meaning'. While 'purpose' has connotations with *finding* purpose, it is also used, and is used in this thesis, to describe an *instrumental* quality – how an act or object can be used to fulfil another aim. 'Meaning' and 'meaningfulness', by contrast, suggest a more personal, intrinsic and enduring quality.

Structure of the thesis

In Chapter Two, 'Masculinities, work and prison in post-industrial Britain', I outline sociological definitions of 'masculinities' and then explore studies that focus on working and non-working masculinities. The second part of this chapter introduces prison masculinities research and challenges the initial focus within the field on the idea of 'hypermasculinity'. I then focus on prison work, presenting a brief history of the practice before describing its contemporary forms and considering the changing purpose(s) of such activities. I finish Chapter Two by bringing these three research areas together to present a picture of the 'prison work-prison masculinities' field.

In Chapter Three, 'Researching work and masculinity in prison', I discuss the challenges of undertaking research in prisons and into masculinities. I begin by introducing the three fieldwork sites before going on to explain my ethnographic approach and the ways in which observations and interviews were conducted. This chapter includes reflections on how my positionality shaped the research, given its pertinence to a study of masculinities.

In Chapter Four, "Purposeful activity", I describe the practice of prison work in classrooms and workshops across the three fieldwork sites, and examine the ways in which instructors and establishments shaped the experience of activities. I then consider the purposes of 'purposeful activity' and explain how men used prison work to improve their lives both inside prison and on release. I conclude the chapter by exploring several problems relating to prison work, training and education, and discussing how such opportunities were simultaneously valued and a source of discomfort and frustration (Goodman 2010, 2012; Hatton 2020, 2021). This chapter demonstrates that while each establishment (and the staff who worked there) influenced participants' approaches to 'purposeful activity' (and determined *what* they could engage with), they did not control the highly personal ways in which men engaged with and found 'purpose' within these practices.

I begin Chapter Five, 'Men at work: situating prisoners in post-industrial economies', by introducing the locales in which the majority of participants lived before their imprisonment, focusing on contemporary and historic labour markets. I then introduce a typology of prisoner masculinities. The 'types' presented are discernible by participants' attitudes to and experiences of licit and illicit work and their acceptance or rejection of broader 'culture goals' (Merton 1938). After explaining the typology, I consider the embeddedness of these masculinities, and demonstrate that the ways men looked for, found and lost work corresponded with differences in regional labour markets. Overall, this chapter intends to demonstrate the diversity of masculinities and work experiences that men import into prison, while also providing evidence that the incidence of different masculine 'types' relates closely to locales.

In Chapter Six, 'A good and useful life', I detail how the masculinities presented in Chapter Five manifested in prison. I explore how staff-prisoner relationships were shaped by prisoner masculinities, why and how certain prisoners engaged in (non-)compliance, and how resources such as status or the body are used by different 'types' of men. I go on to discuss how participants' masculinities related to 'purposeful activity' and the 'prison labour market', showing that the activities that prisoners wanted – and were able – to engage with related both to their imported attitudes and experiences, and to their ability to access social, financial and other forms of capital while in prison. Chapter Six then explores how men's distinct strategies and rationales for engaging with 'purposeful activity' meant they found specific 'purposes' for

prison work, that were fulfilled to varying degrees. This chapter underlines participants' resourcefulness and resilience in purposing and repurposing prison work in particular ways, so that it becomes a masculinity resource and means of adapting to the context of imprisonment.

In the conclusion, I summarise the key findings from this research and discuss how they contribute to wider penological debates about the aims of imprisonment and the relationship between the prison and the labour market. I also discuss the implications of the thesis on the prison masculinities and prison work fields, focusing on how this study encourages the move away from hegemonic masculinities theory, the need for greater consideration of importation theory in masculinities research, and how best to define and classify prison work, in relation to other prison activities as well as employment outside prison. Finally, I explore some policy implications and areas for future research.

2. Masculinities, work and prison in post-industrial Britain

Research conducted outside prison demonstrates that work identities and experiences play a significant role in the masculinities of young men. However, both *men* in prison and *work* in prison have long been considered separately from men and work outside the 'total institution' (Goffman 1961). Consequently, studies of *prison* work and masculinities rarely incorporate findings from the broader field, and this often leads to partial and spectacular portrayals of male prisoners that have tended to reduce prison masculinities to forms of machismo and criminality. I begin this chapter by outlining classic and contemporary masculinities theories, before exploring in more detail how masculinities are shaped by work. Specifically, I consider how the decline of manufacturing and manual work, as well as the subsequent growth in service-sector employment and the rising cultural appeal of entrepreneurialism, have transformed the meaning and significance of 'work' as a masculinity resource for young men. Then, I explore the changing role of leisure in masculinities, and discuss how young men from deprived backgrounds adapt to financial and social exclusion from 'mainstream' leisure practices. In the second half of this chapter, I outline prison masculinities theories and discuss the emphasis in early studies in this field on 'hypermasculinity' and masculine hierarchy. I go on to explore contemporary prison masculinities research – which illustrates greater diversity in prison masculinities – in more detail. In the final section, I use a brief history of prison work in England and Wales to illustrate debates around the purpose of 'purposeful activity' before exploring the forms and functions of contemporary prison work.

The sociology of masculinities

Masculinities literature has grown considerably in the past 30 years, particularly since its focus moved beyond sex-role theory which, despite introducing a social constructionist approach to gender, was primarily concerned with biological differences between men and women and the ways these related to (stereotypically masculine and feminine) traits. Towards the end of the twentieth century, Connell (1995, 1998) took a more critical perspective to the theorisation of masculinities and developed her 'hegemonic masculinity framework'. Building on the social constructionist approach, Connell's (1995) theory explored how factors including class, race, ethnicity and sexual orientation led to the development of a multiplicity of masculinities. Connell argues that these masculinities, are relational and hierarchical, with the hegemonic form representing 'the currently most honored way of being a man' (Connell and

Messerschmidt 2005: 832). Hegemonic masculinity 'legitimates hierarchical gender relations between men and women…and among men' (Messerschmidt 2012: 38) and (usually) achieves this position 'through culture, institutions, and persuasion' (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005: 832) rather than force. Connell (1995; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005) notes that few men fulfil the hegemonic ideal and instead embody subordinate, marginalised and 'protest' masculinities (discussed below) that are complicit in the dominance of men over women and benefit from the 'patriarchal dividend' (Connell 2005: 79) secured by hegemonic masculinity.

In the years since Connell (1995) first outlined her framework, hegemonic masculinity theory 'passed from a conceptual model with a fairly narrow empirical base to a widely used framework for research…about men and masculinities' (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005: 835). It was also subject to significant criticism and interrogation: Anderson (2008, 2012), for example, argues that the stratification and hierarchy of masculinities – a central tenet of hegemonic masculinity theory – has been undermined by decreasing homohysteria[1] and the concurrent development of 'inclusive' masculinities in Western countries during the twenty-first century. In response to such critiques, as well as empirical research that utilised the framework, Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) refined and reconfigured hegemonic masculinity theory. Central to this reconfiguration was greater recognition of the agency of marginalised groups, and of the 'geography of masculine configurations' (ibid. 847): acknowledgement that hegemonic masculinities vary depending on place. Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) propose that, while linked and often overlapping, multiple hegemonic masculinities can be identified on local, regional and global levels. Messerschmidt later provided further clarifications regarding this development, explaining that masculinities should only be considered 'hegemonic' if they 'legitimate a hierarchical relationship between men and women…masculinity and femininity, and among men' (2012: 72). Those that are powerful and influential but do not legitimate patriarchal relations, he argues, are either "dominant" – in that they are 'the most celebrated, common…forms of masculinity in a specific social setting' (ibid.) – or "dominating": they exercise 'power and control over people and events–"calling the shots"' (ibid.).

[1] 'Homohysteria' is defined as 'men's fear of being homosexualised through association with feminized behaviour' (Anderson 2011: 80). Anderson (2011; 2012) theorises that heterosexual men feel a need to engage in hypermasculine behaviours in highly homohysteric cultures and are able to engage in more homosocial and feminised behaviours in cultures where homohysteria is low.

In considering how diverse men from distinct locales develop and adapt masculinities, this thesis is not specifically concerned with hegemonic masculinity, but draws on the wider framework and its understanding of how masculinities are constructed. Contemporary understandings of masculinities – generally rooted in the hegemonic masculinity framework – theorise masculinities as fluid and multiple, and as 'configurations of practice that are constructed, unfold, and change through time' (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005: 852). Largely as a consequence of this framework, empirical studies of masculinities emphasise three factors that influence configurations of men's gender identities.

Firstly, masculinities are historically contingent – structured by the economic and cultural forces of a particular time and place (Tolson 1977; Roper 1994; Segal 1997; Haywood and Mac an Ghaill 2003; Messerschmidt 2014). Fraser (2015), for example, demonstrates how history and locale impact the nature of masculinities and how they are achieved. Through ethnographic research in Glasgow, he states that 'while there are clear homologies of habitus between street masculinities in diverse geographical contexts…certain forms of masculinity are locally constituted by unique configurations of history, culture, and gendered relations' (2015: 167). Indeed, Fraser (2015) theorises that shared experiences in specific cities can produce distinctly local identities and configurations of masculinities.

Secondly, masculinities are produced *with* the body (through social interactions, leisure activities, sports or violence, for example) and/or *on* the body (with diet, exercise and styling) (Segal 1997; Connell 2000; Haywood and Mac an Ghaill 2003; Hakim 2015; Heber 2017). However, masculinities are 'not inherent to the male body' (Connell 2000: 77), as the value and role of the body relates to its intersection with class and ethnicity (Skeggs 1997; Nayak 2006; Phillips 2012; Elfving-Hwang 2020). For example, privileged, middle-class masculinities can be symbolised by 'the healthy, fit, and attractive body' (Wolkowitz 2002: 506). This embodied masculinity is a signifier and product of class, as it is often the result of paying others for help achieving it (Wolkowitz 2002; Connell and Wood 2005; Segal 1997). In contrast, while working-class bodies have traditionally been defined by manual work (Willis 1977), changing labour markets mean they are increasingly marked by engagement with leisure activities, and by the *absence* of physical signs of manual work (Winlow 2001; Nayak 2006; Fraser 2015). While the body can be a valuable resource for accomplishing masculinities, it can also be a hindrance (Connell 2000) or become burdensome, by 'giving away' signs of less desirable masculinities ('body betrayal' (Messerschmidt 2014)). Equally, the pursuit of

masculinities can cause bodily harm, through injury or (substance or physical) abuse (De Viggiani 2012).

Finally, masculinities are theorised in terms of their relation to power (over women and in relation other men) (Segal 1997; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005). While men continue to benefit from patriarchy socially, culturally and economically (Cockburn 1981; Collinson and Hearn 1994), growing gender equality has diversified men's claims to such power and contributed to the development of 'progressive' masculinities (Tolson 1977; Roberts 2012; Messerschmidt 2014). In terms of the power relations between men, hegemonic masculinity theory (and much of the empirical research based on it) describes a relatively rigid hierarchy, and masculinities are defined in terms of their relationship to hegemonic forms (in terms of subordination or domination, for example) (Connell 1995; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005). While some have challenged the continued relevance of hierarchy to studies of masculinity (Anderson 2008, 2012), there is an enduring focus on power relations between men within this field.

Hegemonic masculinity theory, and its subsequent critiques and reconfigurations, highlight the need for further research to understand the impact of geography, and of contemporary socio-cultural trends, on masculinities in England and Wales, including for men in prison. The following section explores contemporary masculinities in more detail, with a specific focus on how the masculinities of young men in the UK are shaped by work experiences.

Working masculinities

Before exploring how masculinities are shaped by work experiences it is important to understand the shape of the UK labour market and how it has changed in the last fifty years. Three trends have significantly impacted men and their work experiences during this period. First, employment in the primary (such as agriculture and mining) and secondary (manufacturing, construction and utilities) sectors of the labour market has declined sharply: in 1970, the primary and secondary sectors accounted for four per cent and thirty-eight percent of UK employment respectively, dropping to one and fifteen per cent by 2016 (Office for National Statistics (ONS) 2019a). This change has been driven primarily by the decline of manufacturing work, which accounted for twenty-eight per cent of UK employment between 1960 and 1979, but only nine per cent in 2019 (ONS 2019a, 2021). The second important trend is the growth of employment in the service – or 'tertiary' – sector, which accounted for fifty-

eight per cent of employment in the UK in 1970, rising to eighty-four per cent in 2016 (ONS 2019a). The Office for National Statistics (2019a) identified two drivers of this increase: work in 'professional, scientific and technical services including education and health' – 'high-skilled' jobs that require further or higher education – and employment in 'miscellaneous services, including hotels and catering', which is more likely to be low-skilled, insecure and low-paid. The contemporary labour market in the UK has therefore been described as reflective of an 'hourglass economy' (UKCES 2014: 9), within which opportunities are increasingly polarised in terms of both skill and rates of pay. The third significant aspect of labour market changes over the last fifty years is that large cities and conurbations are the biggest 'losers': there has been a 'relative and absolute decline of employment in the major cities', and 'the large conurbations, particularly their inner areas, have experienced steeper decline than the free-standing cities' (Turok and Edge 1999: 50).

Labour market transformations inevitably impact masculinities: research has consistently demonstrated that the physical and social experience of work, as well as the economic benefits it provides, are central to many masculine identities. Classic studies, such as those by Willis (1977) and Tolson (1977), explore how traditional working-class masculinities were constructed through manual labouring and the 'self-esteem of doing a hard job well – and being known for it' (Willis 1977: 52). Willis (1977), for example, describes how 'the lads' – a group of working-class schoolboys in a Midlands town – developed traditional masculinities based on a counter-school culture. These masculinities, of 'chauvinism, toughness and machismo' (Willis 1977: 53), racism and an opposition to authority, enabled an easy 'graduation' from school to manual labour. Indeed, they were 'the *credentials* for entry into shopfloor culture proper' (Willis 1977: 52, emphasis added). Masculinities research since has expanded on (and sometimes romanticised) these traditional forms of masculinity, but also explored how other types of work shape men's gender identities and examined the impact of labour market changes on masculinities (Nayak 2003, 2006; Walkerdine 2006, 2015; Roberts 2012; Skeggs 2004). Class has been central to work and masculinities research, with studies demonstrating how contemporary labour market changes have had an uneven impact on men from different locales and socio-economic backgrounds, and in particular, how the transformation of working-class employment has required significant reconfigurations of masculine identities (McDowell 2003, 2009; Nayak 2006; Walkerdine 2006). Understandings of prisoner masculinities and work experiences must therefore be grounded in research about wider relationships between work and masculinity. As such, this section will explore traditional working-class masculinities, the

impact on men of the decline of manufacturing and rise of service work, and the emergence of entrepreneurialism, 'hustling' and 'grafting' as forms of masculine expression.

Manufacturing: decline, loss and haunting

The masculinities described by Tolson (1977) and Willis (1977) were constructed within a historical context where respectability and economic capital were widely available to working-class men who could embody masculinity through working practices. In these studies, the site of men's work – the factory, mine or other industrial plant – was the centre of the community, with a physical presence and material markers in the shape of uniforms, for example (Willis 1977; Walkerdine 2006). The work itself was dirty, brutal, physically gruelling and exploitative, but the shopfloor provided a homosocial bonding space (Tolson 1977; Willis 1977; Sennett 1998; Walkerdine 2006). It is in relation to the social, cultural and economic significance of this work, as well as its physical practice, that working-class masculinities have been configured (Tolson 1977; Collinson and Hearn 1994; Sennet 1998; Walkerdine 2006). The tough, chauvinistic, and respectable working-class masculinities produced in this milieu were both empowering and disempowering: while Willis' (1977) lads subverted and opposed authority, and had some control over the processes of production, these masculinities also left them relatively powerless in terms of their wider economic status, and excluded them from many more institutionalized forms of political and cultural power.[2] As Skeggs explains, it is within this socio-economic context that the cultural capital of working-class men has historically been negatively valued through their depiction 'as embodying physicality and endurance rather than cleverness and self-governance' (2004: 75).

Masculinities founded in the experience of manufacturing work are well established by research (Willis 1977; Tolson 1977; Roper 1994). However, since the 1970s the availability of stereotypically masculine working-class labour – in factories, steelworks, mines, and on shipyards and shopfloors – has sharply declined, and for the jobs that remain, the material, emotional and socio-cultural experience has steadily transformed: it is often less physical and dangerous, less community-based, less likely to take place in an all-male environment, and contractually more casual and insecure – rarely a 'job for life' (Nayak 2003; McDowell 2003; Lloyd 2012). Therefore, even for men still able to access manufacturing work, its cultural

[2] Manufacturing provided some opportunities for career progression, whereby working-class men were promoted to managerial positions alongside their middle-class counterparts (see Roper (1994) for a discussion of 'organization men'), but overall there was minimal 'social mobility' (Willis 1977; Tolson 1977).

compensations – and value as a masculinity resource – has been altered and, in many ways, diminished (Nayak 2003; Lloyd 2012). Subsequent research has examined how increased specialisation and mechanisation of production, in conjunction with the growth of outsourcing and other effects of increasingly globalized neoliberalism, has had an enduring impact on communities, labour markets and masculinities (Tolson 1977; Cockburn 1981; Roper 1994; Nayak 2003, 2006; Walkerdine 2006; Jimenez and Walkerdine 2011). The primary theme in such studies is loss: material and economic, in the shape of rising unemployment and the weakening of trade unions, and social, cultural and emotional, with long-term impacts on communities, families and masculinities (Walkerdine 2006; Sennet 1998; Lloyd 2012). Walkerdine (2006, 2010, 2015, 2016; Jimenez and Walkerdine 2011), for example, conducted research in a South Wales town in the aftermath of the 2002 closure of a local steelworks and described how loss manifested in experiences of trauma, grief and melancholia. While this trauma initially impacted those who became 'ex-steelworkers', the loss of the steelworks also affected the gender identities of local young men who had never worked there:

> The man who is hard, has low levels of literacy, and does a proper day's work which gets him dirty was a figure much missed…this figure haunted (Derrida, 1994; Gordon, 2008) the community as it appeared…in the refusal of unemployed young men to consider work involving literacy or anything smacking of the feminine (e.g., supermarket shelf-stacking); and in the effects on the older generation of young men entering work, such as contract cleaning or pizza delivery. In the latter, the ghost of the steelworker entered in such a way that the young men were ridiculed and scapegoated.
>
> Walkerdine 2015: 169

Another consequence of transformations in post-industrial labour markets is persistent structural unemployment that disproportionately impacts former industrial hubs (Turok and Edge 1999). Studies conducted in several former industrial hubs evidence how young men from these locales increasingly find themselves trying to achieve 'respectability' (and respectable masculinities) without 'respectable' work (Nayak 2003, 2006; Skeggs 1997, 2004; Ilan 2011). Indeed, many of Nayak's participants in North East England 'promoted the values of a muscular puritan work ethic…in a situation where manual *unemployment* was now the norm' (2003: 151). In this context, young working-class men face emotional hurdles, when work opportunities are incongruous with desired masculinity, as well as physical and practical

barriers to employment (lack of jobs in local area, poor suitability for new forms of work) (Nayak 2003; Turok and Edge 1999). As a consequence, some young men 'opt-out' of formal employment altogether (Jimenez and Walkerdine 2011; Fraser 2015). Overall, for those aspiring to traditional working-class masculinities, desirable and respectable work is increasingly elusive, and the pain and frustration young men felt when these aspirations remained unrealised was formative of their attitudes towards other forms of employment – as well as their ability to find it (Nayak 2003, 2006; Fraser 2015; Jimenez and Walkerdine 2011).

Men in post-industrial labour markets

As the UK economy realigned from producer to consumer needs, manufacturing work declined and service sector employment grew, with the result that it now presents the most realistic chance of employment for many young men (McDowell 2002; ONS 2019a). In this labour market context, stereotypically feminine traits – such as deference (to managers and customers), interpersonal communication, presentability, and emotional labour and intelligence – are more in-demand and economically valuable than the traditionally masculine skills prized in manufacturing (Hochschild 1983; McDowell 2003, 2009; Walkerdine 2006; Roberts 2012; Brannan 2015). Consequently, the 'counter-school culture' and working-class masculinity presented by Willis' (1977) lads have become barriers to employment rather than tacit requirements (McDowell 2003). Furthermore, working-class men often find themselves disadvantaged in post-industrial labour markets by the stereotypes associated with their class, gender and racial identities (Alexander 2000; Skeggs 2004; Lloyd 2012; McDowell, Rootham and Hardgrove 2014). As Skeggs explains, 'black working-class men, in particular, are read in highly racist ways by employers, suggesting that their cultural capital cannot be optimized at work…because it is nearly always perceived and valued negatively' (2004: 75).

Young men may therefore experience barriers to accessing service sector employment, while also encountering difficulties in reconciling this work with their masculinity. A number of studies explore how, for young men employed in the service sector, the practice of work – where, how and with whom it is undertaken – impacts the development and performance of masculinity (McDowell 2002, 2003, 2004, 2009; McDowell et al. 2014; Roberts 2012; Brannan 2015; Nayak 2006). For example, the relationship between masculinity and the body often requires renegotiation: dress and grooming codes are enforced for many service industry workers (McDowell 2003, 2009; Roberts 2012), and despite service work often being physically tiring (Roberts 2012; Brannan 2015), men's bodies are not 'marked' by this labour

in the same way (Nayak 2006). Similarly, social interactions in the workplace as a means of performing masculinity are redefined in service sector employment. The scarcity of all-male workplaces undermines the 'masculine compensation' of boisterous and often sexist homo-social 'banter' that was common in traditional manual work environments (McDowell 2009; Lloyd 2012), although numerous studies also explore how not all young men view this change negatively (McDowell 2003; Roberts 2012; Brannan 2015).

The dynamic nature of masculinities has been underlined by research detailing how men adapt to stereotypically feminine service-sector employment in order for work to remain a masculinity resource (Roberts 2012; McDowell 2003). This adaptation may involve being discerning about where one works as well as one's role there: McDowell (2003) noted that young men working in retail sought jobs in sports or electronics stores, and Roberts references respondents working in retail who tried to 'stay physically busy' (2012: 5) by prioritising 'working the stock' (ibid.) instead of being on tills. Equally, some young men reframe the qualities involved in service-work in order to present their labour as masculine. McDowell, for example, found young men were more likely than young women 'to emphasise the heroic struggle necessary to overcome customer resistance in selling occupations, or the camaraderie of the long hours/hard work culture of the burger bar' (2003: 51). At the same time, men may also embrace the service-sector and develop masculinities based on its differences with, and 'superiority' to, manual labour (Roberts 2012; Brannan 2015).

While service work may therefore be an active decision, it can also represent a resentful and pragmatic choice for young men: 'I'm only staying there while the building trade is as it is…It's just a stop gap at the minute' (Lloyd 2012: 624, call centre worker). For these men, work becomes less valuable – or even contradictory – to their desired masculinity (Walkerdine 2006; Jimenez and Walkerdine 2011; Nayak 2003). The value of work to masculinities in post-industrial labour markets is also undermined by increasingly insecure forms of employment and the emergence of the 'gig economy', through practices such as sub-contracting and zero-hours contracts (Sennett 1999; Standing 2011; Brannan 2015). As Walkerdine explains, contemporary labour market transformations have produced:

> A service economy in which the certainty of a job for life…together with a strong and fixed gender division of labour, is replaced by an emphasis on entrepreneurialism, flexibility, transferable skills, and the need to be able to change locations and even occupations, several times within a working life.

Experiences of this labour market are highly gendered (Sennett 1998; Sassen 2001; McDowell 2003; Standing 2011): insecurity and low pay, in conjunction with the growth of service-sector employment that young men may reject or struggle to find work in, can elongate transitions to adulthood (Nayak 2003, 2006; McDowell et al. 2014; Fraser 2015) and inhibit the development of working identities (Sennett 1999; Standing 2011). Therefore, in post-industrial labour markets where insecure forms of service work offer the most realistic opportunity for employment for many young working-class men, work as a masculine resource becomes both less valuable and less reliable.

Entrepreneurialism, hustle and graft

In addition to the growth of (precarious) service-sector work, the cultural and economic effects of neoliberalism have also contributed to the redefinition and valorisation of entrepreneurialism in contemporary labour markets and in relation to masculinities (Roper 1994; Connell 1998; Walkerdine 2006; Vershinina, Barrett and Meyer 2011). Connell notes that while the language of neoliberalism is impersonal and gender-neutral, 'the "individual" of neoliberal theory has in general the attributes and interests of a male entrepreneur' (1998: 15), and behaviours commonly associated with entrepreneurship – competitiveness, independence and being hardworking – are also stereotypically masculine (Giazitzoglu and Down 2015). Connell theorises that the veneration of these characteristics promotes a *transnational business masculinity* amongst influential and powerful men (in business, finance and politics, for example), typified by 'increasing egocentrism, very conditional loyalties…and a declining sense of responsibility to others' (1998: 16).

There is relatively little qualitative research outside of business and management studies that analyses men's experiences of entrepreneurialism as a working identity,[3] particularly amongst those from deprived – rather than elite or privileged – backgrounds.[4] However, Thieme's

[3] See Vershinina et al.'s (2011) study of Polish entrepreneurs in England and Giazitzoglu and Down's (2015) research on 'entrepreneurial masculinity' with business owners in North West England for examples.

[4] Ilan (2012) considers the entrepreneurialism evidenced by young men on the 'UK urban music' scene, although without primary research, and Nayak (2003) touches briefly on entrepreneurialism in his research with working-class men in North East England. Equally, Reid (2017, 2023) explores 'trapping' (drug-dealing) as an illicit form of entrepreneurialism and outlines and several 'trapper' identities in her research on 'on road' culture and identity (see below).

(2013, 2015, 2018a) research with youth entrepreneurs from low-income neighbourhoods in Nairobi, Kenya – which describes biographies, motivations and entrepreneurial identities of her young (and mostly male) participants – echoes numerous portrayals of young men from deprived areas in the UK (Alexander 2000; Fraser 2015; Nayak 2003, 2006; Ilan 2012). For example, Thieme describes her participants' upbringings as follows:

> Most youth in Nairobi have not finished secondary school, are economically active at an early age, have multiple sources of income at any one time, idolize playing and watching football, and many are parents though unmarried. Their lives are mired in an "in-between" state that has created a complicated, sometimes angry, always vibrant sub-pop-culture that continuously straddles hope and disappointment, enthusiasm and defeat.
>
> Thieme 2013: 390

Equally resonant is Thieme's explanation for her participants' entrepreneurialism – a response to high rates of youth unemployment, disaffection with the state, and a rejection 'of previous generations' conception and experience of "licit work"' (2013: 390). Thieme (2013, 2015, 2018a) goes on to define a culture of 'hustling' – a form of entrepreneurialism involving licit and illicit work (and a means of blurring the line between the two) that is engaged in by the socially and economically excluded, and based in narratives of 'struggle'. While this type of 'hustling' is described as means of 'making do' in contexts of insecurity, it is simultaneously presented as an act of defiance: a way to reclaim a sense of agency and undermine formal forms of authority (Thieme 2013, 2018a; Rajah, Kramer and Sung 2014).

Thieme (2018b) has also explored 'hustling' and 'side hustles' in European economies, albeit briefly. As labour markets become increasingly casual and precarious (Standing 2011), Thieme's (2018b) two participants from England and Germany demonstrated a form of 'hustling' which involved combining formal waged work with 'side-hustles'. While 'side-hustles' are not necessarily illicit or criminal, this form of entrepreneurialism echoes the experiences and narratives of many marginalised youth in the UK (and elsewhere) who turn to crime as a source of income, sometimes in conjunction with licit paid work (Winlow 2001; Rajah et al. 2014; Hall, Winlow and Ancrum 2008; Ilan 2011, 2013; Ellis 2016; Maguire 2021a). Furthermore, a number of studies explore how entrepreneurialism, 'hustling' and 'grafting' have emerged as central to some (young) masculinities (Ilan 2011, 2013; Fraser 2015; Maguire 2021; Ellis 2016). For example, Ilan (2013) details how 'street-entrepreneurial

acumen' led to forms of acquisitive 'crimino-entrepreneurialism' and a 'rugged masculinity' amongst young men in Dublin, Ireland. Ilan's (2013) participants generated incomes through various criminal activities including drug dealing, stealing goods to sell on in the local community and participation in the stolen car part market. While much of this activity was opportunistic, Ilan (2013) demonstrates that it could be an entrepreneurial practice, explaining how the young men would 'diversify in the goods they stole where they could anticipate a market amongst their various networks' (Ilan 2013: 8). Maguire's research examining work and masculinity amongst repeat offenders similarly explores 'grafting' – profitable illicit activities that also offer 'substantial masculine capital' (2021a: 121). As with Thieme's (2013, 2015, 2018a) participants, who hustled in response to a lack of licit opportunities, many of Maguire's subjects framed 'grafting' as 'a fall-back option…because it seems to offer a way out from mundane and economically marginalised forms of existence' (2021a: 121).

Other forms of illicit entrepreneurialism require more organisation and planning than the 'grafting' described above, and can be formative of different types of masculinity. Reid's exploration of 'trapping' – a 'combination of drug dealing…and more serious levels of offending, such as robbing fellow drug dealers' (2017: 120) is one example of this. Reid (2017) highlights how young men from a deprived neighbourhood in North London participated in 'road life', a 'street cultural formation…heavily influenced by transatlantic Black diasporic cultural forms…[which] include, but are not limited to, modes of: speech, comportment, fashion and musical expression' (Bakkali 2022: 420).[5] Within this context, the men in Reid's study engaged in 'trapping', both for the practical benefits of being a self-employed entrepreneur (flexibility in the hours they worked and way they dressed, for example) and 'to establish or restore a sense of dignity, along with some control over their lives' (ibid.: 127). Reid (2017) presents a typology that differentiates trappers in relation to the specific nature of their work as well as their appetite for risk-taking and the nature (and extent) of their 'trappedness'.[6] These forms of illicit entrepreneurial work, Reid (2017) explains, are seen by the young men as means to embodying a 'badman' masculinity.

[5] Bakalli notes that despite road life's roots 'in Black diasporic cultural practice' (2021: 420), it 'should not lead to assumptions that it can be understood in exclusively racial or ethnic terms' (ibid.).
[6] Reid's 'trapper typology' comprises of 'glutton trappers' – who, in addition to drug dealing, engage in 'low-level street crimes and high-risk, often violent delinquent behaviour' (2017: 135); 'predatory trappers' who 'are known to kidnap and rob drug dealers' (ibid.: 137) and acquire 'the illegitimate gain of others' (ibid.); and 'humble trappers', who 'prefer to undertake their work role as inconspicuously as possible' (ibid.: 142) and may sell drugs full-time or combine such work with licit employment.

As with Thieme's (2013, 2018a, 2018b) research, the forms of illicit entrepreneurialism outlined in the empirical studies above offer cultural, economic and psychological benefits (Ilan 2013; Reid 2017; Maguire 2021a). However, studies also highlight the insecurities associated with illicit entrepreneurialism: beyond its general unpredictability, such work also 'served to disrupt good adult working opportunities' (Maguire 2021a: 121), and risked social and cultural capital, imprisonment and serious injury (and possibly death) (Phillips 2012; Reid 2017). Echoing Willis' (1977) analysis of how the lads' masculinity and work identity reproduced and preserved their class and economic conditions, Ilan notes that the crimino-entrepreneurialism and 'street social capital' exhibited by his participants reduced 'their ability to advance socio-economically' (2013: 22), while Reid explains how 'trapping' left many of her participants in a liminal state, and 'temporarily or permanently disconnected from mainstream society' (2017: 175).

Non-working masculinities

> For a significant section of the labour force, engaged in low-paid, insecure forms of exploitative work and 'emotional labour', the work a person does appears to have little impact on their identity.
>
> Lloyd 2012: 625

> Studies on masculinity might be more fruitful if they moved away from privileging workplace practices as defining men to broader cultural practices that men take up.
>
> Haywood and Mac an Ghaill 2003: 39-40

As the above quotes suggest, it is increasingly important for masculinities research to consider the role of non-working practices (Sennett 1998; Winlow 2001; Haywood and Mac an Ghaill 2003). Studies exploring contemporary masculinities therefore investigate 'leisure careers' (MacDonald and Shildrick 2007) and (conspicuous) consumption practices as masculinity resources, and describe how these behaviours are increasingly pertinent for men who are unable to engage in work that supports their masculine identity (Frosh, Phoenix and Pattman 2002; Nayak 2003, 2006; Hayward 2004; Hall et al. 2008; Winlow and Hall 2009; Fraser 2015). For example, in place of dirty and physical work, toughness can instead be written onto men's bodies through fighting and bodybuilding (Wolkowitz 2002; Hakim 2015; Ayres and Treadwell 2011; Ellis, Winlow and Hall 2017), and the homosocial environment of the

shopfloor can be recreated through all-male social groups, and practices such as watching football and binge drinking (Nayak 2003).

Consumption and leisure practices are also crucial for masculinities that are not based on manual labour. The promise of meritocracy in neoliberal economies contributes to an aspirational culture where wealth, value and identity are intrinsically linked, and the working-class and its culture becomes something to be escaped rather than defended (Haylett 2001; Skeggs 2004; Hayward 2004; Skeggs and Loveday 2012). In this context, consumption has evolved into consumerism – where consumption takes on heightened significance in the lives and identities of those engaged it. The culture of consumerism means that 'for many individuals, self-identity and self-realisation can now only be accomplished through material means' (Hayward 2004: 5), because the continuous conspicuous consumption of goods and experiences not only *signifies* identity, but is constitutive of it (Hall et al. 2008; Lloyd 2012; Hayward and Kindynis 2013; Hayward and Turner 2019). Given the present role of consumption to identity – and its capacity to represent cultural inclusion, power and control – consumerist practices are extensively referenced in contemporary research as structuring masculine configurations (Frosh et al. 2002; Haywood and Mac an Ghaill 2003; Winlow and Hall 2009; McDowell et al. 2014; Nayak and Kehily 2014). Amongst young men, masculinities are often related to the consumption and display of specific designer brands – or purposeful avoidance of them – and participation in 'weekend leisure' (Winlow and Hall 2009: 99) and the night-time economy (Hayward 2004; Nayak 2006; Ayres and Treadwell 2011; Roberts 2012; Lloyd 2012). Hall at al., for example, describe the identities of their research participants (predominantly young men involved in various forms of crime) as rooted in consumer 'fetishism' and 'excess' (2008: 48). However, while clothing and other visual expressions of consumption are central to the masculinities of many young men, they are also risk-laden and mediated by age, class and ethnicity (McDowell 2003; Skeggs 2004; Hayward and Yar 2006; Nayak and Kehily 2014). In terms of young men's 'leisure careers', studies routinely describe hedonistic and excessive binging, through shopping sprees or nights out drinking alcohol and taking drugs ('deviant leisure' (Hayward and Turner 2019)) (Nayak 2003, 2006; MacDonald and Shildrick 2007; Hall et al. 2008; Winlow and Hall 2009; Ayres and Treadwell 2011; Fraser 2015). For instance, Hayward and Turner's (2019) analysis of the night-time economy in Ibiza underlines how – as with clothing – leisure experiences including drinking expensive alcohol, accessing 'VIP' spaces, and attending club nights, were used to achieve distinction and perform identity.

The economic costs associated with leisure- and consumption-based masculinities which can exclude, or cause financial difficulties for young, low-paid and unemployed men (MacDonald and Shildrick 2007; Lloyd 2012; Hayward and Turner 2019; Maguire 2021a). Some young people manage to negotiate their desired masculinities despite financial constraints and relative deprivation. Nayak describes how his participants developed a practice that gave the illusion of greater wealth than they in fact had:

> The *Real Geordies* would pass through a series of drinking venues usually having just one drink each…this hedonistic display allowed them to be seen in a number of public places and so belied the appearance that money could be a meagre resource.
>
> Nayak 2006: 819

Other young people are less strategic: Lloyd noted that, amongst young call centre workers in North East England, 'the demand for continuous consumption appeared, at times, to steamroll over any sense of financial prudence as payday was greeted with bouts of alcohol-fuelled hedonism and cathartic shopping sprees' (2012: 625).

Hayward theorises that in consumerist cultures like that in contemporary Britain, consumption takes on heightened importance because alternative masculinity resources are already scarce: 'within socially excluded urban environments, many individuals are *over-identifying*…with consumer goods in an attempt to create a sense of identity' (2004: 181, emphasis in original). Pressure to portray wealth and success via the unceasing consumption of goods and experiences – irrespective of one's economic resources or professional achievements – leads some young men to criminality as a means of financing conspicuous consumption and desirable leisure activities (Winlow 2001; Hall et al. 2008; Winlow and Hall 2009; Treadwell, Winlow, Briggs and Hall 2012; Maguire 2021a).[7]

For others, financial exclusion from mainstream leisure and consumption practices leads to engagement with alternative leisure activities that have fewer (or no) financial barriers (Fraser 2015; Ilan 2013; Alexander 2000; Hayward and Kindynis 2013). Fraser's (2015) research with

[7] Theorised as the 'crime-consumerism nexus' by Hayward (2004; Hayward and Kindynis 2013; Hayward and Smith 2017), which 'asserts that consumer culture creates and cultivates—especially among young people—new forms of concomitant subjectivity based around desire, individualism, hedonism, and impulsivity…[which] can find expression in transgressive behaviour' (Hayward and Kindynis 2013: 123)

boys and young men in a deprived neighbourhood in Glasgow includes analysis of their 'learning to leisure' (2015: 161). The 'leisure careers' he describes – which are echoed in similar studies conducted in other locales – are street-based, and involve: 'hanging about' and 'having a laugh' with friends; seeking a 'buzz' from low-level transgressive activities; and engaging in aggressive or violent interactions through football or locale-based rivalries (Nayak 2003, 2006; MacDonald and Shildrick 2007; Phillips 2012; Ilan 2013; Ellis 2016). These practices – or forms of 'risk consumption' (Hayward and Kindynis 2013: 125) – have the combined benefits of mitigating boredom, reclaiming a sense of agency, and performing masculinity within a local culture and tradition (Phillips 2012; Hayward and Kindynis 2013; Fraser 2015). As Phillips describes with regard to territorialism as a form of street-based practice central to the masculinities of many of her young male participants:

> … by erecting boundaries of belonging which exclude others from strictly delineated and symbolic 'area zones', these young men claim dominion, (perceptions of) power, and perhaps most importantly, status over other young men, which is central to the demands of protest masculinity. The opportunity to exclude may be one of the few means by which these young men, marked by their low social, political, and economic position in late modern society, can exercise agency.
>
> Phillips 2012: 134

More 'extreme' masculine performances, involving regular and serious violence, can also emerge from the rejection of and exclusion from mainstream leisure and consumption practices and in the context of deprivation (Winlow 2001; Ellis 2016; Ellis et al. 2017; Heber 2017; Maguire 2021a). Violence plays multi-faceted roles in the masculinities of those who engage in it regularly and seriously: it can express ethical principles; be used as a way of protecting, reclaiming and enforcing respect – for oneself and for others; and has the potential to be financially lucrative (Winlow 2001; Gunter 2008; Ilan 2012; Phillips 2012; Ellis 2016; Ellis et al. 2017; Heber 2017; Maguire 2021a). Heber (2017) describes a masculinity based in a 'gangster discourse' that was common amongst her participants (Danish men on probation and with experience of violence). Involvement with criminality and living a criminal lifestyle were central to this 'gangster' masculinity, as was the presence of 'constant violence' (ibid.: 65) in their lives. However, while violence may be a valued masculinity resource, several studies also describe how young men often feel they have no choice but to engage in it (Winlow 2001; Fraser 2015; Ellis 2016; Maguire 2021a). Furthermore, as Connell (1995) theorises through the concept of 'protest masculinity' (developed from earlier discussions by Adler (1978) and

Parsons (1964)), involvement with violence and criminality – expressions of 'protest' – can prolong and inhibit young men's transitions to adulthood.[8]

Masculinities, work and leisure

So far, this chapter has examined contemporary literature on masculinities, work and leisure, and demonstrated how post-industrial labour market changes impact young men. The resultant picture is one where class, ethnicity and locale intersect with the decline of traditionally masculine work, the growth of service work and a cultural fetishization of entrepreneurialism. In this context, the relationship between work and masculinities changes (Nayak 2003, 2006; Lloyd 2012; Roberts 2012). While traditional manufacturing and manual work was often gruelling and dangerous, it was made more palatable by the masculinity resources it offered (Tolson 1977). In post-industrial labour markets, however, such work is scarcer, trade unions are weaker, and employment generally is more precarious. As a result, manual labour and manufacturing work is less respected, and the social, cultural and masculine value of such work is greatly reduced (Tolson 1977; McDowell 2009; Roberts 2012). While jobs lost to deindustrialisation have to some extent been replaced by employment in other sectors – particularly in service industries – contemporary practices of work increasingly necessitate deference, emotional labour and personal grooming, which are antithetical to traditional working-class masculinities. Studies consistently highlight the resilience of young men and their masculinities in response to changing labour markets (McDowell 2003, 2009; Lloyd 2012; Roberts 2012).

These sections also demonstrated how, despite various adaptations to new forms of work, the value of employment as a masculinity resource *in itself* has declined, with work increasingly framed as a *means* to leisure- and consumption-based expressions of masculinity (Hayward 2004; Nayak 2006; Winlow and Hall 2009; Lloyd 2012). Conspicuous consumption and hedonistic leisure practices are increasingly important to young masculinities (Nayak 2003, 2006; MacDonald and Shildrick 2007; Fraser 2015). However, such activities are often difficult to navigate, given they need to be engaged in regularly and can be costly. The economic risks of leisure and consumption as masculinity resources are compounded by the increasing precariousness of work (Standing 2011). Amongst young men seeking wealth and status, but

[8] Connell's (2005) discussion of 'protest masculinity' links acts of 'protest' to class deprivation and 'childhood experience of powerlessness' (ibid.: 112), which, in addition to violence and criminality, could also involve more egalitarian behaviours and other characteristics not considered stereotypically masculine.

for whom work is inaccessible, undesirable or unsustainable, (crimino-) entrepreneurialism therefore becomes an increasingly attractive potential masculinity resource. While entrepreneurialism – licit or otherwise – is inherently risky, the fetishization of such practices in contemporary capitalism means the riskiness itself becomes a further masculinity resource (Treadwell et al. 2012).

Prison masculinities

An understanding of general masculinities theories – and how masculine identities are shaped by work, consumption, leisure, crime and violence – facilitates understanding of how men's identities are shaped by the experience of imprisonment. Imprisonment is a painful and infantilizing experience (Sykes 1958; Jewkes 2002; Halsey 2008; Haney 2011; Phillips 2012; Ugelvik 2014), which deprives prisoners of liberty, goods and services, heterosexual relationships, autonomy and security (Sykes 1958; Irwin and Owen 2005; Ricciardelli, Maier and Hannah-Moffat 2015). These pains and deprivations are widely regarded as having a negative impact on prisoner masculinities – with the result that imprisonment is variously described as undermining of masculinity (Phillips 2012; Curtis 2014) and a 'masculinity challenge' (Ugelvik 2014; Heber 2017).

Despite acknowledgement that men are overrepresented in prison populations (and as perpetrators of crime), gender was rarely interrogated in the classic texts of prison sociology (Newburn and Stanko 1994; Sim 1994). While early studies of prisons and the imprisoned focused their research almost exclusively on how men adapted to prison, prisoners' 'maleness' was assumed rather than interrogated (Sykes 1958; Clemmer 1958; Irwin and Cressey 1962; Garabedian 1963). The lack of reference to 'masculinity' in these analyses does not, however, mean it is absent: discussions of prisoner roles, modes of adaptation and hierarchies illustrate how different men developed and managed their prison identities, in a way similar to more recent research that explicitly explores prisoner masculinities. Irwin and Cressey (1962), for example, examined 'criminal', 'prison' and 'conventional' subcultures amongst male prisoners, and detailed how commitment to each shaped the way men engaged with the prison, as well as their status and position in prisoner hierarchies. As Irwin and Cressey's example illustrates, classic prison studies can provide theoretical frameworks that can be developed in light of developments in broader masculinities theory (Newton 1994). Ugelvik, for example, discusses how Sykes' pains of imprisonment can 'be re-conceptualized as gendered' (2014: 165):

> The deprivation of liberty, of goods and services, of heterosexual relationships, of autonomy and of security are all experienced as challenging for men as men in a specific cultural and symbolic context where the hegemonic ideal is that men are supposed to be autonomous and assertive heterosexually active tough guys, independently wealthy and able to make their personal mark on their surroundings. For men who have invested in such an ideal, the prison experience can be understood as a multilevel and complex masculinity challenge.
>
> Ugelvik 2014: 165

The prison masculinities field has become more established in the last thirty years and there is now a large body of research interrogating '*prisoners as men*' (Sim 1994: 101, emphasis in original). Carolyn Newton was amongst the first to analyse prison sociology through a masculinity lens, noting that, because of their relationship to power, 'the roles and hierarchies within prison are directly related to masculinities' (1994: 197). Newton (1994) also argues that the way establishments are managed may impact prisoner masculinities. Carrabine and Longhurst built on this work by exploring 'how masculine identities are accomplished through practices which involve strategies of negotiation and contestation' (1998: 165) with reference to primary research observing a board allocating prisoners to work. Much of this early prison masculinities literature focused on variations between establishments and the impact of staff and institutional masculinities on prisoners' gender identities (Newton 1994; Sim 1994; Carrabine and Longhurst 1998). For example, Sim (1994) compared 'the cages' at Inverness prison with the therapeutic Barlinnie unit that opened in 1973. Whereas the former was physically and psychologically brutal (due to a lack of human contact, punitive treatment by staff and austere cells), staff-prisoner and prisoner-prisoner interactions in the latter were based neither in violence or psychological intimidation but on self-reflection. Sim (1994) explains how confrontational masculinities (of male staff and prisoners) were challenged as a consequence of Barlinnie's different culture and regime (although Sim also notes that the related introspection led to 'psychic pain' (1994: 117)). As another illustration of how prisoner masculinities were investigated in relation to staff and establishments, Carrabine and Longhurst (1998) described how governors from two different prisons managed labour boards that allocated prisoners work. In one of Carrabine and Longhurst's examples, a governor tried to establish 'consensus' with prisoners by engaging informally and finding 'common ground…around a shared (or performed, at least) form of masculinity' (1998: 165) – in this case by making suggestive comments and gestures about a female instructor. By contrast,

another governor conducted meetings in a 'militaristic manner' (ibid.) and expected prisoners to behave in a formal and deferential manner, which often led to conflict, as prisoners and staff challenged each others' masculinities.

However, while first-wave prison sociologists often emphasised the multiplicity of prison masculinities (Newton 1994; Sim 1994; Carrabine and Longhurst 1998), the detail of that multiplicity tended to be overlooked with themes of domination 'emphasised at the expense of contradiction, challenge and change' (Sim 1994: 111). These tendencies have endured, with much subsequent research into prison masculinities concentrating on its most stereotypical and spectacular manifestations at the expense of studies exploring their complexity and diversity (Morey and Crewe 2018). As a consequence, the prison masculinities literature is dominated by the ''hypermasculinity hypothesis': the suggestion – sometimes explicit, sometimes implicit – that men in prison exhibit an exaggerated form of masculinity and are culturally rewarded for doing so' (ibid.: 18). This crude, exaggerated or 'extreme' (Jewkes 2005) form of masculinity is consistently described in terms of toughness, (controlled) violence,[9] aggression, homophobia and a rejection of anything appearing weak or effeminate (Newton 1994; Toch 1998; Irwin and Owen 2005; Jewkes 2005; Haney 2011; Rymhs 2012; Curtis 2014; Ricciardelli 2015; Michalski 2017; Buston 2018; De Viggiani 2018).

In explaining the apparent preponderance of hypermasculinity amongst prisoners, scholars invoke two theories relating to the deprivation and importation models of 'inmate culture' (Morey and Crewe 2018). According to deprivation-based perspectives, the prison deprives men of the markers of manhood and self-esteem that they relied upon in the community and reduces them to 'a state of infantilised dependency' (Jewkes 2002: 55). Imprisonment is thus an emasculating experience (Sykes 1958; Ricciardelli et al. 2015) that requires *compensation* in an environment where limited masculinity resources are available (Karp 2010; Michalski 2017; Symkovych 2017). Within this model, hypermasculinity is often presented as one of the few gender identities achievable in prison: in being deprived of safety, for example, various scholars argue that masculinity is re-established through a compensatory response of dominating, exploiting and victimising others to achieve respect and status (Newton 1994; Toch 1998; Jewkes 2002, 2005; Karp 2010; Michalski 2017). Many of these studies describing

[9] Various studies report that uncontrolled violence is often not respected within prisons (Sykes 1958; Bowker 1983; Toch 1998; Symkovych 2017).

how men compensate for the deprivations of imprisonment by engaging in hypermasculine behaviours focus on the threats posed by violence and the loss of heterosexual relationships, for example. However, studies exploring other types of deprivation depict contrasting masculinities. For example, research exploring how prisoners respond to threats posed by the prison administration or the spectre of risk classification explains how some men developed softer and more compliant masculinities (Crewe 2009; Phillips 2012; Crewe et al. 2014; Sloan 2016a). Similarly, one of Maier and Ricciardelli's research participants, for example, 'negotiated the risk of being transferred back to a higher-security prison by abandoning his more aggressive self-presentation and instead acting in a way he believed was consistent with the prison administration's rules and expectations' (2019: 242). It is evident, then, that while many deprivation-based accounts of prisoner masculinities portray hypermasculinity as the 'default' compensatory response to imprisonment, this is not necessarily the case. Indeed, as Maier and Ricciardelli (2019) and others demonstrate, findings within this theoretical framework depend on what deprivations are considered as well as the conditions of imprisonment in specific jurisdictions and establishments (Crewe 2009; Sloan 2016a).

Importation perspectives identify similarities between men's community- and prison-based masculinities and suggest that men's existing tendencies and traits – chiefly those associated with hypermasculinity and criminality – are *imported* into the prison where they are likely to be further exaggerated (Messerschmidt 2001; Jewkes 2002, 2005; Ricciardelli 2015). These explanations frequently note the preponderance in prison of men from lower working-class backgrounds (Newton 1994; Jewkes 2005; Bengtsson 2015; Ricciardelli 2015) and contend that this means many male prisoners have long negotiated masculinities in contexts of disadvantage where 'legitimate' masculine resources are largely inaccessible (Sim 1994; Evans and Wallace 2008; Phillips 2012; Earle 2018). Messerschmidt extends this logic, theorising that 'when other masculine resources are unavailable, specific types of crime can provide an alternative resource for accomplishing gender' (2001: 68), illustrating a common importation-based contention that it is often an existing propensity to hypermasculinity (and crime) that leads men to prison (Jewkes 2002, 2005; Ricciardelli 2015; Sloan 2016a).

Far from being incompatible, deprivation and importation explanations are often combined to explain the apparent pervasiveness of hypermasculinity amongst male prisoners (Jewkes 2002, 2005; Nandi 2002; Haney 2011; De Viggiani 2012, 2018). As Jewkes explains: 'criminal perspectives learned earlier in life combine with the pains of imprisonment to give rise to an

enhanced or exaggerated form of masculinity' (2005: 61) that is 'simultaneously a reflection of wider social norms and a response to the specific, unique properties of imprisonment' (2002: 58). While this integrated model seems incontrovertible, it often contributes to the 'hypermasculinity hypothesis' by inferring that already-hypermasculine men are best equipped to cope with and adapt to imprisonment, thus supporting theories that designate hypermasculinity the hegemonic 'ideal type' in prisons (Sabo, Kupers and London 2001; Hsu 2005; Karp 2010).

Beyond hypermasculinity, hegemony and hierarchy

Much existing prison masculinities research, and particularly that exploring hypermasculinity, lends itself to discussions of the prisoner hierarchy. Masculinities at the bottom of prisoner hierarchies have also been the focus of several studies. Men who are vulnerable to exploitation and (repeat) victimization, who have little (physical, economic or social) capital and who might use drugs or have mental health and addiction issues, are characterised variously as 'dodgers' (Hsu 2005), 'outcasts' (Symkovych 2017) and as those playing the 'sick role' (De Viggiani 2012). In some studies, these masculinities are described relatively superficially, and almost exclusively in terms of their subordination to more powerful – and hypermasculine – prisoners. In contrast, Maguire's (2021a, 2021b) research on vulnerable prisoners features thick description of the distinct ways that men who import into prison trauma and acute disadvantage construct their masculinities. For example, Maguire highlights a number of different facets of vulnerability in prison masculinities, related to being labelled a 'snitch', to breaking the 'inmate code', or to one's 'absence or perceived failure as men' (2021a: 176), which were often related to fatherhood or missing key life moments such as births or deaths of loved ones. By exploring how men experience fear, pain, grief and vulnerability while in prison, Maguire (2021a) describes multiple (vulnerable) prison masculinities. Furthermore, in moving away from the language of 'hypermasculinity', Maguire (2021a) underlines how, for many of his participants, aggression and demonstrable willingness to use violence was a survival strategy (likely to have been employed during other life stages) rather than a bid for high status or a 'hypermasculine' identity (Dolovich 2012; Gooch 2017; Michalski 2017). Therefore, while explorations of violence, aggression and victimisation are well-evidenced and theoretically valuable (Dolovich 2012; De Viggiani 2012; Maier and Ricciardelli 2019), when analysed through the lenses of hypermasculinity, they invariably tell a partial story. By moving outside of these frameworks, Maguire (2021a) provides a nuanced account of vulnerable and marginalised prisoner

masculinities and explains how they relate to men's pre-prison lives beyond merely their experiences of violence and crime.

Other scholars have challenged the hypermasculine and hierarchical reading of male prisoners explicitly: Anna Curtis notes that hypermasculinity 'offers a narrow cultural lens…and often glosses over the impact of race and class' (2014: 122); Bandyopadhyay identifies *competing* (rather than hierarchical) masculinities that 'challenge the homogenous idea of hegemonic masculinity' (2006: 186); and Phillips critiques hypermasculinity discourses as 'too limiting as a one-dimensional imagining of how men accomplish gender inside, without recognizing the agential possibilities of men to construct and occupy alternative masculine formulations' (2012: 158). Most recently, Connor Murray has described a 'prisoner diarchy' within which 'two separate groups of prisons could be regarded as having high-level status' (2023: 98). Equally, some contemporary studies ignore the framework of hegemony altogether (Crewe 2009; Earl 2011; Phillips 2012). Crewe's analysis of how men's identities relate to penal power includes a typology where 'each category of adaptation represents a different form of engagement with the system's demands for self-government and active engagement' (2009: 156). The resultant identities and associated behaviours each reflected distinct masculinities: for example, 'many younger *pragmatists* were self-described 'lads'…who venerated sexual promiscuity, drinking, expensive cars, and clothing' (ibid.: 438), while '*stoics* and *retreatists* were more likely to present themselves as 'decent blokes' – resolute, upstanding, and emotionally self-contained' (ibid.) and '*enthusiasts* exhibited a model of muscular citizenship, an unbending devotion to the moral cause' (ibid.). While Crewe 'orders' his types 'from most to least conformist' (2009: 156) they are unrelated to 'hegemony' or 'subordination'. Indeed, Crewe explicitly rejects 'hegemonic masculinity' in his research site and instead evidences how 'prisoners could 'accomplish' credible masculinities through a variety of strategies and identities' (2009: 437).

Studies that detail diverse and complex prisoner masculinities explore them in terms of a specific factor, behaviour or demographic. Ugelvik (2014) has explored how the masculinities of ethnic minority and foreign national prisoners in Norway are shaped by fatherhood, while Phillips (2012) describes how 'aspirational masculinities' amongst her participants related to being a 'good parent'. Similarly, Meek's (2007) research exploring the 'possible selves' of young fathers in custody suggests that the role of 'fatherhood' in prisoner masculinities can be promoted by targeted interventions – underlining the dynamic nature of prisoner masculinities.

As another example of research focusing on prisoner masculinities in terms of a single factor, Wilson's (2004) analysis explores the experiences of young Black men specifically, identifying two common strategies amongst his participants, relating to 'keeping quiet', by avoiding aggression, respecting boundaries with staff and remaining calm, and 'going nuts', which was exhibited when someone 'could take no more' (2004: 325) or when they realised 'keeping quiet' was going to be ineffective. These two ways of playing 'The Game' were imported from community-based experiences with police and highlight the role of race in determining expressions of prisoner masculinities (ibid.).

Research on specific aspects of prisoner masculinities often focuses on behaviours considered 'hypermasculine', such as violence or sexualised chat. While some of these studies present stereotypical prisoner masculinities, others demonstrate how ostensibly hypermasculine behaviours may be indicative of softer and less extreme gender identities. For example, Maycock's research on prisoner masculinities and bodywork (physical exercise as well as the use of grooming products such as gel, fake tan and moisturising creams) describes how, for participants in his study, 'maintaining their looks and presenting themselves in certain ways were important means through which to maintain links to outside, pre-prison lives' (2018: 77). Importing and sustaining these facets of masculinity means that bodywork can be understood as a means of resistance and a demonstration of agency within an otherwise depriving environment (Carrabine and Longhurst 1998; Jewkes 2002; Rymhs 2012; Sloan 2012a, 2016a). Physiques also serve social purposes: as means of receiving praise and validation from peers (Maycock 2018); signifying self-control (Jewkes 2002); and communicating strength, which can be empowering, increase influence in the prison, and help protect against victimisation (Martos-Garcia, Devis-Devis and Sparkes 2009; Karp 2010; De Viggiani 2012, 2018; Ricciardelli 2015; Heber 2017; Baumer and Meek 2018; Earle 2018). Furthermore, Sloan notes how working out and *changing* one's physique in prison, to become leaner and/or more muscular, represented a 'visible corporeal reward' (2016a: 99) that highlighted men's 'ability to achieve something' (ibid.). Research investigating the role of bodywork in prisoner masculinities therefore highlights how practices that may seem to demonstrate the pursuit of extreme and violent hypermasculinities can also be a means of reclaiming a sense of control and coping with the pains of imprisonment (Jewkes 2002; Phillips 2012; Sloan 2012a, 2016a; Maycock 2018).

Equally, Laursen (2017) describes how Danish prisoners used humour and 'banter' to express identity and resist the emasculation of the prison. While these jokes and innuendos were often about women and girls, and so could appear hypermasculine, Laursen felt that they 'seemed to function as a group-consolidating mechanism and as frictional behaviour rather than actual sexist or misogynist intentions' (2017: 1353). Both Crewe (2006b, 2009) and Nandi (2002) have also presented alternative ways male prisoners talk about women that challenge hypermasculinity discourses. Nandi's (2002) study of Black prisoner masculinities in the United States, for instance, describes a 'pedestaling' narrative that some participants invoked when discussing Black women in their lives, a finding that parallels the language of redemption and purity Crewe (2006b, 2009) reports his English participants using when discussing female family members.

Often, literature that deals with prisoner masculinity as a secondary or peripheral concern, rather than as the focus of the research, presents a more nuanced picture than those which make masculinity a central problem within their analysis. These studies tend to *describe* rather than *theorise* prisoner masculinities, perhaps because the theoretical focus is elsewhere. For instance, Crewe et al. (2014) explore 'the emotional geography' of prisons and contend that distinct 'zones' promote and facilitate alternative, 'softer' expressions of masculinity: 'the emotional landscape of the visits room was palpably different from most other areas of the prison. Here, men held their children and touched their partners with tenderness…and openly displayed joy and affection, as though their emotional identities had been resuscitated en route from the wings' (Crewe et al. 2014: 67). Other studies, particularly those on parenting, provide further evidence of this idea by describing places where male prisoners display more caring and supportive masculinities (Meek 2007; Crewe 2009; Buston 2018): 'there was never any ridicule expressed or even any sense of self-consciousness that these self-proclaimed 'big tough' guys were sitting together sticking hearts onto Valentine's or Mother's Day cards' (Buston 2018: 297). Examinations of male prisoners' relationships with female officers also suggest a diversity of prisoner masculinities: Crewe (2006b) describes a range of orientations ranging from chivalry and sentimentality, as well as more stereotypically macho approaches (see also Phillips 2012).

Finally, the prison masculinities field has been developed by research that considers imported facets of masculinity beyond those relating to violence and criminality. Coretta Phillips' research into multiculturalism in prison found 'postcode identities' (2012: 136) were central to

the identity of many young men in prison, reflecting studies exploring territorialism and local masculinities outside prisons (Ilan 2013; Fraser 2015). This facet of identity connected prisoners to the outside world and their pre-prison lives and acted as 'a mode through which new friendships were forged, enabling them to make meaningful connections with conversations covering mutual friends, leisure, education, or employment venues' (Phillips 2012: 137). Other masculinity resources that are well-researched in the community have also been evidenced as important to men in prison. For example, branded clothing and conspicuous consumption continue to be valuable means of acquiring and embodying status within prison (Jewkes 2002; Crewe 2009; Phillips 2012; Gooch 2017). While some forms of conspicuous consumption – like wearing designer clothes or fashionable trainers – are directly imported into the prison, others, such as rosary beads (Gooch 2017) and shower gels (Crewe 2009), are more specific to the institutional context or establishment. As Gooch and Treadwell explain, the display of material goods in one's cell was used by participants in their study as a masculinity resource: 'lining their cells with vast quantities of canteen and other highly sought after commodities not only demonstrates that they…are not vulnerable to victimisation and exploitation, but also displays their power, control and status' (2019: 59-60).

Prison Work

Work, education, training and other productive activities are common features of contemporary imprisonment. Research exploring the field takes a number of angles, including descriptive accounts, quantitative analysis of provisions, theoretical, legal and economic critiques of the frameworks structuring prison work, and qualitative sociological explorations of prison work experiences. In England and Wales, prison work has rarely been the primary focus of research,[10] but it is often explored as part of studies examining prisoner society and hierarchy, staff-prisoner relationships, and prisoners' coping strategies. In order to understand what prison work means to young men in English prisons and the role it plays in the development of young prisoners' masculinities, this section first explores the purpose of prison work through a historical analysis of practices in England and Wales and discusses how definitions of the aims of imprisonment (specifically, of 'punishment' and 'rehabilitation') change over time with consequences for prison work provision. It then describes contemporary forms of prison work and identifies various functions of different jobs. Finally, it explores literature examining the experience of prison work, and the role it plays in the development of prisoner masculinities.

[10] Notable exceptions being Legge (1978), Simon (1999), Shea (2005) and Pandeli (2015).

A brief history of prison work

Prison work is essentially a technique for achieving the aims of imprisonment – punishment, deterrence, incapacitation and rehabilitation (Piacentini 2001) – and therefore varies in relation to the economic and political context (Rusche and Kirchheimer 1939; Hörnqvist 2008). 'Punitive' prison work may be designed in a number of ways – by being physically and/or mentally taxing, by the absence of opportunities for personal development, or through poor material conditions and financial compensation, and in a number of extreme cases, work in prisons has been punitive to the extent that it has amounted to an abuse of human rights (Rusche and Kirchheimer 1939; Simon 1999; Piacentini 2001). During the 18th and 19th Centuries, prison work in England and Wales was primarily a means of punishment and deterrence, and consisted mostly of 'hard labour', treadwheels, solitary cell work, mat making and oakum picking (Rusche and Kirchheimer 1939; Ryan and Ward 1989; Simon 1999). While more constructive work was occasionally offered (mending roads and railways, or work for private businesses, for example), businesses and trade unions argued that these were anti-competitive because of the low (or non-existent) wages that were permitted to be paid to prisoners in comparison to workers in the community (Simon 1999). Such low rates of remuneration for prison work were, to some extent, the result of earlier efforts to ensure prison (and prison work) served as a deterrent as well as punishment: the 'less eligibility' principle established by 19th Century Poor Laws contributed to an enduring consensus that conditions in prison (and prison workplaces) must be worse than those in the community. As a result of political pressure, prison labour was re-established as purely punitive in the 1877 Prison Act (Rusche and Kirchheimer, 1939; Simon, 1999).[11]

In 1895, the Gladstone Report legislated against some more brutal forms of prison work and asserted that imprisonment was to be used *as* rather than *for* punishment, facilitating an increase in communal work and opportunities for association (Fitzgerald and Sim 1982; Simon 1999). Around the same time, the 'stage system' was introduced, offering early release to working prisoners and suggesting a more reformative purpose of prison work (Rusche and

11 In 1810 Bentham's proposal to build and run his 'panopticon' was rejected after the committee considering the proposal accepted arguments that the degree of exploitation of prisoner work manifest in the design was too great and that this work would not be primarily reformative (Ryan and Ward 1989). The 1865 Prison Act restricted productive labour because it was not seen as enough of a deterrent (Ryan and Ward 1989), while the 1877 Prison Act re-established prison labour as punitive (Rusche and Kirchheimer 1939; Simon 1999).

Kirchheimer 1939). However, the 'stage system' was short-lived, and, on the whole, prison work remained largely menial, punitive and irregular until the world wars required prison work be increased, rationalised and diversified so as to contribute to the war effort (Simon 1999). The mobilisation of prisons to facilitate work during World War II (in terms of space, equipment and changes to regimes) combined with post-war welfarism contributed to prison work being officially repurposed as 'rehabilitative': 'the purposes of training and treatment of convicted prisoners shall be to establish in them the will to lead a good and useful life on discharge, and to fit them to do so' (Criminal Justice Act 1948 as cited in the 1959 White Paper on Penal Reform). Despite this shift in its official purpose, a fast-growing prison population in the 1950s and sixties stalled prison work reforms, and the 'nothing works' era (alongside a failed effort to (re)introduce private production contracts that led to corruption charges, including the trials of Prison Department staff) meant prison work generally remained insufficient, unproductive and basic (Ryan and Ward 1989; Simon 1999; Robinson 2008).

The Woolf Report in 1991 precipitated considerable changes to prison work: responsibility for activity provisions was devolved to governors, private sector contracts were actively encouraged, prisoners' wages increased (although not to levels that enabled prisoners to save for release, or to financially support victims or families, as Woolf had recommended), and, in general, qualifications and training opportunities became more of a priority (Prison Reform Trust 1991; Simon 1999). More broadly, the 1980s and 1990s saw neoliberal and managerialist turns in public policy, which heralded the start of a period for prisons that Liebling and Crewe (2013) characterise as 'managerialism-plus'. The managerialist turn in prison led to increased competition, greater private sector involvement (including the opening of the first private prison in 1992) and a focus on performance-measurement, cost-effectiveness and productivity. While efforts were made to use targets and key performance indicators (KPIs) for 'moral ends' (Liebling and Crewe 2013: 292), the increasing emphasis on measurement had some unintended consequences: for example, it transpired that establishments were able to circumvent poor 'outcomes' relating to 'purposeful activity' by sending prisoners 'to workshops where no work was taking place so that the prison could still meet its target on 'purposeful activity'' (ibid.: 294). During this era, there was also increased emphasis on improving conditions and making prisons more humane, which led to 'high levels of investment in prison programmes and education…in light of a rekindling of interest in 'what works'' (ibid.: 293). This focus on treatment and training in prisons contributed to a

diversification of prison work opportunities and the encouragement of private sector contracts for providing prison work (Prison Reform Trust 1991; Simon 1999; Liebling and Crewe 2013).

Concurrent to the growing influence of managerialism on prison policies was a rise in punitive narratives around punishment. Robinson (2008) explains how this contributed to a 'rehabilitation' being 're-marketed' as a managerial tool with an expressive function, and the resultant emergence of 'rehabilitative punishment' and 'rehabilitation *as* punishment' (ibid.: 436, emphasis in original). This shift also contributed to an increasingly utilitarian objective for rehabilitation, with the result that 'it is no longer offenders themselves who are seen as the main beneficiaries of rehabilitative interventions, but rather communities and potential victims' (ibid.: 432). The Incentives and Earned Privileges (IEP) scheme, introduced in 1995, can be seen as one product of this political context, as it created a measurable mechanism for incentivising – and also, therefore, punishing – particular forms of prisoner conduct (Crewe 2009). The punitive turn, and introduction of IEP system specifically, impacted prison work by transforming the way it was allocated: formal procedures and risk assessments for prison jobs were introduced, which reduced opportunities for staff discretion, for example (Crewe 2009). Furthermore, by extending the power to formally punish and reward prisoners while at work, the IEP system also expanded the disciplinary reach of non-uniformed staff facilitating work, training and education activities.

The increasing importance of performance-measurement – as a facet of managerialism – in tandem with rising punitiveness also precipitated a move away from *employment* to *employability* as the focus of prison work (Hörnqvist 2008; Liebling and Crewe 2013). The shift towards improving prisoners' 'employability' was seen in jurisdictions across Europe from the mid-1990s, and meant a focus on activities that encouraged the 'shedding of 'anti-social' traits' (Liebling and Crewe 2013: 296) and that taught prisoners 'to cope with hardship and the expectations of their superiors' (Hörnqvist 2008: 183). 'Employability' can be measured by staff in prisons before prisoners are released and can be directed towards 'criminogenic needs' identified in prisoners' risk assessments, meaning it can be built into performance targets and other managerialist techniques (Hörnqvist 2008). Moving away from more applied forms of training, education and work also satisfied punitive urges, as providing prisoners with fewer economically advantageous opportunities helped maintain the principle of less eligibility.

In the twenty-first century, the managerialist and punitive emphases in public policy intensified. Liebling and Crewe characterise this period (from around 2007 onwards) as 'managerialism-minus': 'a form of *punitive minimalism* which pledges no-frills, 'effective' punishment while avoiding appearing in any way lenient or 'indulgent'' (2013: 294, emphasis in original). This meant punishing idleness ('prisons should not allow offenders to simply mark their time in a purposeless fashion' (MoJ 2010: 15)) while also making the work itself 'tougher' through longer hours and a focus on discipline (Liebling and Crewe 2013): 'hard work for offenders is at the heart of our plans to make punishments more rigorous. Prisoners will increasingly face the tough discipline of regular working hours' (MoJ 2010: 9). Second, prison work became an opportunity to reduce the financial burden of imprisonment (MoJ 2010; Policy Exchange 2011). As part of the dual emphasis on punitiveness and cost-saving, prison work initiatives during this period were typified by the encouragement of private sector involvement. This strategy was portrayed as economically prudent, on the basis that payment-by-results, tendering processes, and the potential for private companies to shoulder the costs of running and staffing prison workshops, would save money (MoJ 2010). To make prisons attractive workplaces for private investment, policymakers sought to extend working hours and minimise disruptions from social visits, medical appointments and other training opportunities (MoJ 2010). However, while private sector involvement in prison work increased during this period, prison regimes and the types of work available to prisoners remained largely unchanged. Despite this punitive turn, prison work in England and Wales is 'officially' intended to be 'rehabilitative': 'a good and useful life' was re-asserted in The Prison Rules 1999, rehabilitation is endorsed in His Majesty's Prison and Probation Service's statement of purpose (HMPPS 2019: 5) and His Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons (HMIP) assess establishments on the extent to which 'prisoners are able, and expected, to engage in activity that is likely to benefit them' (HMIP 2022). More recently, successive Justice Secretaries have signalled a renewed focus on 'rehabilitation' over punitiveness, and have espoused discourses around learning and skills, and prisoners finding employment on release: Michael Gove, for example, hoped to 'liberate prisoners through learning' (MoJ 2015), and under Dominic Raab, the Ministry of Justice proposed a new Prisoner Education Service (MoJ 2021).

This section has illustrated that prison work is expected to serve a combination of purposes and functions simultaneously: it is rehabilitative, punitive, and a means of (financially, physically and socially) facilitating imprisonment. It is also evident that the *primary* purpose of prison work changes over time, often in relation to wider political and economic shifts (Rusche and

Kirchheimer 1939; Hörnqvist 2008). This is partially manifested in changing definitions and meanings of 'rehabilitation' and 'punishment', as exemplified in Robinson's (2008) discussion of 'punitive rehabilitation' and Hörnqvist's (2008) description of the move from 'employment' to 'employability' as the aim of prison work and training. Despite these developments, on the most fundamental level, the types of work prisoners in England and Wales are able to engage in have been relatively consistent since the 1950s, comprising classroom-based education, vocational training, menial factory-like labour and work to maintain the prison. By exploring how these basic forms of prison work manifest in contemporary prisons in England and Wales and beyond, the next section will highlight the significance of the particulars of how prison work is designed, organised and 'marketed' (to prisoners as well as more generally).

Contemporary prison work

The above history of prison work in England and Wales demonstrates that 'purposeful activity' serves diverse and often competing aims that are dynamic, fluctuating in meaning, and related to wider penological trends regarding the aims of imprisonment (De Giorgi 2011; Robinson 2008; Crewe 2009; Piacentini 2001; Fitzgerald and Sim 1982; Flanagan and Maguire 1993). While specific forms, purposes and definitions of those purposes evidently change over time, the relative consistency in basic forms of prison work means that activities in contemporary prisons across jurisdictions share a number of similarities – both in the forms of activity available to prisoners and in the apparent purposes of it. As such, this section outlines six broad forms of contemporary prison work, details particular instances of these forms from around the world, and then examines the extent to which different activities fulfil various aims and functions in practice.

'Contracts' work – factory-like production and assembly work for government industries, private companies or charities – is described by research from countries including England and Wales, the United States, Taiwan, Ukraine, India, France, Germany, Hungary and Russia (Nagy 1999; Parenti 2001; Piacentini 2001; Fenwick 2005; Hsu 2005; Shea 2005; Bandyopadhyay 2006; Richmond 2014; Pandeli 2015; Symkovych 2017; Hatton 2021). For example, Symkovych's research in a Ukrainian prison details how prisoners split rocks, sorted scrap metal and 'worked in metal, wood and sewing workshops' (2017: 671), while Pandeli's (2015) study in the UK describes contracts work including packing and stickering books, breaking apart computers and computing accessories, and assembling plumbing parts. Gibson-Light (2019, 2020) also describes contracts work in his research in an American prison,

including in the 'sign shop' – a program where prisoners 'produced street signs and other signage to fulfil state and rarer private orders' (Gibson-Light 2020: 202) – and in a call centre (Gibson-Light 2019, 2020). Gibson-Light (2019, 2020) explains that jobs in the 'sign shop' and call centre were the most coveted: the work was skilled, better paid than most other positions in the prison, and more stable (in terms of lower turnover rates, for example). In other studies, however, contracts work is described as relatively undesirable (Piacentini 2001; Hsu 2005; Shea 2005; Pandeli 2015; Hatton 2018b, 2020). This is usually explained with reference to a particularly menial, tiring, repetitive or dangerous task or through discussions about who benefits from the work (Pandeli 2015; Gibson-Light 2019, 2020).

Another type of contemporary prison work is the provision of services, including laundry, preparing and serving food, cleaning and the maintenance of prison grounds (Zatz 2008; Crewe 2009; Goodman 2012; Sloan 2012b, 2016b; Darke 2013; Gibson-Light 2019, 2020; Skarbek 2020; Hatton 2021). These types of service work are largely functional – a means of facilitating the day-to-day running of the prison (Legge 1978; Zatz 2008; Darke 2013). In the UK, prison maintenance work has been associated with status and power in prisoner society because of the influence and informal perks often afforded to those in such roles (Crewe 2009). As Crewe (2009) notes in an English prison, 'wing workers received a number of illicit but minor perks' (ibid.: 241) including extra food, help from officers and greater freedom to move around the prison. Prisoners also undertake administrative service work in numerous countries, both for the prison directly and for organisations operating within them. Bandyopadhyay (2006), for example, details the work of 'writers', prisoners who do administrative work for officers in an Indian prison. Being a 'writer' involved 'record keeping, forwarding letters, keeping track of *gunti* (the regular head count) of prisoners' (ibid.: 191). As evidenced by Bandyopadhyay's (2006) example, administrative work often requires prisoners to be literate and trustworthy, as a result of the personal information they access (Bandyopadhyay 2006; Darke 2013). Research exploring service work (and administrative service work in particular) demonstrates that prisoners in such roles often work closely with staff, and that this can lead to perceptions of collusion and prisoners being called 'screw boys' or 'bootlickers' (Bandyopadhyay 2006; Crewe 2009).

Prisoners in many jurisdictions also have the opportunity to work in prisoner-facing, quasi-managerial roles. This includes generative work for third-sector organisations (as peer mentors or listeners, for example), trusted positions within the prison (e.g. on prisoner councils or gym

orderlies), managerial roles (in which prisoners are responsible behaviours and targets in workshops) and work as facilitators on educational courses or other interventions (Pandeli 2015; Symkovych 2018; Laws and Lieber 2020; Hatton 2021). As Hatton (2021) describes, generative roles generally involve emotional and social labour, and are often valued by prisoners because of the close working relationships with civilian staff and the opportunity to help others. The positioning between staff and prisoners manifest in these types of role can make them difficult to negotiate. Pandeli (2015) describes 'quality control' (QC) and 'technician' roles in a contracts workshop, for example. Prisoners in these positions were responsible for some paperwork, but their primary function was to manage and train their peers. However, using and establishing authority with other prisoners was difficult, and Pandeli (2015) noted how QCs and technicians often did other people's work themselves so as to avoid asserting their 'seniority' while also meeting their manager's deadlines. Other forms of prisoner-facing and quasi-managerial prison work are more disciplinary, such as those described by Skarbek (2020), Tritton with Fleetwood (2017) Bandyopadhyay (2006) and Symkovych (2017, 2018) in Brazilian, Ecuadorian, Indian and Ukrainian prisons respectively. For example, Sacha Darke's research in Brazilian prisons documents how 'prisoners were responsible for handcuffing and escorting…ensuring that inmates remained in their cells outside visiting hours and allocated periods of free association, did not argue, swear or raise their voices' (Darke 2013: 18).

In addition to the above jobs, prisoners in numerous jurisdictions engage with organised education and training opportunities during their sentences. In England and Wales, this includes classroom-based education (in subjects such as English, maths and business), vocational training (e.g. plastering, tiling or bricklaying), creative courses (including art, music, radio production), training related to other prison work (catering, manual handling or biohazard cleaning qualifications, for example), and one-off courses – often delivered by charities, employers or other external organisations – on topics including parenting, sports, rail track maintenance and forklift truck driving (Jewkes 2002; Baumer and Meek 2018; Buston 2018; Maguire 2021a). In England and Wales education and training are forms of 'purposeful activity' equivalent to other types of prison work: prisoners are paid for their participation, they are 'allocated' education in the same way as other work, and education and training courses (largely) take place at the same time as other 'work'. In terms of the sorts of experiences that are common with this type of work, Jewkes (2002) has discussed how some prisoners in her study framed education as transformative and Crewe (2006b, 2009; Crewe et al. 2014) notes

how prison classrooms are frequently described as emotionally warm and supportive spaces where different sorts of staff-prisoner relationships were able to develop, even in comparison to other civilian-staffed workplaces. Equally, for other prisoners, the prospect of being in a classroom was traumatizing because of prior educational experiences (Jewkes 2002; Maguire 2021a).

While the aforementioned forms of prison work are organised and sanctioned by the prison, some prisoners also engage in informal and illicit work (Crewe 2006a, 2009; Bandyopadhyay 2006; Darke 2013, 2018; Skarbek 2016, 2020; Darke and Garces 2017; Symkovych 2018; Gibson-Light 2019, 2020; Gooch and Treadwell 2019, 2020, 2021). In terms of informal work, Crewe discusses how officers in England informally use influential prisoners as 'managers' to 'keep the peace' on wings in return for 'low-level assistance' (2009: 241). Informal prison work to maintain prison order and settle disputes is also described by research in prisons in Brazil (Skarbek 2020; Darke 2013, 2018), Ukraine (Symkovych 2018), India (Bandyopadhyay 2006) and the United States (Gibson-Light 2019), although the degree to which prison staff participate in, encourage or merely permit informal work such as this varies considerably. Prisoners may also undertake what Gibson-Light terms 'shadow work' (2019: 237), informal work that supplements prison wages. Gibson-Light (2019, 2020) provides numerous examples of this, including cleaning other prisoners' bunks or washing others' laundry, 'repairing others' possessions for a small fee' (2019: 241), hiring personal 'security' on the prison yard or 'producing artistic "hobbycraft"…the practice of selling drawings, small sculptures or other artworks to prisons' (2019: 242).

While informal work takes place outside of sanctioned prison work structures, it is often permitted (or even encouraged) by staff, can contribute to the maintenance of order and rarely threatens the structures governing official prison work (for example, Gibson-Light (2019) describes how prisoners used wages from their informal jobs to supplement and facilitate poorly paid workshop work). Other types of 'shadow work', such as illicit dealing (of drugs, mobile phones and other contraband, including goods stolen within prison), are explicitly proscribed and can destabilise prison regimes as a result of the associated violence, drug use and debts (Crewe 2005, 2006a, 2009; Skarbek 2016, 2020; Symkovych 2017, 2018; Gibson-Light 2019; Gooch and Treadwell 2019, 2020, 2021). Gooch and Treadwell's (2020, 2021) examination of drug dealing and organised crime in prisons in England and Wales argues that these forms of (illicit) prison work have proliferated and become better organised in recent

years. Gooch and Treadwell (2020) also identify distinct roles within illicit prison work: '*businessmen'*, for example, are described as entrepreneurial men who controlled drug supplies and networks in ways similar to those in the community (and profited most from such work), while '*middlemen'* and '*foot soldiers'* do '*dirty work'* including:

> … collecting throw overs, bringing contraband into prison via reception or visits, passing and circulating contraband around the prison, storing contraband and weapons in their cells, concealing 'debt list' and bank account details, enforcing payment, passing notes and threatening prisoners.
>
> Gooch and Treadwell 2020: 1268

This section identifies the primary forms of contemporary prison work. While there are similarities across jurisdiction in the basic design of these activities, the practice and experience of prison work varies depending on where it takes place. Equally, some prison jobs incorporate elements of different types of work: Pandeli (2015) describes quasi-managerial positions within privately-run contracts workshops, and Bandyopadhyay (2006) discusses officially sanctioned organisational work as a 'watchman' that facilitates illicit work,[12] for example. Equally, some instances of prison work, such as in fire-camps (Goodman 2012), or in the Howard League's former graphic design social enterprise, fall outside of this classification. With an understanding of the literature around the purpose of prison work, as well as literature that describes contemporary forms, the next section discusses the extent to which prison work achieves its aims in practice (Howard League 2011).

The aims and functions of prison work

While definitions of rehabilitation vary across time, jurisdiction and even establishment (Piacentini 2001; Robinson 2008; Crewe 2009), there is a relatively enduring (and international) consensus that contemporary prison work should be primarily 'rehabilitative', and that this means it should help prisoners find employment on release. Within this understanding, the forms of prison work outlined above are framed as facilitating prisoner employment post-release by enhancing prisoners' 'employability' and providing education, training, qualifications and accreditation (King and McDermott 1995; Simon 1999; Shea 2005; Hörnqvist 2008). Prison work is also presented as a means of assisting post-release

[12] The use of formal jobs to facilitate illicit work is referenced in studies from numerous jurisdictions including England and Wales (Crewe 2009; Gooch and Treadwell 2020).

employment by providing 'realistic' work experiences and environments.[13] The logic behind 'realistic work experiences' promoting future employment outside prison follows that prisoners need to get used to the routine of employment, to working for a (small) wage, and to conforming to the 'expectations' of a work environment and employers (Legge 1978; Pandeli 2015). This approach thus assumes that prisoners are less in need of new skills or specific qualifications and instead require cultural and attitudinal changes towards licit work. As a senior prison manager cited in Pandeli's thesis on contract prison work for private firms asserted, such work is 'rehabilitative' because it 'provides [prisoners] with a work ethic – to get out of bed every morning and go to work' (2015: 95). The extent to which contemporary prison work delivers these outcomes in practice, and indeed the extent to which such outcomes would translate to employment post-release, is debateable (Hörnqvist 2008; Richardson and Thieme 2020; Maguire 2021a). Masculinities studies, such as those discussed above, identify structural and regional unemployment, and the low-pay, precariousness and general undesirability of available jobs as the primary barriers to young working-class men finding work – not men's 'employability' or lack of work ethic (Nayak 2003, 2006; Fraser 2015; McDowell 2002). Some forms of prison work are linked to specific skills and jobs, such as those involving railway track maintenance, forklift truck driving and construction. However, some scholars question the extent to which much other education and training prison work might help prisoners get into work post-release. Maguire (2021a), for example, notes that current provisions in England and Wales are generally insufficient and inappropriate as a means of helping prisoners find employment because they do not reflect contemporary labour markets on a national or local level:

> … in the competitive climate for mainly service-based local work opportunities or specialised roles in Hull's emerging energy sector, it is doubtful that these respondents will see much transferable value in their gym instruction credentials or in partly completed "City and Guilds" certificates in bricklaying and joinery.
>
> Maguire 2021a: 132

Suggestions that prison work can provide 'realistic' work environments and experiences are more widely undermined in prison work literature. Critics argue that work is fundamentally distorted when it takes place in prisons. For example, there is no separation between home and

[13] This logic is most often associated with factory-like light-assembly contracts work, although Simon (1999) explains that such work was initially introduced and conceived of as a means of occupying prisoners who were unsuitable for other activities, and not as a means of rehabilitation.

work (or the people you interact with in these two domains), aptitude is rarely the main consideration for the allocation of work, prison staff (as 'supervisors' of work) have extensive powers over the lives of workers, and the 'working day' is subject to security-related constraints (Legge 1978; Simon 1999; Shea 2005; Pandeli 2015; Gibson-Light 2020; Hatton 2021). Prison work is also inherently limiting and limited in comparison to other forms of work – Hatton (2020) and Gibson-Light (2020) explain that the lack of opportunity for promotion and progression manifest in work that takes place in prison make it impossible for prisoners to see such activities as 'real' work. These sentiments were most pronounced amongst prisoners in high-skill and high-status work that they were otherwise positive about: 'you can't aspire to be the boss one day' (Hatton 2020: 2). Studies from England, Russia, the US and Ukraine also evidence that prison work is often conducted with inadequate or outdated tools and resources which undermine how realistic it can be (Legge 1978; Piacentini 2001; Hatton 2018a, 2018b, 2021; Symkovych 2017, 2018). Symkovych, for example, described the use of 'dilapidated, even archaic, industrial equipment' (2017: 680) in a Ukrainian prison, and one of Hatton's participants in the US, whose job involved cutting grass, explained that prison 'had lawnmowers and a truck, [but] they make us use the manual weed whackers, like it's slavery.' (2018b: 185-6).

Beyond the ways in which the daily practice of prison work is unlike other forms of work, 'purposeful activity' is distorted on a more fundamental level by its unique legal positioning. Although the specificities of prisoners' legal statuses vary by jurisdiction, prisoner workers are often exempt from the protections and entitlements workers outside prison receive (van Zyl Smit and Dünkel 1999; Shea 2005; Zatz 2008, 2009, 2021; Pandeli, Marinetto and Jenkins 2018).[14] This unique legal position means many prisoner workers can be hired and fired with relative impunity, have minimal recourse to complaints and grievance procedures, and are not entitled to sick pay or holiday, for example, making prison work acutely insecure and unpredictable (Gibson-Light 2020). As Pandeli et al. explain, such exemptions are made possible because 'in international law…it is held that prison-work's rehabilitative role legitimates and distinguishes it from economic work or unfree labour (Article 4 of the European Convention on Human Rights, ECHR)' (2018: 2). Official declarations regarding the rehabilitative – and thus non-economic – purposes of prison work are also vital for the legal

[14] Working prisoners in England and Wales have few legal rights, however, legal entitlements and protections in other countries are not always borne out in practice (Shea 2005) – prisoners in Brazil, for example, are entitled to work but in practice there are insufficient opportunities to do so (Human Rights Watch 1998).

positioning of prisoners as (non-) workers who can be can be exempted from minimum wage legislation (Parenti 2001; Zatz 2008, 2009; Goodman 2012; Pandeli et al. 2018; Hatton 2020, 2021).

There is little theoretical or quantitative evidence that contemporary prison work is routinely 'rehabilitative' – as a means of supporting prisoners into post-release employment or otherwise (Parenti 2001; Hörnqvist 2008). As a result, some theorists go beyond assessing how 'rehabilitative' prison work is and contend instead that it is actively punitive, exploitative and/or coercive (Parenti 2001; Zatz 2008, 2021; Hatton 2018b, 2020, 2021). Hatton, for example, identifies 'their lack of remuneration, their lack of autonomy in choosing whether to work and in negotiating the terms of their labor, and their mistreatment and degradation on the job' (2018b: 180) as the features of contemporary prison work that contribute to participants' perceptions of such activities in negative terms.[15] Indeed, as a result of these aspects of prison work, a number of Hatton's (2018b) participants draw parallels between prison work, slavery and other historic and racialised forms of exploitation. Other theorists argue, however, that it is the wider context and conditions of imprisonment – as opposed to the practices of prison work specifically – that undermine the 'rehabilitative' potential of 'purposeful activity' (Legge 1978; Fitzgerald and Sim 1982; Sim 2008):

> An unjust, bloated, violent, and corrupt gulag archipelago cannot be a place for useful, just, and humane prison labor…When the initial terms of imprisonment are unjust, all else that follows is unjust.
>
> Parenti 2001: 249

While research suggests that prison work rarely fulfils 'rehabilitative' purposes, studies also illustrate other functions and purposes it serves, for both prisons and prisoners. First, prison work is a means of physically and financially maintaining prisons: contracts work can subsidise the cost of imprisonment (although it frequently operates at a loss), and service work in kitchens, gardens, laundry and administrative departments is often vital for the daily running of establishments (Piacentini 2001; Crewe 2009; Sloan 2016a, 2016b; Hatton 2021). These kinds of prison work also save establishments money, as they mean they do not need to hire civilian staff (who would need to be paid significantly higher wages) for such roles (Hatton

[15] While Hatton's research is conducted in the United States, participants from studies in other jurisdictions reported similar opinions (Legge 1978; Pandeli 2015; Symkovych 2018).

2020). Prison work also serves non-economic functions for establishments. For example, prisoner-facing roles facilitate imprisonment by directly involving prisoners in the creation and maintenance of order (Skarbek 2014, 2020), and the varied desirability of different forms of prison work means it can be used to incentivise (and punish) prisoners' behaviour (Crewe 2009; Gibson-Light 2019, 2020). 'Employability' courses and other education and training qualifications also play an important role in the organisation of prisons, in that they produce measurable outputs that enable managerialist assessments of an establishment's performance (Carlen 2008; Hörnqvist 2008; Sim 2008; Liebling and Crewe 2013).

In terms of prisoners' experiences of 'purposeful activity' and the purposes it serves in practice, different prison jobs might provide income, time away from wings and out of one's cell, early release or movement to lower security establishments, and material benefits such as extra food, for example (Crewe 2009; Sloan 2016b; Pandeli 2015). Some forms of prison work are also reported to have emotional and personal consequences for an individual's identity and self-worth, as a source of status, dignity, and masculinity (Shea 2005; Goodman 2012; Pandeli 2015; Ricciardelli 2015; Sloan 2016b; Hatton 2020, 2021; Gibson-Light 2019, 2020). Crewe et al.'s (2014) study on 'emotion zones' supports these findings by highlighting the different sorts of behaviour men exhibited in classrooms and workshops, for example. As a number of theorists explain, their participants' descriptions of prison work as simultaneously exploitative and valuable are common, not contradictory, and evidence of the complexity of 'purposeful activity' and experiences of imprisonment (Goodman 2012; Pandeli 2015; Hatton 2020, 2021; Gibson-Light 2019, 2020). Research also underlines the extent to which the perceived value and purpose of different jobs depends on the work itself as well as the prisoner undertaking it (Bandyopadhyay 2006; Goodman 2012; Gibson-Light 2020; Hatton 2021).

The contradictions of prison work

> Given that the aims of imprisonment – punishment, deterrence, incapacitation, and rehabilitation – appear contradictory, and its operational goals – security, order, decency etc – also seem conflictual, it is unsurprising that definitional clarity is difficult to achieve, let alone translate into practice.
>
> Crewe 2009: 20-1

While Crewe's quote refers to imprisonment as a whole, the lack of clarity he describes is equally the case for prison work. This section has illustrated that prison work might be directed towards serving diverse purposes depending on the aims of imprisonment as defined by philosophies of crime and justice at a given time within a jurisdiction. Contemporary prison work is most often defined in terms of its rehabilitative potential and the role it might play in supporting prisoners into employment post release. A number of studies critique this approach in terms of the type of work it seems to prepare prisoners for, chiefly, that which is precarious and low-wage (Hornqvist 2008; Hatton 2021). However, through assessments of present forms of prison work, the structures that govern them and of how they function in practice, it seems there are often insufficient resources and provisions for prison work to be meaningfully or believably 'rehabilitative' (Piacentini 200; Symkovych 2017; Hatton 2018b; Richardson and Thieme 2020). In part, the failure of the 'rehabilitative' purpose of prison work is an outcome of such practices being overloaded with aims and functions, of which some are unofficial, unarticulated and contradictory. In addition to being 'rehabilitative', prison work is looked to as a means of making prisons safe and controlled, economically viable, and as places that deter and punish criminals – and this leads to confusion amongst policymakers, prison staff and prisoners about the purpose and meaning of prison work (Fitzgerald and Sim 1982; Simon 1999; Cooper and King 1965; Legge 1978; Piacentini 2001; Zatz 2021). As a consequence of the lack of clarity regarding prison work in England and Wales, penological critiques of 'purposeful activity' across six decades are strikingly similar: it is under-resourced, inefficient and largely irrelevant to labour market needs, and offering such opportunities under the pretence of rehabilitation is misleading (Legge in 1978; Bottoms in 1990; King and McDermott 1995; Simon 1999; Shea 2005; Richardson and Thieme 2020; Maguire 2021a). It is the idea that prison work in its present state is so patently incapable of being 'rehabilitative' that leads Hörnqvist to conclude that 'the attempt at the penal constitution of wage labourers is imaginary rather than merely unsuccessful' (2008: 192).

These sections have demonstrated that while prison work may not be 'rehabilitative', prisoners often convey that the activities they participate in are valuable in some way. Furthermore, as Hatton (2020), Goodman (2012) and others (including Pandeli 2015 and Gibson-Light 2020) have found, many prisoners describe work as valuable while also explaining that it feels exploitative and coercive. That prisoners simultaneously hold these positive and negative opinions of prison work underlines how those who participate in such activities tend to evaluate them both in terms of the specific practice of a job, course or role and in terms of how they

relate to and impact on experiences of imprisonment more generally. It follows that existing research examining experiences of 'purposeful activity' finds that prisoners 'have diverse experiences and interpretations of their labor' (Hatton 2021: 27) and that the extent to which different jobs and opportunities in prison are viewed as exploitative or valuable varies significantly (Bandyopadhyay 2006; Goodman 2012; Gibson-Light 2020; Hatton 2021). These studies explain how prisoner assessments of work, training and other activities depend on: personal factors, including an individual's masculinity, work experiences and aspirations for the future (Ricciardelli 2015; Hatton 2021); the specificities of the prison, such as the staff, structures and hierarchies within them (Hsu 2005; Bandyopadhyay 2006; Pandeli 2015); and local or national narratives on the history of (coerced) work.[16] As Hatton explains, experiences of 'purposeful activity' shaped by these complex factors have consequences for the individual: 'prison labor, like any labor relation, shapes incarcerated workers' subjectivities: how they experience and interpret their labor and even themselves' (2021: 39). While several studies examine the impact of prison work on those who do it, this examination of existing literature demonstrates the need for further research in this field.

Conclusion: the prison work-prison masculinities field

> Offenders do not come to prison because they have failed as workmen, and the task of the prison is to train the whole man: a prison is not therefore and should not be, first and foremost a factory.
>
> White Paper on Penal Reform 1959: 15

This quote from a White Paper in 1959 conveys a sense of clarity about prison work, and the men who undertake it, that is absent from contemporary policy, practice and understanding. The history of prison work in England and Wales makes evident that 'purposeful activity' is overloaded with vague and undefined objectives, as is the case with imprisonment more widely. However, while the aims of imprisonment are subject to considerable research, discussion and critique, prison work has not been examined in the same way, leading to a lack of understanding and confusion for criminologists, policymakers, prison staff and prisoners.

[16] As demonstrated by Hatton's (2018b) discussions of the invocation of slavery amongst her American participants and Piacentini's (2001) consideration of how Soviet forced labour camps shaped contemporary experiences of prison work in Russia.

Studies that have explored and referenced 'purposeful activity' in England and Wales in a significant way over the last 60 years identify strikingly similar practices and issues (Legge 1978; Bottoms 1990; King and McDermott 1995; Simon 1999; Shea 2005; Pandeli 2015). Prison work has long been inefficient, insufficient and under-resourced. While there are opportunities for greater numbers to engage in 'purposeful activity' in the contemporary prison, *forms* of prison work have changed negligibly: prison maintenance (cleaning and in kitchens, for example) and unskilled light-assembly work have long been the most common forms of activity available to prisoners. The extent to which prison work has ever been 'rehabilitative' is unclear, although Tony Bottoms noted in 1990 that talk of 'encouragement to lead a good and useful life' in the context of the present physical and social conditions in many British prisons…is hollow to the point of obscenity' (Bottoms 1990: 5). Education and training qualifications have expanded since the early 1990s, however, developments have failed to keep pace with labour market transformations resulting from de-industrialisation. As Maguire states, 'the prison education and training provision – mainly based around traditional masculine trades – were woefully inadequate in preparing these men for changing workplaces on their release' (2021a: 114). Equally, while the focus on 'employability' was ostensibly a means of reorienting provisions to better suit a service-led economy, the picture presented by work and masculinities studies is not one where 'soft-skills' are the primary barrier to employment for young men (let alone those with criminal records).

In terms of the meanings and experiences of prison work for those undertaking it, studies outline various financial, social and psychological benefits, as well as those relating to release and progression through the sentence (Crawley and Sparks 2005; Crewe 2009; Pandeli 2015; Ricciardelli 2015; Sloan 2016b). Gibson-Light's (2019, 2020) exploration of hierarchies within and between different prison workplaces also illustrates the significance of these activities to prisoners' status, dignity and sense of self. Equally, research underlines that prison work is inherently risky and precarious, and that prisoners may experience it as coercive and exploitative irrespective of the benefits and desirability of the specific activity they undertake (Hatton 2018b; Goodman 2012; Gibson-Light 2019, 2020). The positive and negative experiences may be experienced simultaneously, because, as Goodman explains, they are not necessarily contradictory: prison work may be 'partially exploitative and partially something to appreciate as good, useful, or at least better than the alternative' (2012: 368). These studies highlight the complexity of prison work experiences and the need for more research that considers heterogeneity in how different men engage with and feel about 'purposeful activity'.

Bandyopadhyay's (2006) study is an example of research that accomplishes this – she explains how men import different work histories into prison and demonstrates the significance of prisoners' identities to their engagement with and experience of various prison jobs. Furthermore, Bandyopadhyay (2006) describes the ways different men use prison jobs to cultivate and maintain masculinities during their sentence. There is a dearth of similar research conducted in England and Wales (although Pandeli (2015) considers some of these issues in her thesis on private contracts work), producing a gap between understandings of prison work provisions and its 'official' or intended purposes, and understandings of how prisoners experience and make meaning through prison work.

To improve understanding of prison work and the experiences of those engaged in it, research can benefit from incorporating and being guided by findings from the wider masculinities and working masculinities fields. These studies situate the experiences, attitudes and behaviours of young men within locales (and local histories) and wider socio-economic trends, and present more nuanced and diverse masculinities than is present in much of the prison masculinities literature. The work and masculinities field demonstrates the role local labour markets play in young men's masculinities, regardless of whether an individual is or has been formally employed (Nayak 2003, 2006; McDowell 2002, 2003; McDowell et al. 2014; Roberts 2012; Walkerdine 2010, 2016). This is evident in research that shows how post-industrial forms of employment available to working-class young men are increasingly unskilled, precarious, and in the service sector. Consequently, some young men reject or find themselves unable to acquire licit employment and the associated masculinity resources work offers. As Hayward explains, it is in this context that 'certain forms of criminal practice become highly attractive as a means of 'exerting control' and 'constructing identity' in increasingly socially precarious lifeworlds' (2004: 16). Studies also evidence how locale plays a similarly important role in young men's licit and illicit leisure practices, including violence (Ilan 2012; Phillips 2012). By situating violence within men's specific milieus, research illustrates the diverse meanings and purposes of violence, such as how it may be used to demonstrate 'hardness' in the absence of 'hard' work, that it might represent local legacies of violence, or how in some places there may be risks associated with *not* participating in violence (Fraser 2015; Ellis 2016).

It is notable that the most insightful of these studies are exploratory, descriptive, use inductive reasoning and largely ignore reductive frameworks such as 'hegemonic masculinity'. Few studies of prisoners or prisoner masculinities take a similar approach or consider the

experiences and attitudes towards work evidenced by this research, with Phillips (2008, 2012), Crewe (2006b, 2009), Bandyopadhyay (2006) and Maguire (2021a, 2021b) providing some of the notable exceptions. Instead, prison masculinities literature tends to focus on extreme behaviours and masculinities (Sloan 2016a). While violence, aggression, sexism and homophobia in prison are well documented (and important issues to research), dichotomous frameworks – where prisoners are depicted as dominating or dominated, victim or perpetrator, powerful or vulnerable – undermine acknowledgement of multiple prisoner masculinities and underplay the extent to which they are contested and dynamic. While many studies continue to centre issues of hierarchy and domination because of wider penological interest in these themes, there are signs that prison masculinities research is becoming more diverse.

In order to develop and add depth to understandings of prisoner masculinities, prison work and the relationship between them, research that explores the diversity of masculinities as they relate to distinct forms of prison work is needed. It is evident that work is unavoidably distorted when it takes place in prison and that this contributes to confusion regarding the purpose of such activities, but the consequences of contemporary prison work and prisoners' masculinities on broader experiences of imprisonment is less clear. Gibson-Light surmised the following with regard to how prison work impacts experiences of imprisonment in the United States:

> All prisoners, regardless of work status, are subject to the mortification processes of prison life (Gofman 1961; Sykes 1958). The despotic labor processes, deskilling, lower pay, heavy restrictions on movement, and other undesirable features of "bad" prison jobs magnified such challenges. "Good" jobs, on the other hand, offered greater autonomy and skilled, engaging tasks in environments that participants deemed more like the outside world. Where the latter better facilitated claims to dignity, the former often stifled them.
>
> Gibson-Light 2020: 213

Given the lack of similar research in England and Wales, it is unclear whether 'purposeful activity' has the same effect on prison experiences in this jurisdiction. Whether and how prison work undermines or affirms prisoners' masculinity and sense of self, and the impact of this on the way men engage with 'purposeful activity' while serving sentences in England and Wales is equally unclear. I have therefore designed research that explores the meaning of prison work to young men in three English prisons, rooted in the approaches, theories and findings of both

penological and sociological studies of work and masculinities. The following chapter outlines how I designed and conducted this research, before the remaining chapters explain my findings.

3. Methodology: researching work and masculinity in prison

Prisons are both 'microcosms' and symptoms of society, and therefore academically rich environments. As Liebling states, 'prison sociology – done "right" – can humanize our understanding of the prison and the prisoner in ways that are of deep significance not just to penological scholarship, but also to late modern fractured communities' (2014: 484). However, prisons are also difficult places to penetrate, and complicated sites in which to conduct research. This chapter will begin by outlining the research design, before describing the field(s). It will go on to discuss prison ethnography and the particular challenges of researching masculinities and work in prison, before outlining and reflecting upon the fieldwork experience. The chapter will then conclude with a review of how I analysed the data and developed the findings explored in this thesis.

Research design

Given my interest in studying masculinity and the meaning of prison work amongst young male prisoners, and the theoretical considerations outlined in the previous chapter, I developed the following research questions:

- How do young men maintain and construct masculinity in prison, and what role do work experiences (in prison and in the community) play in these identities?
- What forms of purpose and meaning do young men find in different types of prison work, and how does its availability and allocation impact the experience of imprisonment?

In considering how best to answer these questions, it was most appropriate to develop a comparative and ethnographic study involving observation (or 'reserved participation' (Liebling 1999: 160)) and semi-structured interviews across multiple establishments in different locales. In selecting the number of sites for the study I weighed the benefits of a larger number of comparators with resource and time constraints that would impact how long I would have at each prison, and decided to include three prisons. I spent three months at each site and built time away from the field(s) into the research design because, as Drake and Harvey explain, 'the performance associated with being an empathic listener is a difficult one to sustain for long periods of time' (2014: 496). The research timetable for each site involved one month focused exclusively on observing different forms of prison work, organised principally around

three or four workplaces in each prison, with ad-hoc visits to additional workplaces in order to develop an understanding of each prison's 'labour market' as a whole. Interviews were to be prioritised in the second and third month in each prison, and I set a target of 90 interviews in total – 30 per site. This relatively large number of interviews was necessary in order to achieve populations from each site that would both facilitate a deep understanding of that prison and be a meaningful comparator.

The field(s)

I selected three fieldwork sites in discussion with my supervisor. I sought Category C 'training' and 'resettlement' prisons specifically, because they are theoretically the establishments with the greatest emphasis on and resources for purposeful activity. As I was focusing on young men, I chose sites holding this demographic specifically, where possible. The other main factor when selecting sites was that they were from three distinct regions, as I wanted to be able to compare the impact of differing local labour markets on prisoners' experiences of and aspirations for employment. I also had to consider the financial and practical feasibility of conducting research in different areas. HMPYOI Swinfen Hall and HMPYOI Isis were thus selected as Category C prisons holding young men in the West Midlands and London respectively, while HMP Wealstun, a general Category C prison near Leeds, Yorkshire, was selected as the third site.

Access to the establishments was initially sought informally through my supervisor, who made contact with the governors of each prison via email. Once these contacts had agreed to host the research, I submitted a written application to the National Offender Management Service (now His Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS)) National Research Council (NRC) in April 2016. In May 2016 my application was approved pending agreement to minor modifications. I notified each prison that my research had been approved and negotiated rough start dates. Prior to beginning fieldwork, I visited Swinfen Hall and Isis, after the governor at Swinfen Hall and deputy governor at Isis had requested meetings to discuss the research and resource requirements. I visited Isis on a second occasion before fieldwork to complete key training. My contact at Wealstun did not suggest a meeting and, given it was much further away, arrangements were made over telephone and email.

While broadly comparable as Category C training and resettlement prisons, the three sites also differed from one another in various ways, as a result of their history, location and architecture

as well as their distinct populations. These factors shape a prison's culture and emotional climate, as well as how it is organised and staffed (Liebling with Arnold 2004; Crewe, Liebling and Hulley 2014), which in turn has consequences for prisoner masculinities and work experiences. Furthermore, the culture of a prison impacts how research can be conducted there, and provides valuable context for the research findings.

Swinfen Hall

HMPYOI Swinfen Hall was a Category C prison in a small village in the West Midlands. After opening as a borstal in the 1960s, Swinfen Hall became a long-term closed YOI in the 1980s. At the time of research, the prison had a specialist function holding just under 600 men aged 18-26 years old who were serving sentences over three-and-a-half years. Swinfen Hall was the only prison in England and Wales serving this specific role, and as a result, the population was less 'local' than other Category C prisons. There were nine wings in the prison. A, B and C wings were the oldest units and in a state of disrepair.[17] The other wings in Swinfen Hall were newer buildings in better condition. D and E wings, the Enabling Environment and Psychologically Informed Planned Environment (PIPE) respectively, were the best-resourced and best-presented.

The prison's unique function was central to staff culture and identity. Many officers relished holding 'some of the most dangerous' young men in the country (fieldwork notes) and enjoyed telling me about the crimes prisoners had committed, particularly those that had been in the media. This focus on prisoners' crimes and dangerousness contributed to a traditional and 'heavy' public-sector officer culture (Crewe et al. 2014), and the staff group overwhelmingly concerned with (staff) safety, risk and security as opposed to rehabilitation or relationship-building. Officers were openly suspicious and untrusting of most prisoners, and the 'heaviness' of the prison was reflective of and reinforced by a restrictive and inconsistent regime ('they're trying to run a high-security prison with Category C staff. It's not right!' – prisoner, fieldwork notes). Prisoners frequently complained about inadequate access to showers, limited association time and frequent cancellations of activities.[18]

[17] An HMIP report conducted six months after I had finished my fieldwork at Swinfen Hall described accommodation on these wings as 'squalid' (2017: 29), and noted that 'most of the 180 cells on these wings had windows without glass, leaving prisoners exposed to the elements' (ibid.).

[18] Only a small number of men – those in the waste management or plastering workshops – were allowed daily access to showers. Men in tiling, painting and decorating and gardens workshops and work parties were particularly aggrieved by their limited access to showers.

Swinfen Hall's culture was also shaped by approximately one third of the population having been convicted of sexual offences. Those convicted of sexual offences were fully integrated into the prison's regime and thus not 'identifiable' by their wing location or workplace, which bred widespread paranoia amongst Swinfen Hall's population: prisoners obsessively discussed and over-estimated the number of convicted sex offenders in the prison, were at pains to demonstrate their non-sex offender status, and were especially cautious of their peers due to fears about accidentally befriending someone convicted of a sexual offence, because of the associated 'stain' (Ievins 2023). The performance of this paranoia, and demonstration of concerted efforts to avoid and identify those who had been convicted of sexual offences, was undertaken by many prisoners during observations and in interviews (including some who had been convicted of sexual offences themselves):

> We don't see what they're in here for, so we start investigating them basically, like we interview and speculate and that and we try to get out what they're in for…it puts a dampener on us as well because we don't want to be around them. What they've done is wrong, nothing like that should ever happen. I think it's disgusting.
>
> Karteer

Isis

Situated in Thamesmead in South East London and within the perimeter of HMP Belmarsh, HMPYOI Isis was a Category C prison that had held young adults since its opening in 2010. While the prison had originally held 18 to 25-year-old men, it had recently begun receiving older men as well. Isis was a compact establishment, that at the time of fieldwork, held just over 600 men across eight wings on two identical house blocks. None of the wings were formally 'specialised' besides the induction wing. As a new prison, Isis was relatively well-resourced and well-maintained: there were green spaces outside the house blocks and each wing had plenty of natural light.

Isis had a reputation as a 'rough' prison, and both staff and prisoners at Swinfen Hall warned me about how dangerous it was when I told them I was going to conduct research there. Rates of violence were high (HMIP 2016) and it felt 'edgy' during fieldwork, as though a fight could break out at any point. Phillips noted in her research (conducted in another prison with a large London population) that there was 'a strong investment in neighbourhood- or estate-based identities with powerful sentiments of territorialism' (2008: 322) amongst prisoners. The same

was evident in Isis, and participants often discussed the 'vetting' of new arrivals by other prisoners in order to establish their outside connections and rivalries.

To manage high levels of violence, the prison ran a 'split regime' which almost totally separated the house blocks: prisoners from one half of the prison attended activities in the morning and had association in the afternoon, while those in the other did the reverse. The regime alternated Monday to Thursday meaning there were very limited opportunities for violence between men on different blocks. While this regime meant that prisoners spent less time in 'purposeful activities' than in most Category C prisons, it also provided more time on association.

The regularity of activities and association meant that prisoners spent a lot of time out of their cells and were thus easily accessible. I therefore had fewer and shorter conversations with officers in comparison to the other fieldwork sites and could not reliably characterise the staff culture. However, it is worth noting two observations: first, that the Senior Management Team were highly and purposefully visible throughout the fieldwork period and were well regarded by prisoners and non-uniformed staff; and, second, use of force was high (HMIP 2016) and I witnessed Control and Restraint techniques being used on a number of occasions.

Wealstun

HMP Wealstun, located near a small village in Yorkshire, opened in 1995 after two existing prisons built in the 1960s were merged. In 2008, Wealstun was re-rolled from a joint Category C/D establishment to a solely Category C prison. With a capacity of just under 850 adult men, it was the most populous prison in the study. Wealstun was a sprawling site with 10 wings, almost all of which were in individual buildings across the site. A, B, C and D wings were on one side of the prison, and each housed between 120 and 180 men, mostly in single-cell accommodation. C wing was designated as the drug recovery wing, although not all residents housed there were on drugs programmes. On the other side of the prison, E, F, G, H, I and J wings housed around 50 men each. These house blocks were converted from Category D accommodation when Wealstun was re-rolled, and were lighter and more spacious than the other wings.

Staff culture in Wealstun corresponded with the 'traditional-cynical' quadrant of Crewe at al.'s (2014) model. While the regime was regular, and it seemed as though more men were engaged

in purposeful activity each day than at the other sites (I asked for figures from the prison, but staff were too busy to provide them), the prison otherwise felt unpredictable and disordered. Staff seemed generally friendly and respectful in their interactions with prisoners but had 'retreated', which was underlined by participants who routinely described blurred staff-prisoner boundaries and not knowing 'where they stood' with officers. On arrival at Wealstun, issues with security and drugs were quickly evident: there were flyers and security notices reminding staff to 'PROVE AND SHAKE TO PREVENT ESCAPE!' (in addition to multiple standard reminders to 'lock it and prove it'), and I frequently encountered prisoners who were obviously intoxicated. Indeed, the illicit drugs economy appeared to shape Wealstun's prisoner society more than in the other sites, and certain workshops were known as being for drug addicts or for powerful dealers. Fights were common and took place during freeflow and in sight of staff (and sometimes me), which marked a departure from the mostly hidden prisoner violence in both Isis and Swinfen Hall. In addition to the role played by drugs, the prisoner society in Wealstun was heavily shaped by locale: men from outside Yorkshire (from the North West or London, for example) generally kept to themselves, while local prisoners described rivalries between and within different cities, primarily Leeds, Sheffield and Bradford. Ethnicity was often tied to these local identifications and prisoner friendships were usually ethnically homogenous. Unlike in Isis, where friendship groups were often based on the same wing because of security concerns and a restricted regime, prisoners in Wealstun sought to form and preserve locale- and ethnicity-based social groups through work and education placements ('I've only really come [to this workshop] for my mates…that's why I come down here and we all chit chat' – Sayeed).

Fieldwork

I began fieldwork in the summer of 2016. I generally spent four days a week at the prison during fieldwork periods, always between Monday and Friday because most prison workplaces did not operate at weekends. I carried keys in all three establishments. This was methodologically and practically beneficial as it allowed me to move relatively freely around the prisons, and not requiring staff escorts meant I had more control over where I conducted observations and interviews. Senior managers and other contacts were very accommodating, and each establishment gave me permission to use a voice-recorder during interviews.

In addition to the practicalities of conducting fieldwork and getting through the front gate, 'a prison researcher must approach each area of a prison as if he/she is entering the institution for

the first time' (Drake and Harvey 2014: 492). These 'daily negotiations of access' (Drake and Harvey 2014: 492) involved working alongside a variety of staff who were able to facilitate (or impede) each aspect of the study: education and workshop staff were the 'gatekeepers' to observation sites, while prison officers (and on one occasion a psychologist) had ultimate control over my presence on wings, where the majority of interviews were conducted. The nature and amount of contact I had with prison staff varied considerably between each establishment, and I sometimes found myself negotiating access to the same workshops and classrooms multiple times when prison work staff changed.

I developed good relationships with one or two instructors in each prison – these were generally staff members who prisoners were particularly fond of, and they provided useful insights into the men as well as prison work. On two occasions during observations, instructors made clear that my presence was too disruptive. I apologised, left some time before I next visited and talked with them about how I could minimise disruption before I returned. Neither of these instructors were rude or obstructive and I was grateful for their patience. As observations were primarily conducted in prison workplaces, I did not spend much time with officers at any of the sites. The interactions I did have with uniformed staff were mostly brief, superficial and practical (pertaining to why I was there, who I needed unlocked and what my research was about). Some officers commented on the research ('what about *our* experience of work? No one cares about that!' – fieldwork notes, Swinfen Hall) or tried to 'test' me and assert their authority (by using prison slang or acronyms, or challenging whether I had the authority or training to be in the space, for example), but mostly I was just a task to be dealt with. On one occasion, officers became frustrated by my presence on their wing because I was occupying their office space to conduct interviews with prisoners. This behaviour was impacting the interviews, as officers were coming into the room, not leaving for five minutes (while I paused the interview), and making comments to me and the participant (including about the interview and what the prisoner may or may not discuss with me). I thanked staff for facilitating the research and stopped interviewing on that wing.

Ultimately, the relationships I developed (and did not develop) with prison staff successfully accomplished two functions. I was courteous and friendly enough with staff that I was able to access the spaces and people I needed for the research with relative ease. Equally, by spending little time with staff (especially uniformed staff), it was clear to prisoners that I was independent of them. Most men I spoke to were open with their opinions about staff members,

which I believe demonstrated a degree of trust derived in part from participants' understanding that I was independent of the prison.

(Prison) ethnography

Ethnography 'aims to fill the gap between correlation and explanation, through meaningful understandings' (Liebling 2001: 475), by drawing on 'the systematic and impressionistic recording of human and cultural social life in situ' (Drake, Earle and Sloan 2015: 3). It may involve observations, participation and interviews, but these methodologies used together – and in the field itself over a prolonged period – means that ethnography offers deeper understanding than would be afforded by one of these methods alone (Liebling 2001; Drake et al. 2015; Jefferson 2015). Contemporary ethnography 'has departed from its traditional striving for objectivity and distance…and has largely conceded to the value of involvement, perspective, and subjectivity' (Liebling 2001: 475). Indeed, Liebling explains that prison sociologists invariably endeavour to 'achieve criminological *Verstehen* – subjective understanding of situation meanings and emotions' (2001: 474, emphasis in original). This does not mean, however, that ethnography is (or can be) divorced from theory (Layder 1998; Wacquant 2002). Layder endorses an 'adaptive theory' approach to sociological research, whereby 'theory both adapts to, or is shaped by, incoming evidence while the data itself is simultaneously filtered through, and is thus adapted by, the prior theoretical materials (frameworks, concepts, ideas) that are relevant to their analysis' (1998: 5).

The subjectivity inherent to ethnography relates not only to research participants but also to researchers, who are the tools of their own inquiry. As Liebling remarks, 'what you need most of all is *full use of your self*' (2001: 475, emphasis in original). Prison ethnography thus 'involves a high degree of embodied performance' (Jefferson 2015: 169) from scholars, who must 'be *affectively* present as well as physically present in a social situation' (Liebling 2001: 474, emphasis in original). Researchers conducting ethnographic research in prisons must also reduce, as much as possible, the distance between themselves and their subjects (Liebling 2014), develop empathy for and appreciation of their participants (Matza 1969) and 'do trust', which sometimes means putting 'ourselves in situations that demonstrate we trust when there may be no grounds for trust' (Jefferson 2015: 177). Within this context, the data in ethnographic studies is best understood as being mutually produced by researchers and participants. While 'classic' prison sociology tended to ignore the impact of researchers on their studies, there has been an increase in reflexive and auto-ethnographic interrogations of

researcher positionality and experiences in recent decades (Phillips 2008; Crewe 2011; Jewkes 2011; Liebling 2014; Sloan 2016a). Indeed, Coretta Phillips and Rod Earle state that – done skilfully – such accounts are 'a route out of this epistemological cul-de-sac' (2010: 362).

As a means of researching masculinity and work amongst young men in English prisons, ethnography presents unique risks and opportunities. Firstly, talking to men about masculinity is a complicated and delicate process (Cowburn 2007; Crewe 2009; Earle 2011; Symkovych 2017). The complexity of studying masculinity is compounded by the significance of the researcher's gender. While not related to prisons, Coates' (2003) research into 'men's talk' explores how men tend to (consciously or subconsciously) self-censor when they are talking 'for' female researchers and conform to masculine ideals when the researcher is a man. In prisons, studies by mixed-gender teams routinely highlight differences between the way participants engage with male and female researchers (Liebling 1999; Phillips 2012). Lone male and female prison researchers have also contributed valuable reflections about the ways they felt gender impacted participants' conduct. Anton Symkovych (a white male researcher) for example, described how 'at times, my 'masculine success' made me feel uneasy, as I occasionally sensed my research participants' tendency toward self-deprecation and interrogation of their self-worth as men and humans; my presence might have incited this reaction' (2017: 70). Furthermore, irrespective of it being about masculinity, prison research conducted by women often illustrates that encounters with male participants during observations or interviews become a means for performing masculinity (Phillips 2012; Ievins 2017; Laursen 2017). Crewe's (2006b) analysis of male prisoners' orientations towards female staff provides further context for the different ways interactions with female researchers may facilitate masculine performances.

Observation and participation

> We are no more 'passive' agents in our research than our research 'partners' are. The term 'reserved participation' may be more appropriate than observation to capture this activity.
>
> Liebling 1999: 160

In each site, fieldwork began with prison work observations. As Alison Liebling's above quote suggests, 'observations' in prison ethnography (and qualitative research generally) are inevitably more active than the term suggests, and I planned to immerse myself in prison work

environments by listening to and talking with both prisoners and staff, as well as by joining in with prison work, where appropriate (Gibson-Light and Seim 2020). As Gibson-Light (2019; Gibson-Light and Seim 2020) demonstrates, researching prison work presents particular challenges. The question of whether and how to participate in prison work is both complicated to answer and relatively unique to this aspect of prison life: there are few, if any, other practices or activities that prison researchers could feasibly (both practically and ethically) participate in alongside their subjects, be they prisoners or staff. However, the dearth of prison work research conducted *in prison* means there are currently few answers about the ethics and consequences of participating in different forms of prison work.[19] Research into prison work also benefits from the ethnographic method. By combining observations and participation with interviews, researchers are able to explore a greater number of forms and instances of prison work, including those that are difficult to access (such as illicit work).

During my first day at each site, I was given a tour and provided with an overview of the different activities available to the men there. Afterwards, I was more or less left to my own devices. In each establishment, three to four workplaces were selected for 'primary' observations, meaning I visited them for full sessions multiple times over approximately four weeks. I hoped this would facilitate the development of a more in-depth understanding of each workplace than if I visited a greater number for less time – in part because I expected it would take a few sessions for the novelty of my presence to wear off and thus facilitate observation of 'normal' operations (Liebling 1999; Crewe 2009; Laursen 2017).[20] Workplaces were chosen to ensure that I closely observed a variety of activities, although I also had to consider how physically and socially accessible they were, in terms of where was practical (with regard to space and health and safety requirements, for example) and whether staff expressed some willingness to host me. Staff occasionally made suggestions of workplaces they thought would be 'good' to see (because they had recently been renovated, for example), but this did not inform my selection.

At their core, all three sites had very similar regimes: there were two, three-hour long activity sessions Monday to Thursday in the morning and afternoon, and a half day with a shortened

[19] Much of the North American prison work literature has been conducted outside prisons in community-based forms of prison work or with recently released prisoners (Zatz 2008, 2009, 2021; Goodman 2010, 2012; Hatton 2018a, 2018b, 2021).

[20] My hope that the novelty of my presence would wear off was only realised in about half of the observed workplaces, primarily because the prisoners in each workplace varied considerably session to session.

morning session on Friday. I alternated where I spent the morning and afternoon session each day so as to ensure I observed each workplace with a range of prisoners and staff. To enhance my breadth of understanding, I also spent some time in workshops and classrooms beyond the primarily selected workplaces.[21] Visiting more workplaces also afforded opportunities to meet a wider variety of people and aided the development of rapport with prisoners and staff. In Swinfen Hall for example, multiple staff and prisoners raved about the instructor in the tailoring workshop and appreciated that I took their advice and visited it for an afternoon.

As Gibson-Light (2019, Gibson-Light and Seim 2020) found in his research on prison work in the United States, the practice of 'observing' varied with the type of activity rather than by prison, primarily because I was able to participate in some forms of work but not others. In most contract workshops I was allowed to do the same work that the men were doing. This had practical and methodological benefits, in that it built trust while also helping me develop an understanding of how the work *felt*. Participating in contracts work also minimised the disruption caused by the presence of a researcher, both in terms of productivity (which might have undermined the goodwill of instructors in letting me be there) and distorting the 'authentic' work experience. On a personal level, observing people – particularly in prison – is inherently awkward, and it felt less uncomfortable being able to work alongside the men than if I had simply been watching them do menial labour they largely disliked. Occasionally, participants commented on my participation, but instructors in these workshops often dipped in and out doing the work themselves, so my involvement was not especially remarkable. There was one occasion where my (non-) participation proved problematic. In the contract workshop in Isis, mattress recycling, I was invited to participate on my first visit by the instructor and declined as there was little work to do and only two of the four men there were working at any one time. On my third visit, there were around 10 men in the session carrying mattresses to a shipping container to be stacked for storage, and I offered to help. The men found this amusing, but the officer who was covering for the usual instructor insisted I did not participate, stating: 'it's too dirty and dangerous. You do *not* want to touch those mattresses. You don't know what might be on them'. This exchange was very public and in front of prisoners who had protested frequently about how dirty the mattresses were that they themselves did not want to touch. I felt particularly uncomfortable for the rest of the session.

[21] I visited these additional workplaces on one or two occasions each, in comparison to the 'primary' workplaces which I visited five or six times each.

I did not participate while observing vocational training or prison maintenance work. Non-participation did not feel awkward in these contexts, as the work was skilled and my not being able to do it felt like a way for prisoners to claim status. Indeed, after observing a session in the Quays in Isis, where prisoners undertook catering qualifications while running the staff canteen, the men excitedly invited me to join their meal – they were proud to be able to show off their skills. The curry was delicious, and they were keen to receive feedback. When I said it was 'the best food I've ever had in prison', the men were visibly *dis*heartened, wanting the food to be judged as 'good', not good *for prison*. I felt bad, and in an effort to make up for this faux pas, ate at the canteen much more frequently than was convenient or affordable for the rest of my time in Isis. Vocational workshop environments generally facilitated conversations with prisoners and staff while I observed them working, and only occasionally did my presence seem to become too disruptive and distracting (Gibson-Light and Seim 2020). For example, during one session observing the barbering workshop in Isis, the instructor told prisoners to stop talking to me and do the work required from their textbooks – I had hardly participated in the long debate that had distracted the men, but it seemed my presence had played a part in initiating the discussion as it had become an opportunity to perform or 'show off'.

Participation in classroom-based activities was also more 'reserved', although prisoners intermittently asked me for help with their work and staff occasionally sought tacit support for their authority (Gibson-Light and Seim 2020). There was less socialising in these workplaces, which meant I spent more time observing silently than I did in other workplaces. The other types of activity undertaken by participants – wing work and generative, third-sector work – were not observed at great length. This was a pragmatic decision: I had limited time, and both wing and third-sector generative work are relatively unsupervised, so I was conscious that observations would have been particularly disruptive of the field. I expect the impact on the study was minimal – wing work has been described elsewhere (Crewe 2009; Sloan 2012a, 2012b), and I spent time discussing generative work with relevant staff and prisoners, so I was able to ask appropriate questions about such roles during interviews.

After a month exclusively undertaking workplace observations in each prison, I began conducting one-on-one interviews with prisoners. I continued to conduct workplace observations once or twice a week during this stage of the fieldwork. I also 'dropped in' on workplaces during this second stage, for example when an interview finished just before lunch

or the end of the working day (as it did not make sense to start a new interview at those times). These sessions lasted an hour or less each time, but were beneficial for building rapport and identifying participants.

Interviews

The research sought to understand prison work experiences, the construction and performance of prisoner masculinities, and specifically, the ways that prisoner masculinities are shaped by work in prison and in the community. Semi-structured interviews were therefore the primary mode of data collection. The interview schedule (Appendix I) was an extended and adapted version of what I had used for my MPhil research on the same subject. I modified the original schedule prior to beginning this fieldwork and made a small number of further changes during the observation period. All questions were written specifically for my own research and developed in response to relevant literature about prison work, work, and masculinities. I made a conscious decision not to include questions about race, ethnicity, or violence in the interview schedule (although I sometimes did ask questions about these topics when participants referenced them). While these topics inevitably shaped the masculinities and work experiences of prisoners, they were not the primary focus of the research. Furthermore, issues of race and violence both relate to common stereotypes about men in prison (Warr 2023), and I was interested in whether and how participants might raise (or avoid) these subjects.

The schedule had three sections: 'growing up', 'work', and 'masculinity', and incorporated a life history interview portion with questions inspired by appreciative inquiry (Liebling at al. 1999) and the concept of 'possible selves' (Meek 2007, 2011; Hardgrove, Rootham and McDowell 2015). Appreciative inquiry 'starts from accepting the construction of reality by the interviewee on its own terms' (Liebling, Price and Elliott 1999: 78) and 'enables the interviewee to speak out of their best experience, rather than out of a presumed need to defend or justify their worst or near worst experience' (ibid.: 77). Using aspects of appreciative inquiry to formulate the interview schedule (with questions such as: 'what is the best work you can do in this prison?'; 'what makes a good instructor?'; 'what are you most of proud of in your life so far?') helped avoid the interactions being 'set up in problem mode' (ibid.). This complemented the exploratory nature of the study, as many existing studies start from an assumption that male prisoners' work histories and skills are limited or relate primarily to illicit activities and using appreciatively designed questions helped avoid this. In terms of 'possible selves', Meek explains that these are:

> …future-oriented constructs formulated by the individual in relation to hopes, fears and aspirations for the future, developed through an evaluation of a sense of self, traits, abilities and circumstances and derived from representations of the self in the past and the present.
>
> Meek 2007: 372

This methodological technique was particularly valuable in asking participants about masculinity, as some participants felt being manly or being a 'good man' was incompatible with being in prison. In these cases, asking participants to imagine future, 'manly' selves helped identify how individuals perceived themselves and the idea of 'masculinity'.

I wanted the interviews to feel like a mutual endeavour rather than a 'data mining' exercise, so the schedule was intentionally relatively short. This semi-structured format provided time for queries, follow-up questions and reflective discussion, and facilitated the sort of 'structured disorder that characterizes conversation' (Crewe 2009: 479). Both prisoners and I shaped interviews in this way: 'participants did not want to be 'subjects' but acted as agents. They participated, made choices…they would return to a topic, change their first response – go deeper, and become fluent, trusting, more open, as the interview unwound' (Liebling 1999: 158).

Sampling

As I was conducting a qualitative, exploratory and comparative study, the most appropriate sampling strategy was maximum variation sampling, a non-probability and purposive approach that 'aims at capturing and describing the central themes that cut across a great deal of variation' (Patton 2002: 234-5). By collecting data from as diverse a selection of participants as possible, I hoped to 'describe the uniqueness of each site…[and] also look for common themes across sites' (ibid.: 235). As Patton explains, the theoretical value of maximum variation sampling is that 'any common patterns that emerge from great variation are of particular interest and value in capturing the core experiences and central, shared dimensions of a setting or phenomenon' (ibid.). The target population was men aged 18 to 30 years old,

and I therefore sought to interview young men within this population who would offer the widest range of perspectives about prison work.[22]

To recruit participants, I used volunteer (both snowball and self-selection) and haphazard techniques (Patton 2002; Henry 2009). This involved asking young men who I had built rapport with while undertaking observations if they would be interested in participating in an interview, asking participants to refer friends, and asking officers to identify potential participants on wings. Approximately a third of participants were recruited by officers on wings, and I had some concerns that staff would pick only the most compliant and lowest risk men. This seemed to be the case on a small number of occasions but was not borne out overall, as there was not an obvious pattern to participants recruited in this way. In contrast to my expectation, some officers appeared to seek out men who would 'test' me, either because they were very quiet or because they were very talkative and difficult to manage (although not a risk to my personal safety). Other officers seemed to view the prospect of an interview as a form of punishment and so picked men who they did not particularly like, while others still seemed simply to choose whoever happened to be in view when I came into the office. Occasionally, participants reflected on why staff had chosen them. My first interviewee, for example, believed he was chosen because he was gay: 'oh [the officer] knows [this is] about masculinity? That's probably why he chose me, coz I'm homosexual. I bet he thinks that's funny!' (fieldwork notes).

I was able to be more strategic with the participants I recruited directly, which was important in order to maximise variation within my sample. I kept a tally of participants' age, ethnicity, hometown, wing,[23] and where (or whether) they worked in the prison. As interviews at each prison progressed, my purposive sampling was adjusted in accordance to the demographics of people who had already participated. However, recruiting a diverse sample was more straightforward for some of these factors than for others. For example, to maximise the variation of prison work experiences in my sample, I categorised prison work opportunities – as 'wing work', 'education', 'workshops', 'other' and 'unemployed' – and, in each prison, sought to recruit similar numbers of participants undertaking each type. In practice, this was more difficult than anticipated and the proportion of men doing each type of work is not spread

[22] HMP Wealstun held men aged 18 and over, unlike the other sites which held men aged 18-30 years old. In order to gather diverse data about work experiences, I recruited five men over 30 years old.
[23] I did not recruit directly on induction wings or segregation units, and none of the sites had Vulnerable Prison Units.

evenly across the three sites. Ultimately, having an imperfect spread of participants undertaking different categories of work proved relatively unimportant: it was quickly apparent that a participant's job(s) at the time of interview did not mean their prison work experience was limited to that activity (or even that prison), so it was relatively easy to collect varied perspectives on all types of work. The exception to this was unemployed prisoners, who were most difficult to recruit. Partly, this was because relatively few prisoners were officially 'unemployed' in each prison. Amongst young men who *were* formally unemployed, many were considered troublemakers or high-risk and therefore were not unlocked during the working day except for association (when officers preferred me not to be on the wings). Furthermore, officers were reluctant to select and release such men for one-to-one interviews, both because of concerns about the prisoner's behaviour (and my safety), and because doing so might have been construed as a 'privilege' that they were felt not to deserve (primarily because I provided biscuits). These barriers to recruiting unemployed prisoners was difficult to overcome, and in my eventual sample, only four prisoners were unemployed at the time of interview.

Participants

Overall, I interviewed 88 men across the three sites: 31 in Swinfen Hall, 29 in Isis and 28 in Wealstun. Interviews lasted between 50 minutes and three-and-a-half hours, with most lasting around 90 minutes. Approximately a third of participants were interviewed over multiple sessions, and I was unable to complete the full interview schedule on five occasions. Of these incomplete interviews, three men were removed from the research and not included in the sample of 88 participants.[24] All except six interviews were recorded. As other scholars have noted, recorded interviews may be reminiscent of police interviews (Sinha and Back 2014; Maguire 2021a) and a number of participants made comments to this effect, including one who asked for the voice recorder to be hidden in a biscuit packet so that he could not see it (which we did, without impacting the quality of the recording).

Participants' ages ranged from 18 to 41 years, with an average (mean) age of 24. Seven participants were under 20 years old (five from Swinfen Hall and two from Isis) and five were

[24] Two of these three men withdrew from the research, and one was moved to the segregation unit where I was not able to conduct the rest of the interview – we had not completed enough of the interview schedule in the first session to enable meaningful analysis.

over 30 years old (all from Wealstun).[25] In terms of locale, 30 participants were from London, 23 from Yorkshire, 13 from the West Midlands and 11 from the North West (with the remaining 11 from the East, East Midlands and South East). The vast majority of participants in Isis and Wealstun came from the region in which the prison was situated (London and Yorkshire respectively). As a result of its unique function, only 35 per cent (n = 11) of participants from Swinfen Hall were from the West Midlands.

I recorded participants' ethnicities based on how they identified themselves rather than according to the prison's formal categorisation. This decision was made after a number of participants expressed frustration at the official recording of their ethnic group. Some of these frustrations related to the use of a letter and number to denote their ethnicity (e.g. A1, B3), which participants felt was reductive, while others felt their ethnicity was not properly accounted for (e.g. those who had one Black African and one Black Caribbean parent, or those from countries such as Turkey that were marked as 'white other' despite not identifying as 'white'). A significant proportion of participants specifically objected to 'Black British' not being part of the official categorisation, which 12.5 per cent (n = 11) of participants self-identified as. In the sample as a whole, 43 participants identified as white British, 25 as Black African, Black Caribbean or Black British, nine as mixed-race, eight as Asian, British Asian and British Pakistani, and three as other ethnicities (Turkish and white Irish). One participant was a foreign national, and English was the first language for all participants. The ethnic composition of the sample varied significantly between regions and sites, and the research itself was not specifically about race, so despite the diversity of the sample, I was mindful about not over-claiming or being reductive about these matters. However, where possible, I have tried to make sensitive and defensible comments about the role of race and ethnicity as well as the intersection of these factors with locale and class.

I did not collect data about participants' sentences or index offences as they were not relevant to the research. Neither knowing nor asking for this information helped develop trust with participants. This was especially important in Swinfen Hall given that participants were serving

[25] While younger men were the focus of the research, these older participants offered a valuable point of comparison and there was a risk that excluding all older men from the study would have led to a biased understanding of Wealstun's purposeful activity provisions given the smaller number of young men in the prison and their tendency to group in specific workplaces.

long sentences for crimes that many did not want to disclose or discuss.[26] The majority of participants chose to discuss their offending, generally in relation to illicit work and making money. However, a small minority of men consciously avoided discussing their index offence. I occasionally learned of these men's offences from staff, sometimes inadvertently, but on other occasions such disclosures were made very deliberately. For example, on returning to a wing to complete an interview I had started the previous day, the officer on duty said he would have to check whether I was allowed to interview that prisoner one-on-one 'because he's a rapist' (fieldwork notes).

The interview process and experience

The locations of interviews also occasionally caused issues. While the ideal interview location is quiet (Sinha and Back 2014), this was not always possible, given the limited available space in the prisons.[27] In one workshop storeroom where I conducted three interviews, the radio was so loud that I struggled to hear participants (both during the interview and when transcribing) and the large windows made us very visible to staff and prisoners, leading to frequent visual distractions for participants. In a second workshop, an interview was conducted in a cupboard before we were asked to move to another space which was best described as a stable – it was tiny, dark, and with a gate rather than a door. The men in the workshop proceeded to launch projectiles at me and the participant, one of which hit me in the head. These settings were far from ideal, but it was a case of conducting interviews in those locations or not at all.

Participants were extremely likely 'to have been subject to coercive forms of qualitative interview' (Sinha and Back 2014: 476) and it was important to avoid replicating this as much as possible (ibid.). Therefore, I gave participants the chance to ask me questions – about myself or the research – and allowed time to chat informally before starting the interview. As Sloan (2016b) found, some participants described feeling an affinity with me because they were also studying, and, as Crewe (2009) experienced, some asked what the research was 'for'. I explained how many years I had been studying, that it was my own project, that I would become a Doctor of Criminology when I completed the work, and that I did not know what I would do afterwards – participants were generally impressed if a little bemused at my chosen career path.

[26] Participants in Swinfen Hall often asked if I knew what they 'were in for' and were more likely than participants at the other sites to avoid discussing their offence during the interview.

[27] Although it should be noted that no interviews took place in spaces where myself or the participant could be overheard.

I then began interviews by explaining the research and how the interview would work. I emphasised that participation was voluntary and that they could change their mind at any point without repercussions. While reading the consent form and information sheet (Appendix II and Appendix III), I also explained how participants' anonymity would be protected, that the interview was confidential (and what that meant), and the limits to confidentiality. During his fieldwork, Maguire found that he 'seemed to be much more concerned than the informants were about protecting their anonymity' (2021a: 83), and this was often the case with participants in my study, with a number of men insisting it was fine to use their real name, and one who actively wanted me to.[28]

Before embarking on the interview schedule, I explained to participants that I wanted to hear their story and opinions rather than find out why they were in prison or about their involvement with crime. I hoped to make clear that I did not have preconceived ideas about them, and also that the interview was about them as men rather than them as prisoners. While I believe this became clear to most participants at least by the end of their interviews, many responded to the first question ('what's your earliest memory?') by asking if I wanted them to talk about the first time they broke rules or committed a crime. On these occasions, I clarified it was anything they remembered and felt comfortable sharing, and underlined again that the focus was not on their criminality or prisoner status.

Through interviewing, I quickly became comfortable with silence, which became a valuable technique as participants invariably filled it. Some participants needed little encouragement and spoke easily and at length. In a handful of these cases, I found it difficult to interrupt to ask questions or keep the participant 'on topic'. Other participants gave short, undetailed answered and needed frequent prompting or for questions to be asked in different ways. In some instances, this was a result of nervousness or misinterpretation. I tried to pick up on body language or responses that suggested a mis- or lack of understanding and rephrased questions accordingly. In terms of my own comprehension, I occasionally struggled with strong accents or slang – on these occasions, I asked them to repeat, clarify or define what they had said. These interludes were usually humorous and light-hearted, and they potentially made participants feel they too could check terms with me or ask me to repeat something when they

[28] I have not used any real names and explained to participants why and that I would not.

needed. Occasionally, discussing slang or accents led to insightful mutual analysis of (our) class, regional or racial differences. While interviewing, I was conscious to summarise and repeat back to participants points they had made in order to check mutual understanding or chronology. This was particularly important in discussing prison work, as participants' narratives of these experiences were sometimes disorganised and often spanned multiple sentences and establishments. Participants sometimes found questions difficult to answer, particularly 'how would you describe yourself' and – as others have found (Earle 2011) – those relating to masculinity. To overcome hurdles around discussing masculinity, I often asked participants who found such questions awkward to imagine that there was a film about their life, and to think about how they would guide the actor playing them to make sure they portrayed them accurately (or who they would pick to play them and why). This approach seemed to take some of the pressure and anxiety off participants who struggled with initial questions about masculinity, and it also made it easier for me to ask for more details. For example, when participants initially gave short or generic answers to this question, I often responded jokingly along the lines of 'that won't help the actor very much! That could be anyone!', which usually prompted them to give more detail.

Participants were open and generous with their experiences and opinions and I warmed to most of the men I interviewed. As Liebling (1999) found, participants generally became more open as they settled into the interview, and many shared sensitive and personal stories. Crewe describes how 'much of the distress in men's prisons is submerged beneath surface interactions, creating an environment that is superficially calm yet highly emotionally charged' (Crewe 2009: 484), and it was relatively common for participants to detail incidents involving emotional, physical and sexual abuse, extreme violence, and loss. Sometimes participants became emotional or acknowledged how traumatic such experiences had been for them ('when I got shot, after that I was just a different person. Went to [weighing] about eight stone, didn't leave the house or nowt…It just ruined me' – Brad). Others, however, were nonchalant about extreme violence they had been the victim of:

> I've been stabbed a few times…once [in my leg], once [in my hand], three times in the arm, once in the ear, you can see it [shows scar] – it went straight through...War wounds aren't they. I look at them and just think 'I'll have a memory'!
>
> Ash

Hearing about participants' life-threatening and life-changing injuries, experiences of childhood abuse, and about violence participants had themselves perpetrated made the interviewing portions of fieldwork quite emotionally draining (see Liebling 1999; Drake and Harvey 2014). I was hyper-conscious of how I reacted to such disclosures: I did not want to centre myself in participants' pain so avoided becoming too visibly emotional, but I also wanted to be understanding and convey sympathy and empathy (although not pity). As others have detailed (Liebling 1999), I relied on participants' tone and body language when deciding whether and how to ask follow-up questions about challenging and emotional topics.

Participants often shared details of crimes they had committed, and a significant minority also voiced extreme views or used offensive language ('Have you heard of PHC? P*** Hating Crew? I was in that gang' – Jay). On these occasions, I wanted to demonstrate comprehension of what participants were saying without endorsing the behaviour or racist, sexist and homophobic opinions. Sometimes it felt appropriate to question participants' attitudes so as to better understand them, and these conversations generally enhanced my understanding of participants' masculine identities while, I hope, conveying disagreement without criticism. I relied on a friendly and relatively informal approach in these situations and made use of humour, which was often reciprocated and made such exchanges feel light-hearted rather than judgemental. For example:

Shaun: One of my pals, his kid plays with Barbies. He's about eight. I kick him all the time. Why's he playing with them?!

Martha: You kick him?

Shaun: Yeah of course! He's a boy playing with Barbies! Do you think that's cute?

Martha: I don't think it's cute or not cute.

Shaun: Listen, not where I live! I'll bully him. I don't kick him hard, just a little [mimes kicking] like that, 'what are you doing, little muppet, playing with Barbies?!'

Martha: [high pitched] Do not do that!

Shaun: Why?! He's playing with Barbies!! […]

Martha: […] Ok I think we'll move on.

Shaun: I won't hit him again if it does your head in.

Martha: Yes please!

Phillips describes the 'difficulty of asking questions but being unsettled, unprepared, or simply uncomfortable with the responses' (2012: 60), and I found myself caught off-guard when participants alluded to sexual offences. This only happened in a handful of interviews, but in each instance, I did not know how to respond and swiftly changed the subject. In theory, these disclosures should not have been surprising given that a third of the population in Swinfen Hall were convicted of sexual offences. However, at the beginning of my time in Swinfen Hall I interviewed a number of men I knew were convicted of sexual offences and they did not allude to or raise their convictions at all during interview. As a result, I had assumed going forward that others would also avoid discussing their sexual offences (especially because it was not necessarily relevant to the interview).

I felt responsible for not leaving participants feeling worse at the end of the interview than when they started, so I concluded the formal portion of interviews with an appreciative question: 'what are you most proud of?'. Some participants struggled to respond, but I joked that it was the only non-negotiable question and made sure to find something positive to end on. I also asked if there was anything else they wanted to discuss. After the voice-recorder was turned off, participants usually reflected on the experience (sometimes unprompted, and sometimes in response to me asking how they had found it). While some had little to say, Crewe (2009) details three patterns of response that reflected how the majority of participants in my study discussed the experience: some framed it as an 'interesting diversion' from prison life and 'a rare opportunity to reflect on a world that they had come to take for granted' (Crewe 2009: 483). As Crewe found, these prisoners often expressed hope 'that their contributions had been 'useful'' (ibid.). Another response was that 'the interview had provided them with some kind of personal insight' (ibid.), which amongst my participants, was most often in relation to discussions about 'manliness'. The third kind of reflection was that the interview had been therapeutic in some way, and that it felt good to share things with an interested and impartial stranger. At the very end of our discussions, I asked participants again if they had any questions and reminded them about how they could get in touch if anything came up after I left the prison.

Overall, the vast majority of interviews were completed without incident. The exceptions to this included an interview where the participant began making inappropriate, sexually suggestive comments (it was towards the end of the interview schedule so I finished the session quickly), a couple of instances where participants became emotional and cried while describing upsetting incidents from their childhoods (I paused the interviews and voice-recorder and gave

them time to talk about their feelings) and another where it became increasingly evident that the participant had taken drugs (I ended the interview as quickly as possible and deleted the recording when he withdrew the next day).[29] These incidents exemplify the types of ethical judgements researchers make in the field – about how to keep themselves and participants physically and emotionally 'safe' during the interview process but also about how, when and whether to 'collude' or 'take sides' with staff or prisoners (Liebling 2001). I decided not to report any of the behaviour from these interviews in part because I was conscious of how doing so might impact the way prisoners perceived me and thus my ability to conduct the research (I discuss 'ethics' more thoroughly below).

Prisoners' perceptions of me as a researcher unavoidably shaped the interview experience for both parties. Given participants' attitude to speaking with me (ranging from willingness to eagerness) and the way they engaged during interview sessions, I believe I was seen as empathetic, friendly and relaxed. In most cases, I tried to convey my professionalism by being consistent, organised, and through what I did not do: I did not answer identifying or overly personal questions about myself (such as where exactly I lived, or details about my family), and I refused to collude with either non-compliant prisoner behaviour (in workshops, for instance) or disrespectful staff chat (about or towards prisoners). Inextricably bound up with these perceptions was my positionality as a young, white, middle-class female researcher, which I consider in the section that follows.

Reflexivity

> For us, the attraction of reflexivity lies not in confessional or testimonial exhortation, but in its capacity to acknowledge researchers as active participants whose identities, like those of research subjects, may be variously shaped by powerful hierarchies of race/ethnicity, gender and class. The practice of explicitly working through these dynamics reveals how our own positions and interests are, sometimes discretely, imposed throughout the research process.
>
> Phillips and Earle 2010: 362

[29] This participant was slurring his words and eating Jaffa Cakes whole – after about 10 minutes he could hardly speak.

Fieldwork involves constant questioning of one's behaviour as well as practical, ethical and academic dilemmas. A researcher's positionality influences how they engage with and experience the field as well as the decisions they make (about who to interact with and how, and the meaning of what is witnessed or heard). The researcher is therefore relevant to their findings, and while there are some legitimate critiques of reflexive accounts in qualitative research (Skeggs 2004), I ultimately agree with Phillips that 'the dynamics of a conversation are interactive and one in which the researcher is actively present, and this active presence cannot be ignored' (2012: 53-54). Therefore, while I endeavour to avoid overly subjective self-indulgence and confessional anecdotes, this section interrogates how the research was shaped by my identity, self-presentation, emotions, and behaviour in the field.

As a researcher

> 100 million percent if you was a male you would *not* get attention like you get attention... you're, sorry to say it again, a pretty girl from Cambridge University doing interviews one-on-one with prisoners. Any prisoner would be excited for that...On the roads it's different, but you're a female *in prison*. Especially because you're not an officer, you stand out a lot.
>
> Javani

Duneier argues that 'a different social position can have a serious effect on one's work, and one can do better work by taking them very seriously' (2004: 103). Therefore, in this section I interrogate how being a young, white, middle-class woman shaped the research process, including the negotiation of informal access and the development of rapport, and the impact I inadvertently had on the field.

As Javani noted above, being a young woman in overwhelmingly male institutions meant I stood out immediately in the field, particularly in residential units. While conducting fieldwork, I thought constantly about how best to inhabit and present my gender in terms of the impact it would have on the research. For example, after weighing up the pros and cons of feeling self-conscious versus looking like I had made an inappropriate effort, I decided to wear some make up, but less than I would usually do. Like other female prison researchers (Bengtsson 2015; Ievins 2017), I too established a 'uniform' – of trousers and long-sleeved, loose-fitting tops. Unsurprisingly, I still made mistakes in my self-presentation. On one occasion, for example, I wore some smart dungarees and a jumper to a music session in Isis. While I did not feel my

outfit was much different to that which I wore every other day, the men in the group evidently did, and, much to my embarrassment, the dungarees were mentioned in most of the freestyle raps during the session. Overall, I became hyper-aware of how being a young woman in a prison shaped every interaction. Some participants and staff politely and inquisitively asked questions that they were unlikely to have asked a male researcher, wanting to know why I spent time in prisons ('why would you *choose* to come to this shit hole?!' – officer, fieldwork notes), whether I was scared (I told them I was not, and asked why they thought I would be) and how my family or partner felt about it (and sometimes – as Liebling (1999) and her colleagues were also asked – why they 'allowed' it!).

Being a young woman also presented challenges with both staff and prisoners. On a number of occasions, it felt as though my age and gender were used by staff to justify closer supervision or to restrict my access to certain people or spaces. That I was a young woman also appeared to irk some staff, primarily prison officers invested in hypermasculine identities largely founded on their ability to work in a high-risk environment with 'dangerous' and 'unpredictable' men. A young woman being willing to talk to these same men one-on-one, and that the men did so without incident, seemed to undermine their narrative of a dangerous workplace and thus a key aspect of their masculine identity. Overall, the inconsistency in the way officers engaged with me was frustrating and meant I did not want (or feel able) to seek out additional interactions with uniformed staff. The impact of my gender on interactions with prisoners was more diverse and significant, both methodologically and on a personal level. Explicit and inappropriate harassment was shouted by 'window warriors',[30] muttered on wings and in workshops, and men often whistled or exchanged suggestive smiles with each other when I came to collect participants for their interviews (sometimes it felt that I was supposed to witness these non-verbal exchanges, but I was never included in them). Despite expecting these kinds of incidents, they were still exhausting and uncomfortable, especially because interviews and travel to the sites meant I was already tired. In Swinfen Hall, one prisoner shouted sexual and inappropriate comments at me every time I walked past his wing, which I had to do multiple times each day. After a couple of weeks, I mentioned this in an off-hand way to the women in the office where I was based. They passed this on to a manager without my knowledge, and he discussed it with me. I had not formally 'reported' the harassment and did not want it escalated, but the man was identified and moved to a different cell where he

[30] Prisoners who shout out of their windows, often to do so anonymously.

would not be able to see the walkway. This felt unfortunate on a number of levels – it made me feel very much like I had 'disturbed' the prison in a way I had not wanted to, and I felt guilty about the repercussions for the prisoner who had been moved as a result. However, the catcalling reduced greatly which made the rest of the experience less stressful. Bandyopadhyay noted while conducting research in an Indian prison that 'the dangers I associated with fieldwork in a prison were, in many respects, similar to the perceived dangers of any other dominant male space I encountered in the world outside' (2006: 187). I felt similarly: the sexual harassment I experienced during fieldwork generally resembled that found outside the prison, and I often felt physically safer than in many spaces outside prison because I trusted assistance would arrive extremely quickly if needed.

I also benefitted from being a (young, white) woman in these spaces. As the earlier quote underlined, being a woman likely made recruitment easier. Some participants also felt more at ease with me because I was female and seemed more willing to share certain stories and thoughts as a result: 'there's just some conversations you can't have with another man' (prisoner, fieldwork notes). Studies with mixed-gender research teams describe participants demonstrating similar attitudes about female researchers (Liebling 1999; Phillips and Earle 2010; Phillips 2012). While I also felt that some people took both me and the research less seriously than they would have done had I been older and/or male – because they saw me as inexperienced and naïve – these assumptions were sometimes advantageous. For example, I 'wilfully used' (Sloan and Wright 2015: 153) my gender and the perception of naivety to ask questions about masculinity, work and prison that might have felt awkward to other researchers. Rod Earle, for example, found that 'asking young men to reflect on 'being a man' can be about as immediately productive as asking white people what it feels like to be white…because a functional, familiar, grammar is simply not available' (2011: 137). While it was not always *easy* for participants to discuss masculinity with me, being a young woman who (some) participants perceived as naïve seemed to facilitate insightful discussions.

Despite the growth in reflexive and autoethnographic accounts of prison research, the role and impact of race and ethnicity is often overlooked. Those accounts that do interrogate the race of researchers underline how it impacts both their own engagement with the field and how participants engage with them (Duneier 2004; Phillips and Earle 2010; Phillips 2012). My whiteness facilitated easy movement through all three sites. Whiteness is 'normalised' amongst prison staff and at no point did I feel conspicuous because of my race: all senior managers I

had contact with were white, and there were very few Black, Asian or people of other ethnicities working in either Swinfen Hall or Wealstun (Isis was more ethnically diverse). I was more conscious of my whiteness with prisoners, although I never felt unsafe or wary around prisoners because of my race.[31] I did not find it difficult to recruit men from any particular ethnic background, and Phillips' (2012) experience conducting research with Rod Earle – a white man – suggests that some white prisoners may have been more willing to participate in the research because of our shared ethnicity. A minority of white participants expressed racist views or used racist language. While these men might not have spoken this way had I not been white, my whiteness meant I did not feel personally threatened or physically unsafe as a result of these incidents. I was keen not to be perceived as colluding with racist talk, and always questioned such statements. Interactions with Black and Asian prisoners were also shaped by our respective races. As Duneier (2004) and Phillips (2012) explain, what participants say – and how they say it – differs depending on the race of each party, particularly when discussing race itself. Warr discusses the ways that Black prisoners feel a need 'to change…[and] perform a more institutionally acceptable Blackness' (2023: 1103) and so engage in 'a range of narrative labours…specific to prisoners of colour' (ibid.), and this analysis provided further context for how race might have shaped my interviews. For example, Black participants who discussed racism and discrimination in my study seemed to raise these topics particularly cautiously, likely to sense my reaction. I was open to discussing such incidents, acknowledged my whiteness, and explicitly agreed with most of their statements regarding systemic and institutional racism in criminal justice institutions.[32] In general, I sensed that most participants felt comfortable sharing at least some of their experiences of and opinions about race, but also acknowledge an inevitable degree of self-censorship regarding what they discussed and how.

Finally, my positionality was shaped by being middle-class and from Cambridge University. It was not unusual for participants to assert that, or ask whether, I was 'posh'. Many participants asked where I lived or grew up, and some used this discussion to underline that we were likely to have had different upbringings and experiences: 'a lot of people think the police help people,

[31] In contrast, Phillips – a Black researcher – cites fieldwork notes where she describes how 'some of these people [prisoners] look scary to me. Some of them look like the stereotype of a kind of white racist thug. And I found some of them quite frightening' (2012: 54).

[32] Some Black and Asian participants were anxious about using the word 'white'. When this seemed to be the case, I clarified to them it was inoffensive to describe people as such.

probably in your area! ...You live in the posh people bit right?' (prisoner). In Wealstun and Swinfen Hall, participants who were from London and the South East tended to express an affinity with me as a fellow 'southerner' and this helped build rapport. Occasionally, and I assume because of my accent and perceptions of being 'posh', participants 'translated' slang or asked if I understood something they had said. I generally had, which they found amusing.

Emotions: being and feeling in the field

Done properly, prison ethnography is an intense, emotional and all-consuming experience (Liebling 1999; Crewe 2009). Emotions in the field are data (Liebling 1999; Drake and Harvey 2014), and 'it is only by exposing our emotional reactions to the prison experience…that the readers of our work can judge our interpretations' (Phillips 2012: 54). Accounts of prison research tend to focus on its 'toll', but as Jewkes states, 'while introspection, anxiety, vulnerability, and trauma are present – if generally downplayed – in much prison research, positive emotional experiences are equally under-discussed' (2011: 69). I certainly felt a range of emotions during the fieldwork process, and reflecting on how the experience *felt* provided methodological and theoretical insights.

Some of my more complicated emotions during fieldwork related to my 'power' as a prison researcher: we are privileged because we have chosen (and been allowed) to be in establishments, but we do so only temporarily and thus have a different authority from prison staff (Gibson-Light and Seim 2020). Furthermore, researchers tend to avoid using their power as much as possible, both because they do not want to (negatively) impact the field but also because they want to build rapport and trust with those who are less powerful than themselves (Crewe 2009; Jewkes 2011; Jefferson 2015). In practice, taking on this approach often led to a sense of helplessness, and it felt awkward to hold and acknowledge my power. I identified with Jefferson's summary of this dual sense of power and powerlessness as follows:

> I felt inconsequential and brutalised, not by the harshness of the atmosphere but by my choice to adopt a bystander/witness stance in the face of seemingly endless and tragic stories of *judicial limbo*…I could not help. I chose not to help (mostly).
>
> Jefferson 2015: 178

Undertaking fieldwork with and about people means developing feelings about them – be that sympathy, fondness, ambivalence or antipathy (Liebling 1999, 2001; Jewkes 2011; Crewe and Ievins 2015). Given the assumption that 'the research process requires us to appear to like our

interviewee or that it generates a genuine emotional affinity' (Crewe and Ievins 2015: 133), it is particularly important to interrogate the diversity of feeling that I experienced. I felt particular affinity with several participants, mostly those who were open and entertaining storytellers. For example, one participant made me laugh throughout his over-three-hour long interview with stories of past relationships, and ended the interview by inviting me to his wedding. As Jewkes found, 'sometimes, rapport may be superseded by genuine, if very transitory, friendship' (2011: 66), and I found there were two or three participants in each site about whom I felt this way. These 'friendships' helped make the research experience more manageable and provided opportunities to reflect on initial findings. I neither liked nor disliked some other participants. Some of these emotions were best described as indifference, but in other cases it was more a cognitive dissonance, which Crewe and Ievins have described in relation to prisoner-participants specifically:

> The cognitive dissonance of liking and not liking someone simultaneously, for example, enjoying the company of someone who admits to having committed a grotesquely violent act, and who may describe it with little remorse. It suggests a suspension of judgement that is necessary in order to distinguish between the person and the offence, or an attitude that is genuinely conflicted.
>
> Crewe and Ievins 2015: 134

There were also a small number of participants I did not like. Sometimes, as Crewe and Ievins (2015) acknowledge, I did not understand and could not explain my dislike. At other times, I could easily identify why I felt negatively towards someone, such as when a participant described – with apparent amusement – the time he spent as a pimp. Having spent time in prison before conducting this fieldwork, and rarely having felt negative emotions towards a prisoner, I had not anticipated strongly negative reactions. I was therefore surprised that I found myself feeling angry, saddened and offended by the way this participant discussed his treatment and exploitation of vulnerable women. My disliking of a participant was usually coupled with a sense of sympathy or pity for them in relation to other aspects of and experiences in their lives that they disclosed. I was also enduringly aware of my professional identity and conscious of maintaining as consistent, non-judgemental and objective an approach to interviewing as is possible. As a result, while I expect that participants who I liked would have been able to tell I enjoyed talking to them, I believe others were unaware that I felt ambivalent or negatively about them.

Prison ethnography is an emotional experience that is hard, if not impossible, to leave at the gate, and it can impact researchers longer term (Liebling 1999; Sloan 2016a). As other researchers report, the prison encroached on my dreams (Liebling 1999; Phillips 2012; Sloan 2016a),[33] and my hyperconsciousness about appropriate clothes and grooming while in prison led me to dressing more femininely and wearing more make-up when I was not in the field (with some distance from the experience, I expect I was subconsciously trying to demarcate my 'professional' from my 'real' self). It was equally difficult to leave positive emotions at the gate – prisons are often filled with humour, which can be missed afterwards, especially because, as Liebling (1999) and her colleagues found, it is impossible to convey the experiences and feelings to those who have not experienced such environments. Observing and experiencing care and intimacy (between prisoners and between staff and prisoners) also had a lasting impact on me, in that it made further work and research in prison feel more sustainable and desirable.

Boundaries

Navigating boundaries effectively is an important aspect of any fieldwork, but it can be particularly challenging in prisons because of the significance and inequality of power in these spaces, as well as the emotion involved. As Gibson-Light and Seim acknowledge, prison researchers' 'atypical position *between* prisoners and staff can complicate matters' (2020: 677). Trying to navigate complex power relations in prison means researcher need to simultaneously 'claim and respect status' (Liebling 2014: 482) in order 'to build trust, solicit authenticity, know the culture, and overcome distance among participants' (ibid.). One aspect of managing power and status relates to the establishment and appreciation of boundaries. Recognising the need to develop and maintain professional and ethical boundaries, I was careful about the information I shared with participants when they asked me personal questions and did not give identifiable details. I was more open with sharing opinions and experiences, when it felt appropriate – such as when we had shared interests or when participants wanted to chat informally to delay returning to their cells. These conversations helped reduce social distance between me and participants (Liebling 2014) and also led to insightful discussions that benefitted the research. Boundaries were also established by the way I presented myself, and through the management of touch, which is highly distorted in prisons. Other than initial

[33] I had recurring nightmares about forgetting to leave my phone at the gate and finding it in my pocket while in the prison.

handshakes when participants initiated them, I avoided physical contact even when it would normally have felt natural, such as when participants cried. I was also mindful of respecting participants' non-physical boundaries and ensuring they felt able to assert them. As a result, I was careful to make clear throughout interviews that participants could ask to move on from a topic and that they did not have to answer questions they were not comfortable with.

While professional boundaries were easily and imperceptibly maintained in most cases, I needed to assert them more purposefully on a number of occasions. Some of these were incidents where participants were more interested in asking me personal questions than participating in the interview – I underlined that I was conducting research and we needed to discuss particular topics, but that it was voluntary, and they did not need to participate. Another way participants pushed appropriate boundaries was by behaving flirtatiously. Sometimes, this behaviour felt like a 'test' – similar to that which Bengtsson (2015) described – as most participants seemed to interpret my boundaried and professional response (of ignoring and moving on from flirtatious behaviour or comments) positively, and as evidence that I would maintain the confidentiality and anonymity I had promised to them. Often, participants did not seem to be consciously 'testing' me though, and instead simply seemed (overly) comfortable. Furthermore, a few participants described feeling anxious about interacting with women when they got out of prison, and I was conscious that behaving flirtatiously with me may have felt like an opportunity to reclaim a sense of identity amongst men who prided themselves on romantic success.

Most of these interactions were light-hearted and humorous, so I moved conversations along and became more formal in my body language and approach. Participants usually picked up on these signals and responded in kind. I was occasionally explicit about the inappropriateness of questions or comments (usually by asking if they thought what they said was appropriate, or by saying that I did not think it was appropriate to discuss something). Overall, I was cautious to verbally acknowledge or challenge inappropriate behaviour of this kind. This was partly because I felt responsible in many instances – I often introduced and prompted discussion of romantic relationships (due to their relevance to masculinity), for example. However, I was also cautious because I did not want to change the dynamic of these interviews or undermine rapport by potentially embarrassing them.

A handful of times, participants clearly overstepped boundaries. For example, a participant who worked in the staff mess whom I got to know well tried to give me a piece of paper under the guise of it being the menu – I was immediately suspicious so said I did not need it. However, the participant was insistent, there were other people around and I wanted to avoid escalating the situation by attracting staff attention or embarrassing him in front of his peers. After some back and forth, I took the note and walked away without reading it. As expected, the note did not contain a menu and instead contained an Instagram handle. When I next saw this participant, I explained why his behaviour had been inappropriate. He said he understood and asked if I was going to report him, which I explained I was not. While this situation was uncomfortable, I was confident I had dealt with it professionally and that it would have been unfair and inappropriate to report it to prison staff.

Ethics, informed consent, confidentiality and anonymity

Conducting ethical research meant obtaining informed consent from participants. I read through a consent form and information sheet with each participant before they agreed to being interviewed and provided a copy of both for them to take away (Appendix II and Appendix III). I used simple and clear language to make sure this information was accessible and provided time at the beginning and end of interviews for participants to ask questions (as well as letting them know they could pause or stop the interview at any time). I also provided participants with my name and departmental address in case they decided that they no longer wanted to participate in the research after I had left the field. When officers had nominated prisoners to participate, additional emphasis was placed on the voluntary nature of the interview because I did not know how the research had been described to them. I was satisfied that participants felt comfortable and mostly enjoyed interviews: participants often thanked me for listening to them or explained that it had felt good to talk freely with someone they would never see again. I was not allowed – nor would it have been appropriate, given the necessarily voluntary nature of the interviews – for me to financially compensate prisoners for their participation (Crewe 2006a). I was, however, able to bring in biscuits to share with participants during interviews. This felt insufficient, so it seemed important to also give participants time to discuss other subjects if they wanted to, after the formal interview had ended and the voice recorder turned off. Some participants explained they wanted to chat in order to spend more time out of their cell, and others said they simply wanted to make the most of having conversations that did not feel 'loaded', like they did with staff and other prisoners. These conversations were mostly about TV and football, but to facilitate this felt ethically significant.

Staff in each prison understood the research process and respected my need for confidentiality and anonymity, so did not ask for details of what participants had shared (Crewe 2009). The exception to this was when staff in one prison asked for feedback about the prison's work provisions, and, after I shared some general findings and quoted one or two prisoners' positive statements, asked me who had said them. I explained that it was confidential, but they did not feel positive comments needed to remain anonymous. I explained that it did, which they accepted. I rarely felt conflicted about whether to report specific disclosures with staff,[34] although I occasionally worried about whether to discuss concerns I had about a prisoner's well-being when they had become emotional or distressed, or seemed to be struggling to cope. No one described thoughts of harming themselves, so I was not ethically bound to break confidentiality, but in each instance I still weighed the potential risks of saying nothing (harm to the prisoner) with those of disclosing (causing harm to the prisoner by inducing worry that I had breached confidentiality; undermining my credibility), and decided to maintain confidentiality. In arriving at these decisions, I considered the context of the participants' emotional state (they were describing painful memories and experiences while in an already painful place (prison)) and reminded myself that I had asked whether they were okay multiple times (and had believed them when they said they were).

While I took all feasible steps to conduct the fieldwork ethically, there is an undeniable 'predatory character' (Rock 1979: 201) to fieldwork, and 'prison researchers benefit in uncomfortable ways from their perceived neutrality and from their willingness to listen' (Crewe 2009: 484). As Crewe and Ievins explain, it is therefore 'completely plausible that, within the comforting embrace of the interview…an interviewee says more than they later feel is prudent, or does not think through the reality of a distant publication' (2015: 127). Indeed, I found that 'many prisoners expressed surprise at their own candour' (Crewe 2009: 483) and said they had shared things they had not told anyone else (ibid.). While research of this sort might therefore be considered exploitative, it is an unavoidable risk unless fieldwork is abandoned altogether. Nevertheless, it is an accusation that is particularly easy to level at ethnographers because their prolonged presence and often friendly demeanours can contribute to the creation of an artificial closeness and sense of privacy, even when consent forms and

[34] A few participants discussed wanting to violently attack prison staff if they saw them in the community post-release, but these statements were vague and seemed a means of communicating frustration than real intent.

information sheets have been well-designed and agreed to by participants. This risk has to be weighed against the ethical imperative for researchers to behave authentically in the field. Furthermore, I did not seek salacious details or push participants to share stories, and made it explicitly clear at regular intervals that participants could share as much or little as they wanted.

In terms of how I managed data outside of the prison, audio recordings were kept on password-protected and encrypted memory sticks in a locked box alongside the consent forms and my notebooks (which were the only places participants' names were written). I did not collect prisoner numbers or dates of birth, so participants' data was identified only by a number based on the order in which they were interviewed.

Leaving the field and using data

Leaving the field differed at each site. I had mixed emotions about saying goodbye to the prison, staff and prisoners, and I felt guilty – about inserting myself into these spaces and lives but then leaving, and about being *able* to leave. Yet leaving was also a relief, as I was invariably physically and emotionally drained after three months. After leaving the field, I kept in touch with a small number of participants: I wrote to two participants (one who had asked me to write to him, and another who I contacted because he had discussed wanting to study on release), and one who wrote to me using the departmental address included in the consent form and information sheet.

In terms of the research process following fieldwork, I transcribed all recorded interviews myself. There were a small number of recorded interviews that were very poor quality, and which were difficult to understand. In these cases, I typed summaries of participants' responses and only fully transcribed portions of dialogue that were both clear and felt relevant. Interviews which had not been recorded were typed up as they had been written in my notebooks. Listening to the recordings evoked a sense of each participant, which helped minimise 'the distinction between the phase of being in the field and being in the office' (Crewe and Ievins 2015: 133). I remembered which participants I had liked and disliked, as well as which interviews I had found boring or stressful, for example. My feelings towards participants often changed as I transcribed their interviews, reflecting the greater distance at this stage of research (Liebling 2001; Crewe and Ievins 2015). Recognising the way my emotional responses and interpretations differed helped me to reflect further on my experiences in the field and benefited subsequent analysis.

I imported the transcripts to NVivo and identified significant topics to code, such as 'masculinity', 'status', 'locale' and various nodes relating to work in prison and in the community ('licit work', 'prison work' and 'illicit work', for example). Some nodes were added only once I had started the coding process (e.g. 'religion', 'lifestyle' and 'sexuality'); others were edited during analysis ('personality' became 'personality/identity', for example), and I added sub-nodes to a number of topics (e.g. 'gender equality opinions' was added under the 'women' node). Adaptive theory (Layder 1998) informed ongoing analysis, meaning the resulting findings and theories were shaped by the data while also being informed by relevant literature.

As Crewe and Ievins explained, there is a 'tension between the need to establish closeness and distance at different phases of the research process' (2015: 125). I felt this particularly strongly during analysis as it was necessary to consider the participants as individuals as well as part of a whole sample. Maintaining a sense of participants as individuals was not only a matter of personal integrity, but also the study's integrity, as detaching quotes and stories from the individual can easily lead to the misrepresentation of data. Equally, when engaging critically with data during analysis it was important to remember that, as a researcher, I did not see the whole person when I met and interviewed participants (Crewe and Ievins 2015), and that they were likely to have been selective in their self-presentation to me.

'Truth'

I was more concerned with how participants *felt* about work and masculinity than the veracity of what they shared. Nevertheless, I sometimes doubted participants' claims, and it was not uncommon for there to be inconsistencies and contradictions in participants' interview responses. Sometimes, contradictions were theoretically relevant, and I discussed them with participants, but more often, inconsistencies reflected that we were discussing 'sensitive areas where the information we sought was perceived as risky…or as damaging to self-esteem' (Liebling 1999: 157). While it was valuable to reflect on this during analysis, I felt that it was unnecessary to challenge participants in the field. In terms of uncovering 'truth', it is also likely that there were aspects of many testimonies that I accepted relatively unquestioningly but which had in fact been fabricated, exaggerated or misrepresented – subconsciously or purposefully. Overall, 'truthfulness' was relatively immaterial in most cases because of the study's concern for participants' subjectivities.

Occasionally, though, I wanted to verify participants' claims. For example, when my doubts related to offences, I researched participants on the internet after leaving the field. I found little information in most cases, but of those whose names did return results, two participants had been convicted of sexual offences against children. While one of these convictions had been vaguely alluded to in the field, they both came as a surprise, and reading the specifics of these cases was quite shocking. It was hard to reconcile the people in the articles with the gentle and genial men I had met, and this was profoundly unsettling. Primarily, this discomfort was because I did not like these men less after discovering the offences they had committed: they *had* been funny, thoughtful and vulnerable. Furthermore, learning of these men's offences did not make their interviews feel less sincere or as though I had been 'duped' in any way, because I was aware at the time that they were omitting information about criminal behaviour (and had filled in the gaps that their convictions were probably for sexual offences). As Ievins (2017; Crewe and Ievins 2015) recognises, I was primarily unsettled by the need to reconcile the fact that I could enjoy spending time with someone who had committed such acts, and this forced significant introspection: I frequently found myself thinking about these men and the way I had engaged with and felt about them, and while I forgot the faces and names of many participants over the years since completing fieldwork, my memories of them remain vivid. For a long time, I oscillated between two quite extreme assessments of *myself* on account of my having enjoyed spending time with someone who had committed acts I deemed appalling. Some days, I felt my ability to hold these two judgments about someone signified strength, maturity and professionalism, while at other times, I thought it meant I was naïve, de-sensitised and a 'bad feminist' – ultimately, that there was something 'wrong' with me.

Writing and language

While transcribing interviews, I had to decide whether to censor expletives, 'write' accents, and include 'fillers'. Editing swear words felt unnecessary and puritanical, although in actuality I ended up having to *un*-censor them because the transcription software automatically asterisk-ed all expletives. I decided to 'write' accents into the transcripts so as to include regional dialects which helped retain a sense of individuals when quoted. Furthermore, it felt inappropriate to actively 'correct' participants' language, and this would have been necessary had I 'standardised' the language in transcripts. The same policy was applied for slang. 'Filler' words and sounds ('umm', 'like' etc.) were included only when they were meaningful.

I agree with Crewe that 'the liberal employment of direct quotations…is, to some degree, an ethical decision' (2009: 487). Consequently, I endeavoured to foreground participants' voices and create a sense of personhood by using an abundance of quotations and writing without moral judgment. This effort also contributed to the decision to choose a number of 'protagonists' who are referred to and quoted regularly throughout the thesis. While it is inevitable that all participants in qualitative research are 'dismembered into extracts' (Crewe and Ievins 2015: 129) to some extent, I hope that centring a handful of individuals helps convey a fuller sense of their personhood and somewhat minimises this 'dismembering'. Participants who are quoted were assigned pseudonyms that seemed appropriate to their ethnicity and faith (Phillips 2012).

In addition to being mindful of how participants are written about, it is also important to consider the impact of how research presents other stakeholders (Liebling 2001; Guenther 2009). Crewe and Ievins discussed how 'other forms of betrayal result not from any amendment of the research participant's truth, or from exposure of private intimacies, but from putting into print public truths that may appear to cast judgement on professional competence' (2015: 128). While it would be unethical to airbrush potentially unflattering details out of a sense of indebtedness for access, it was important to consider how to fairly present each site and avoid inadvertent critiques. Practically, this meant ensuring that that my descriptions and judgments about each establishment were fair, informed and relevant to the study. Ultimately, I hope the ways in which this research was designed, conducted and analysed helps to deepen criminological understandings of prisons, and that the findings and their presentation are considered 'open, recognizable and legible' (Back 2015: 834) by those who it is about.

4. ‘Purposeful activity’

HMIP sets out expectations regarding ‘purposeful activity’ provisions in men’s prisons in England and Wales, including that ‘prisoners are able and expected to engage in activity that is likely to benefit them’ (HMIP 2022). This chapter explores the practice of prison work in HMPYOIs Isis and Swinfen Hall and in HMP Wealstun, and discusses how it shapes and is shaped by other aspects of imprisonment. Central to this exercise is the concept of ‘benefitting’ – so in addition to analysing what ‘purposeful activity’ *is* and how it functions, this chapter seeks to develop an understanding of the purposes it serves, and how these purposes are derived from the work, training and education men participate in while in custody.

Using data from observations and interviews alongside existing theory and research, this chapter therefore begins by examining specific forms and instances of ‘purposeful activity’ from across the three fieldwork sites and analysing the factors that shape men’s experiences of them. The chapter then considers four purposes of ‘purposeful activity’ before presenting the problems with contemporary ‘purposeful activity’.

Defining and describing ‘purposeful activity’

‘Purposeful activity’ denotes wide-ranging forms of work, education and training in prisons. In response to the provisions at the fieldwork sites as well as existing research and HMIP reports, I have categorised types of ‘purposeful activity’ in this thesis as: wing and orderly work, contracts workshops, vocational training, classroom-based education, creative opportunities and ‘other’ forms of work.[35] These forms of ‘purposeful activity’ involved engaging in varied work, education or training practices while being supervised by different types of staff and in spaces that were physically dissimilar. With the exception of wing and orderly work, this section describes these different forms of ‘purposeful activity’ using examples from across the three fieldwork sites, and then uses this understanding to draw out key themes that shaped experiences of prison work at an institutional level.[36]

[35] This is a broad and imperfect categorisation (some activities could correspond to two or more groups and ‘other’ is intentionally vague) that is primarily employed to give structure to analytic discussions of work rather than to highlight intrinsic differences between them.

[36] While ‘wing and orderly work’ is not included in this description (as noted in the previous chapter, it is described in other literature and observation in this study presented methodological challenges), participant reflections on and experiences with these forms of work are incorporated in subsequent sections and chapters.

Contracts work

Each prison had at least one contracts workshop, which typically involved low- or unskilled production or assembly of products for private companies or Prison Industries. There were three contract workshops in Swinfen Hall: Opella, an unskilled light-assembly workshop that fulfilled private contracts;[37] tailoring, where prisoners cut and sewed prison-issue tracksuits; and Magic Carpets, a carpet binding workshop for a social enterprise that was temporarily closed. The two contract workshops in Wealstun were ostensibly like those in Swinfen Hall, in that one – tea-packing – fulfilled a Prison Industries contract and the other – pins and grommets – was a private, unskilled, light-assembly workshop. Isis had a single contracts workshop: mattress recycling, which was contracted through the local council and a private company and involved unskilled but relatively more manual work. With the exception of mattress recycling – which was based in a small garage-like room with an open front – contracts workshops tended to be spacious and utilitarian, with little in them other than workstations and boxes of materials and finished products.

Contract workshops tended to employ larger numbers of prisoners than other activities: they had greater capacity and the work itself was generally low-risk and unskilled, meaning the vast majority of men were eligible for it. Their relative size, in conjunction with each establishment's efforts to meet 'purposeful activity' and 'time out of cell' targets, meant it was common practice across all three sites to allocate new arrivals in the prison to contract workshops. Consequently, many of those working in contract workshops had not applied for (and thus resented) their allocation. The practice of contracts work was also widely maligned: 'we're sitting there putting little plastic things into other little plastic things, you know what I mean, fucking bollocks' – Porter. As Porter's quote illustrates, criticisms sometimes pertained to particular activities. Tailoring, for example, was often derided because of connotations with femininity, while mattress recycling was frequently disparaged because it took place outside (and it was winter at the time). Similarly, workshops that produced or assembled goods for other prisons or prisoners had unfavourable connotations with servitude, with tea-packing described particularly negatively because the packs they assembled were more generous than the ones they received. However, the practice contracts work was mostly frequently criticised in general terms: for being unskilled, repetitive, and as providing few (if any) opportunities for

[37] At the time of observation, this involved slotting tiny, coloured bits of plastic into white plastic caps – that would subsequently be used for a tool to refill lighters (although this latter bit of assembly did not take place in the prison).

personal development, which gave it a sense of pointlessness ('them white caps [that they assembled], you don't feel like they're going anywhere, they're just *there,* and you're doing it for no reason' – Karteer – Opella, Swinfen Hall).

Contracts work was also marked by its unpopularity and low-status relative to other activities, and this contributed to the emergence of rumours about different workshops of this sort. In particular, prisoners were concerned about the potential 'contamination' or 'stain' presented by contract workshops. In Wealstun, for example, numerous participants believed that tea-packing presented health risks: 'that's just mashing up your health… the place where you're actually doing the tea packing now used to be the old cement place' – Mitchell. While handling teabags did stain prisoners' fingers and leave residue on their clothes it was unlikely that the building itself presented a health risk. Concerns about physical contamination were more acute with regard to mattress recycling in Isis. The mattresses participants handled were in variable states of disrepair and often heavily soiled, which led to concerns about hygiene:

> I done something called mattress recycling that I didn't like doing…It's just breathing in all that stuff and that, even though you've got a dust mask on, I just didn't like the idea of touching mattresses, it freaked me out a little bit, anything could [have] happen[ed] on them mattresses.
>
> Jamie

Opella – the light-assembly contract workshop in Swinfen Hall – was also the subject of rumours. However, fears about 'contamination' from Opella were primarily social and pertained to the prison's population of men convicted of sexual offences, which was around 30 per cent but which most prisoners estimated to be around 70 per cent. Both staff and prisoners frequently explained that both Opella and tailoring (the other operational contract workshop in the prison) were places where 'mostly gays and sex offenders' (instructor – fieldwork notes) worked. This association men convicted of sexual offences, and the resultant fears of social contamination, led many participants in Swinfen Hall to reject and disparage Opella: 'Opella's got to be the worst job […] full of rapists' – Fernando. While there was little evidence that men with such offences were over-represented in the workshop, there was quite rigid demarcation of different groups of men, who based themselves on separate tables (one of which was described as 'the sex rapists' table' (prisoner – fieldwork notes)). However, despite protestations that they avoided all interaction with their peers, I observed numerous kind and respectful interactions between men from these different groups.

Fears of social contamination were also evident in Wealstun, with tea-packing having similarly negative associations with a specific demographic of prisoners – drug users: 'I'm never going in there, I wouldn't dare, it's full of smack heads!' (Shaun). There were some grounds to this association: numerous men in the workshop openly discussed their histories of substance misuse use with me, various prisoners were obviously under the influence of drugs during sessions, and I frequently witnessed men sneak into to the bathroom before returning to the workshop red-eyed, and on one occasion, unable to speak. While there was some care and looking out for one another amongst the group of drug users, other men in the workshop found it entertaining to mock them.

The contrasting atmospheres of Opella and tea-packing highlighted the significance of instructors to contract workshops. The vast majority of these staff had worked in the prison service for a long time, but did not specialise in the activity they supervised. Garry, for example, staffed Opella in Swinfen Hall and had worked in the prison for nearly two decades, while Stella, who ran mattress recycling in Isis, had worked in numerous establishments during her career as a prison industries instructor and prison officer. Given the unskilled nature of the work that prisoners did in these workplaces, staff tended to have little to do in terms of practical 'instruction' in contracts workshops.[38] However, instructors' interactions with prisoners, and in particular the way staff framed the specific activity they were doing, had a significant impact on the sense of professionalism in a workshop, as well as men's experiences of it more generally. For example, both Stella and Garry sympathised with prisoners when discussing the work required by their workshop and acknowledged that it was boring (and in the case of mattress recycling, tiring and dirty). However, they also participated in this work and worked alongside prisoners they supervised. Stella and Garry sought to establish and maintain some organisation and a sense of professionalism in their workshops, which enabled them to feel relaxed but ordered. These atmospheres presented a stark contrast with contract workshops in Wealstun. Tea-packing, for example, was staffed by a group of men who varied day-to-day, were overly friendly with prisoners and lacked the authority (or desire) to effectively police prisoner behaviour. As a result, the workshop was disorganised and security measures were lax: cutting tools attached to workbenches were used to seal and separate the tea-packs, but

[38] The exception to this was the tailoring workshop in Swinfen Hall, which was run by staff with specific training and experience.

prisoners had purposefully broken and removed blades from a number of them, some of which had not been found. Violence was also common in tea-packing, and the workshop was responsible for the majority of 'alarms' during working hours. Therefore, while the workshop at times had a light-hearted and productive atmosphere, the mood could change quickly to become tense and 'edgy'. While prisoners working there did not express feelings of being unsafe, those who worked elsewhere routinely described tea-packing as unpredictable and 'risky':

> The calibre of people in there, yeah, very bad atmosphere […] It's normally a lot of lads in there who have got negatives on their profile. In other words, you could easily get into bother in there with someone, someone would just have to look at you the wrong way. Sometimes we have to go in to find someone…and you can just see everyone looking, and it's just, get me in and get me out, you know?
>
> Paul

Vocational education and training (VET)

There were numerous vocational education and training (VET) workshops across the fieldwork sites: plastering, tiling, industrial cleaning and cycle repair in Swinfen Hall; barbering, cycle repair, painting and decorating and fitted interiors in Isis; and plastering, painting and decorating, industrial cleaning, fitted interiors and maintenance operations in Swinfen Hall. Almost all of these courses offered accredited qualifications (between Level 1 and Level 3) alongside practical training and work, and they usually ran on a roll-on roll-off basis meaning students were invariably at different points in the syllabus. A number of shorter vocational courses were available at various points over the year. These tended to be delivered by outside businesses or charities linked with specific industries and included rail track engineering and forklift truck driving.

I visited all VET workshops at each site and conducted multiple observations in barbering (in Isis), plastering (in Swinfen Hall) and maintenance operations (in Wealstun). VET courses across all three prisons were routinely over-subscribed and had waiting lists, and those that I observed were operating at capacity. Prisoners routinely sought to extend their time in VET workshops: mentor positions were highly sought after and men often delayed submitting coursework or sittings exams, a practice that instructors sometimes colluded with. The workshops in which vocational education and training took place were usually smaller than contract workshops and had significantly lower capacity given the space taken up by tools and

facilities necessary for the specific form of training. Plastering in Swinfen Hall, for example, had six booths – three walls and a ceiling – which prisoners used in pairs to practice skills they were learning – while barbering in Isis had sinks with chairs for hair washing and chairs in front of mirrors for hair cutting. Alongside practical facilities, VET workshops tended to have an area for written work – usually one large table with chairs.

Sessions in VET workshops usually involved coursework for one half of the group and practical training for the other half. Splitting groups in half was a practical solution to low staffing levels and a lack of resources for all to engage in practical work at the same time. Instructors invariably struggled to supervise and support all prisoners at once and sessions often lacked structure. During observations in plastering and barbering, instructors focused on those doing practical work while those undertaking coursework were largely unsupervised. Plastering was particularly difficult to manage, as tasks were usually completed quickly and learners often had to wait for their work to dry before being able to move onto the next task or giving someone else a go. Consequently, there were significant portions of each session where some of the men had nothing to do. This led to boredom, the distraction of those doing coursework, shouted conversations with friends in nearby workshops and general messing around (e.g. playing with the plaster mixture). While the popularity of VET workshops incentivised some compliance – men knew that instructors could take them off the course easily and so did not engage in obviously dangerous or aggressive behaviour – it was evident that the instructor, Lee, struggled to keep control of the workshop.

Barbering was similarly chaotic (exacerbated by the lack of a second member of staff that the prison had struggled to recruit) but better controlled and not 'edgy'. In part, this was because prisoners in barbering were relatively integrated – individuals seemed to move easily between different groups, and they spent time at the end of sessions chatting altogether. While there was some mocking, prisoners also engaged in discussions that were deeply personal and vulnerable, for example, about religion and love ('I'll know when I love someone' – fieldwork notes). The lack of 'edginess' in barbering was also a consequence of the instructor's approach and experience. Viv had worked in various establishments over a decade and had a positive orientation to prisoners: she described how important it was to her that they felt well treated and could open up and was proud that many prisoners did not want to leave the workshop after completing the course.

Viv's ability to control the barbering workshop was also linked to her technical expertise: prisoners recognised that she was skilled and knowledgeable and thus respected her authority as a tutor. Tutors in other VET workshops, including plastering (Swinfen Hall) and cycle repairs (Isis), lacked vocation-specific experience. Lee – the plastering instructor – for example was an experienced tradesman but not a plasterer, although he was only covering while the usual tutor was off. Despite his lack of plastering knowledge, Lee's experience working in industry and in the prison meant he was confident in his role and the men in his workshop interacted with him in a friendly and open manner. In the cycle repair workshop in Isis, however, it had become apparent to prisoners that the instructor had only recently qualified to teach the course, and this undermined his authority as well as the status of the workshop:

> I went there and had to show him a few things I'm not gonna lie. First day we went there, there was a bike on the floor and he was going about it all wrong and I had to show him!
>
> Calvin

Unlike in contract workshops, men in VET workshops were perfectionists with their practical work, keen to show it to me, each other and their tutor. It was evident that being able to pick up new techniques quickly and to demonstrate skill was a source of masculine pride, and this further underlined the importance of instructors being deemed capable of passing on expertise. However, endeavouring to demonstrate skill also created the potential to fail. In one session in barbering, for example, a group of prisoners mocked their friend who had given (what they judged to be) a 'bad' haircut during that session, which visibly embarrassed both the barber and client (who they seemed not to know).

Other concerns about VET workshops related to hygiene and cleanliness. In manual trades workshops this pertained to the ability to access showers – which most men from VET workshops were able to access shortly after sessions. The exception to this was Swinfen Hall: across the prison, men were only able to access showers every other day. Prisoners working in waste management, however, were allowed daily showers and those in plastering were frustrated that they were not given the same privilege. While no one discussed dropping out of the course because of this issue, the fact that officers on some wings tried to give men from plastering daily access to showers (despite the official policy) heightened frustrations between wing staff and prisoners and caused resentment between men on different wings. Barbering was not considered as dirty as trades workshops, but the touch necessitated in the workshop

led to concerns about hygiene and physical contamination from other prisoners: 'one brother's hair! This yoot was stinking blud. I was, like, you can do it to yourself…I said look just bend over the sink and do your ting yourself' – Calvin.

Classroom-based activities

All prisons offered classroom-based education in English and maths, and two of the three sites offered Information Technology (IT) (Swinfen Hall and Wealstun) and Business Studies (Isis and Wealstun). Classroom-based education activities offered qualifications ranging from Entry Level 1 to Level 2 and I observed one instance at each site: 'Foundation Learning' (English and maths) in Swinfen Hall and business classes in Isis and Wealstun. The rooms in which all of these courses took place were reminiscent of school and participants often sought to avoid being allocated to these activities because of these similarities and resonances. In the classes I observed, however, the vast majority of prisoners wanted to be in the sessions and to learn. To some extent, the motivation of the prisoners I encountered during observations may have been a function of the classes I attended: most of those in business classes had elected to be there and discussed aspirations for setting up their own company post-release, and – despite being mandatory for those without Level 1 or 2 English and maths – Foundation Learning was often a stepping-stone to activities men wanted to do (but which required a certain level of English and/or maths). Furthermore, as the teacher explained, improving their literacy made it easier for men to navigate prison life: 'it means they can read canteen sheets, write letters to their families and understand papers about their cases and legal situation' – teacher (fieldwork notes).

As with VET workshops, classroom-based education was delivered through a contracted provider, which meant teachers were not directly employed by the prison. In comparison to other activities staff and instructors, classroom-based teachers were generally younger, more likely to be female, and more likely be in their first prison-based job. Sessions were the same length regardless of the activity one participated in.[39] However, the approximately three-hour sessions were most challenging for staff delivering classroom-based education activities, given the focus on written and book work and that lack of practical exercises they were able to deliver. During observations it was evident that staff took several different approaches to

[39] With a handful of exceptions including for those in staff canteens and roles that necessitated being 'on call', such as listeners or biohazard cleaners.

managing long sessions. Rachel, the Foundation Learning teacher in Swinfen Hall, developed interactive and detailed worksheets and lesson plans for each session to engage students of a variety of different levels, including some with learning difficulties or for whom English was a second language. Men in each session were relatively engaged and productive, and Rachel was well-liked by past and present students who recognised her effort and care: 'she pushed me to develop myself…she'd always be like "do you want some work to take back" and everything, "so you can just refresh your memory, I'll mark it for you"' – Honey); 'best teacher I've ever met in my life' – Andrei). However, it was also evident that Rachel lacked authority and confidence (which had been further undermined after having recently been threatened by a student), and she described feeling increasingly drained by the amount of work she undertook outside of class time. Consequently, students often became rowdy during sessions which were usually quite chaotic and uncontrolled by the end of the three hours.

The business class in Isis was taught by two different teachers during the period of my observations. The usual instructor was informal and spent one session unsuccessfully teaching a board game to his students, while the teacher who came in to cover for later sessions was extremely strict and had two students removed from the class for no obvious reason. The business teacher in Wealstun – Eryn – demonstrated a more professional orientation and was more experienced, having worked in the prison for several years. Eryn had selected a relatively applied syllabus that offered students who completed the Level 2 qualification a year of business mentoring post-release. Prisoners in the business class seemed to respect Eryn and expressed appreciation (to me and to Eryn) for how she organised the course, her diligence in marking their work, and her willingness to conduct internet-based research for them. Students were recruited on a roll-on roll-off basis so were all at different points of the course, but Eryn organised regular group activities. In one session, for example, students presented their business ideas to the rest of the group, who then had a chance to ask questions at the end. Eryn also explained that she organised 'dragon's den' sessions and brought in various speakers to keep the course relevant and engaging. Eryn described how she wanted to create a business-like environment in her classroom and set clear expectations for her students, relating to punctuality, for example. While it was clear that Eryn did not tolerate distractions, it was also evident that students understood and respected the consistency of Eryn's rules and expectations, and consequently, neither Eryn's authority nor the order of the classroom were challenged during my visits.

Creative opportunities

There were limited opportunities for men to engage in creative initiatives or to complete creative education and training qualifications across the sites: Swinfen Hall and Wealstun provided art classes, and Isis had a radio broadcasting course as well as art classes in Swinfen and one-off choral project that started and finished during the fieldwork period.[40] Despite the relative scarcity of creative opportunities across the fieldwork sites (and the Prison Service more generally), many participants had engaged in artistic or musical activities at some point in their current or previous sentence which were widely praised. Such opportunities were presented in various ways: radio broadcasting in Isis and art in Swinfen Hall were based around accredited Level 1 and 2 qualifications, while art in Wealstun was portrayed as primarily therapeutic (although it did offer qualifications) and the role of the pilot choral project in Isis was unclear.

The differences between the two art provisions highlighted the impact of the physical environment and the way an activity was 'marketed' to prisoners on how it was subsequently experienced. In Swinfen Hall, the art classroom was in the education block alongside classroom-based activities and was therefore relatively small and with limited space for men to create art or for staff to store art materials. Being on a corridor with other classes also meant that art was frequently disrupted by issues and noise from nearby classrooms. The teacher – a young woman with little experience working in prisons – struggled to structure sessions or direct students, who spent most of the observed sessions engaged in boisterous debate. During observations and in interviews, past and present students said they enjoyed making artworks, found the practice therapeutic and were proud of what they had achieved and made. However, few were invested or saw the point in the associated qualification, which compounded the tutor's issues with focusing the group. By contrast, the art class in Wealstun was based in a large standalone workshop away from other activities. Students had a designated individual workbench and the workshop was equipped with an exhibition corner and a wide variety of art materials (in comparison to Swinfen Hall which involved mostly paint, crayons or collage making). Despite the usual instructor being off during observations, the men worked quietly on individual projects during observations and were keen to explain the motivations behind their work. Over numerous sessions, various students disclosed that they suffered with mental

[40] I was informed that Isis had also offered music and art classes in the recent past, but neither was currently running nor had a date for when they may run again.

health problems or substance misuse and explained that attending art classes offered respite from the stresses of their wings or other workplaces where temptations and other issues were more pronounced.

Comparing the two music-related activities also highlighted important factors relating to 'purposeful activity' provisions. Radio Broadcasting was a Level 1 and Level 2 course delivered by an instructor – Nate – who had industry experience but had also taught in prison for several years. Nate was exceptionally well-liked and well-respected by those who were or had previously been in his class and participants often described the course as the highlight of their prison work careers ('[radio broadcasting] was probably the best course I've done' – Marley). The popularity of Radio Broadcasting related in part to the qualifications it offered, which participants saw as useful and which Nate supported them with achieving. Radio Broadcasting also presented some tangible opportunities: a prisoner who had completed the course hosted a National Prison Radio show, and three students had written and recorded a rap for Black History Month which had been submitted to the Koestler Trust. The atmosphere in Radio Broadcasting was another aspect of its appeal: in each observed session groups engaged passionately in stimulating and often humorous debates about music, violence and life outside prison. Classes were also productive, and Nate made frequent efforts to challenge behaviour or attitudes that he perceived as unprofessional, inappropriate or disrespectful. In an informal interview, Nate explained that this was part of his philosophy to use the class to support students beyond their qualifications:

> I'm trying to instil knowledge that will hopefully help you, the learner, on the out…I hate to see these guys feet up on the desk, it doesn't happen in this room. I hate the use of the N word, you know, all of these things. I try to loosely beat it out of them before they move on because I think it's important.

The choral project, on the other hand, was facilitated by two young, classically trained musicians who were visiting a prison for the first time. These men intended for the course to involve singing songs from a list they had developed and prepared – which included songs by Drake and other popular artists they thought would appeal to the prisoners. It quickly became apparent, however, that the prisoners attending the sessions did not want to sing. A 'compromise' was quickly reached whereby the group agreed to sing one song each session (which ended up being the same song every week – One Dance by Drake) before spending the rest of the time developing and performing freestyle raps. After one session, the facilitators

asked me what the men had been rapping about, as they did not understand some of the terminology, and I explained that much had been about violence, crime, drugs and sex, which alarmed them. The following session, the men spent time establishing rules around the content of the raps, which were adhered to, to varying degrees. The unstructured nature of these sessions and relative lack of boundaries yielded some unexpected outcomes: in one session, the group discussed their love lives and one of the facilitators disclosed that he was gay, which surprised the prisoners and was discussed at length both in the sessions and on the wings. Over time though, it became evident that relationships developed with this instructor had successfully challenged some participants' homophobic attitudes.

In discussing the initiative with the prison's activities department, as well as the woman who had organised it, it transpired that the prison had facilitated the course largely because they did not have to pay for it (and because they otherwise were unable to offer prisoners creative opportunities). Because of the project being facilitated outside of the prison's usual commissioning framework – and for free – the project was unregulated, unaccredited and largely unsupervised by prison staff. This sort of arrangement between charities, social enterprises and others hoping to work in prisons is relatively common, and particularly so with creative opportunities. In this instance, while most participants in the choral project said they had enjoyed it, a sense that it had been poorly organised and executed, coupled with widespread awareness that the woman behind it was seeking funding to run further projects in other prisons, had bred an underlying resentment and sense of exploitation – men felt they had been used as 'guinea pigs'.

'Maintenance work'

In addition to wing work, there were various activities that prisoners engaged in that maintained and contributed to the running of establishments, including in the prison's grounds, in kitchens or in visits. Often, these forms of work were similar to VET workshops in that prisoners could (but were not required to) work towards applied qualifications but differed in that men did not have to leave the job after completing the course. I observed two such forms of work: 'paints party' in Swinfen Hall – which involved painting different areas of the prison – and The Quays in Isis which was a café/restaurant for staff.

The instructor in Paints Party in Swinfen Hall – Frank – had worked at the prison for a long time and cared deeply about the well-being of the prisoners working with him. There were no

qualifications or formal training associated with ‘Paints Party’, although the majority of the men employed there had completed a painting and decorating qualification with Frank previously. During sessions, the group moved between wherever was being painted and a workshop where they started and ended sessions, took breaks and stored materials. The painting projects undertaken during the observation period were relatively short-term, which meant that the work in Paints Party felt varied and less repetitive than most other activities. The atmosphere amongst the group was relaxed, and at the beginning and end of sessions everyone sat around a large table to socialise while the men took turns to make tea and toast for everyone. Overall, there was a sense of normalcy in Paints Party, echoed by prisoners during interviews: ‘it’s just a bit of a normal situation in a very un-normal place’ – Taylor.

The men in Paints Party worked together as a team, both physically (in that they worked on the same projects) and socially: there were no cliques, and the more extroverted members of the group made visible efforts to include those who were less confident, by laughing at their jokes, for example. As a consequence, men in Paints Party had developed close bonds with Frank and each other. This cohesiveness was particularly noteworthy given that at least two men were convicted of sexual offences relating to children. While it was not clear whether their colleagues knew about their convictions, the absence of derision or interrogation of new or existing members of the group marked a stark difference with other workplaces in the prison. Because of the sense of normalcy, teamwork, close bonds and Frank’s care, Paints Party was a highly valued space for men in Swinfen Hall, to the extent that Oska, for example, explained that while it might be useful for him to complete qualifications or become a red band (neither of which was possible in Paints Party), he elected to stay there because of ‘the people, and Frank’s really solid’.

The Quays was hard but enjoyable work. Prisoners prepared a variety of dishes each day so there was always lots to do and Kerry did not let people ‘coast’. Usually, The Quays had a friendly and supportive atmosphere: Kerry and the men chatted and joked throughout the mornings, she seemed to know each individual well and they listened to her and followed her instructions. The men felt comfortable making suggestions of ways to improve and adapt recipes, and Kerry was usually receptive to this. Innovating with the food they made provided opportunities for the men to impress themselves, their peers and Kerry, which they did regularly. A slightly ‘heavier’ atmosphere emerged on other occasions when Kerry became more authoritative and less generous with the men. In one such instance, someone wanted

cheese on his snack, to which Kerry very forcefully said 'no'. The man looked to a peer for guidance, who shook his head, as if to indicate the decision should not be challenged. While a seemingly minor incident, I was struck by how differently I felt this encounter would have gone on previous days I had been observing The Quays. It also became evident over time that Kerry had favourites. While not unusual for instructors to find some individuals more reliable or trustworthy than others, preferential treatment in The Quays had distinct and negative consequences for men who were not Kerry's favourites. For example, one prisoner had never been allowed to make food, despite having worked in the Quays for several weeks. On one occasion, this prisoner joked with Kerry about when he would be allowed in the kitchen and pointed out that someone who had joined after him was already cooking. Kerry had designated this prisoner was not allowed to cook because he was the barista – a role he had not wanted and which meant he had little to do until lunch service started, which he pointed out to Kerry. Overall, The Quays was marked by teamwork and sociability, and both Kerry and the prisoners took pride in their work. While the atmosphere was more unpredictable than that in Paints Party because of Kerry's different approach (and potentially related to understaffing in The Quays), prisoners were generally provided with the resources and freedom to learn practical and social skills, which they spoke about enthusiastically.

Work in The Quays was therefore different from Paints Party in several ways. First, the Quays was based in one location, in comparison to the variety offered by Paints Party – although due to fears around violence in Isis, 'mobile' work was relatively risky and thus undesirable. Second, men in the Quays were required to undertake catering and food hygiene qualifications while working there. While few men saw these courses as useful longer term, they understood the importance of fulfilling statutory requirements for working in the environment. Third, prisoners in both workplaces operated as a team but in the Quays, everyone had a distinct role, such as pastry chef, barista and pot wash. While some of these positions were rotated others were not, and Kerry's favouritism underscored the higher and lower status of some prisoners. This unofficial hierarchy was absent in Paints Party as the group were all similarly 'qualified', did the same tasks and were treated equally by Frank.

Themes in prison work

Describing instances of prison work across the fieldwork sites has made evident that purposeful activity – although superficially similar across the jurisdiction – was practiced in distinct ways.

As a consequence of both the staff facilitating an activity and factors relating to the specific institution in which it occurred, experiences of work and education were shaped significantly by the sociability, predictability, status and edginess of each instance of purposeful activity. In terms of the impact of staff on prison work, this analysis has demonstrated that instructors shaped the volume and nature of social interactions that men had in prison workspaces, both with their peers and with instructors themselves. Instructors like Nate (HMPYOI Isis Radio Broadcasting instructor), Eryn (HMP Wealstun business teacher) and Frank (HMPYOI Swinfen Hall Paints Party instructor) confidently maintained boundaries, used authority effectively, and actively fostered a sense of collectiveness amongst the group. These staff were highly regarded because they provided participants not only with a sense that the instructor was personally and professionally invested in them, but also that the activity required learning, dedication and skill, and that it was therefore worthwhile. In observing other teachers and instructors, it was evident that having a positive orientation was insufficient for providing these benefits, and that 'jailcraft', consistency, authenticity and subject-specific expertise were equally important factors.

With regard to the impact an establishment had on purposeful activity, while fears of contamination were evident across all sites (and in particular in contracts workshops), precisely what men were concerned about being contaminated *by* was highly localised, relating to the prison's demographics, physical environment, and the specific work they undertook. In HMPYOI Isis, for example, fears of contamination related to the nature of the contracts work and the risk of physical contamination from soiled mattresses. By comparison, the sex offender population in HMPYOI Swinfen Hall meant fears of contamination in the Opella contracts workshop were social, and led those who worked in there to engage in regular and highly public demonstrations of their fears of contamination (which contrasted with the civil, and often kind, interactions witnessed in the workshop itself).

The purpose of 'purposeful activity'

The heterogeneity of 'purposeful activity' meant that participants' experiences of prison work, training and education were highly varied. Some of the factors influencing men's experiences of 'purposeful activity' were considered in the preceding section. However, the way prisoners felt about prison work was also influenced by their understandings of its *purpose*: in what ways it could, 'should' and did benefit men participating in it. As Chapter Two demonstrated, 'purposeful activity' theoretically serves a multitude of functions for prisons and policymakers,

although these have rarely been articulated explicitly or convincingly in practice. In practice, participants described 'purposeful activity' as fulfilling diverse purposes, relating to their lives in prison and their imagined futures and lives post-release. Experiences of 'purposeful activity' were also shaped by participant understandings of the *intended* purpose of prison work, education and training, and the extent to which they felt this was met. Using interview data, the following section identifies and analyses four sorts of 'purpose' that 'purposeful activity' served for prisoners across the three sites. Two of these categories of purpose – *to prepare* men for employment and *to better* them more generally – relate to men's lives post-release, while the others relate to their lives in custody and how prison work is used *to comfort* men while in prison and as a means of enabling them *to cope* with imprisonment.

To prepare

> When you're in jail, you're supposed to help people get back to not reoffend again, put them on a path to better their lives. So explain to me how tea-packing is helping you better your life? It's not. You're not learning 'owt, you're not getting nothing out of it, you're just sat there. So I don't get how it helps. I don't get why they have stupid things like that in jail.
>
> Bogdan

Bogdan's quote illustrates a sentiment that most participants across all three sites expressed (with varying degrees of explicitness): that prison work *should* be preparing them for licit employment because work would be crucial to desistance post-release. Such beliefs were the consequence not only of personal beliefs, but of official rhetoric around such activities (HMIP 2022), of the way staff promoted prison work, and of 'purposeful activity' sitting within each prison's 'reducing reoffending' function.

Despite this apparent fundamental purpose of 'purposeful activity', few participants identified any form of prison work as having prepared them for employment in the community. There were several explanations for this. A small proportion of men, for instance, planned to return to work that they had done previously and were already qualified for and skilled in, meaning they did not need 'preparing' activities. Other participants explained that the activities offered in prison related to industries they were not interested in pursuing work in: '[plastering] was quite a good thing to do I suppose…could go into a lot of good areas of work…but I don't think I'm going to go that sort of way' (Barney). While some – like Barney – expressed simple

preferences for different jobs, others spoke more critically about the relatively limited forms of work the prison seemed to offer to prepare them for. Keaton, for example, worked in the kitchen fittings VET workshop in Wealstun. When asked whether he would look for employment in this field post-release, Keaton explained that he was 'thinking bigger, to be honest'. Morgan, who was part-way through a barbering course in Isis, expressed similar sentiments, explaining how he felt barbering was not a 'good' job outside prison and that he could make better money elsewhere:

> … obviously it's a job, but it's a job where you chill – you cut someone's hair, you just have a laugh and that. But then with my dad, my dad works like 10 hours [a day] and it's good money, so that's quite a good job. It's a *real* job sort of thing.
>
> Morgan

Another explanation for why participants felt 'purposeful activity' – and VET in particular – would not help them find work post-release was that the qualifications offered were insufficient or unnecessary for jobs in the associated sector. As Lyle explained, the additional training that he would need do at a college post-release meant that the plastering course he was undertaking was not 'preparing' him for work:

> Don't get me wrong, I could go and do plastering, but I've only done my level 1, which means I'd have to go to college and do level 2 and level 3, and that's just more time in college *and* I'd have to pay for it.
>
> Lyle

By contrast, Mikey believed prison VET courses might technically qualify someone for trades work, but that they were nevertheless inadequate because the competitiveness of labour markets meant that more than the bare minimum skills and credentials provided by the prison would be needed to be hired: 'there's so many other people out there that's willing to do that job…like, good people!'. Classroom-based education was often described as similarly insufficient, as while academic qualifications (and sometimes specific work completed in class, such as a business plan) were seen as enhancing general employability, they invariably failed to qualify participants for anything specific.

Nevertheless, it was relatively common for prisoners to portray these forms of work as *potentially* preparing *others* for employment. These discussions were usually vague and hypothetical and mirrored the way 'purposeful activity' was marketed by the prison to

prisoners: 'you *can* go straight into them – *if* you know a barber, you can go and hire out a chair and do your thing' – Alexander (emphasis added). Dean similarly endorsed the rehabilitative purpose of these forms of prison work *in theory* ('plastering and bricklaying, it might not be as fun as doing something else, but when you get out you could get a job from what you've learnt in jail') before clarifying that it did not serve that purpose *in practice* for him: 'I haven't really done plastering or anything, so that's not really going to help *me* get a job. *If* I done that it would help me' (emphasis added). These discussions demonstrated that most participants 'bought into' the prison system's discourse about training and education provisions supporting men into work post-release, and suggested that many men took personal responsibility for the failure of 'purposeful activity' (as defined and designed by the prison) to prepare them for work, in that they did not need or want it to, or had not tried or engaged enough:

Martha: **Do you think any of the work that you've done in prison will help you with work on release?**

Matthew: If I wanted a job in JD [Sports] yeah! Did many a folding in that tailoring workshop didn't I! But no, I've not really learnt any other skills in prison that I'm gonna use when I get out if I'm honest, but then again I've not tried…so it's kind of my fault isn't it.

While participants portrayed most forms of 'purposeful activity' as not having prepared them for work post-release, a handful of opportunities were widely considered effective, chiefly PTS (Personal Track Safety) courses that qualified men to work in the railway industry, and those that provided CSCS (Construction Skills Certification Scheme) cards or forklift licences. These activities were highly sought after because they offered professional qualifications that were pre-requisites to gaining employment in the related industry. Consequently, such courses were described almost universally as positive and as a means of preparing prisoners for specific jobs on release: 'that rail track course, that's a good course because you can get a job out of that' (Arthur). Participants trusted that such qualifications would lead to work – and to work that they deemed desirable – because the schemes were well-established, meaning numerous participants knew people who had already had success in the sector, or had done so themselves:

> … when I came out of jail the first time, I done an apprenticeship with rail track engineering yeah, I passed it […] I done well, and when I come back out this time, I'm going to go back to the rail track engineering. Hopefully the company take me back. If not, I'm going to try and work for another company.

Kash

The appeal of CSCS, PTS and forklift qualifications was also a consequence of the certification prisoners received on completion of the course being standardised – meaning any future colleagues would have identical documentation, and potential employers would be unable to tell that it had been achieved in prison. This made such opportunities appear more legitimate and useful in terms of procuring employment:

> CSCS card, have you heard of them? Like, more serious qualifications? I'm not saying [other] qualifications are bad, but [I would like] more qualifications that as soon as you come on the outside you can apply for jobs for like CSCS card...it covers a lot of jobs.

Nise

Furthermore, as such qualifications were both necessary for employment in these industries and cost money to undertake outside, completing them in prison represented a financial saving: 'I got my CSCS card…you can't work on a building site without that... I think they cost about £75 to do outside – so not that bad – but if you get free when you're in jail, do you know what I mean!?' – Jamie). Some of these opportunities also had direct links with employers. Not only did this make finding work post-release seem more realistic, but it meant employers (or their representatives) were able promote the benefits of the jobs they offered to men while they were still in custody, which enhanced the job's appeal:

> A lot of prisons do the railway course, I believe that's the best course you can do […] It's a rewarding job, plus there's good earning potential…You get a pension, obviously you get your annual leave, it goes up yearly… It's quite a good career to be in, you can go up through the ladder being on the railway, you can start on the bottom and suddenly you can progress quite a lot. If you're interested and you're willing to learn you can go a long way.

Ryan

To better

While few activities were perceived as preparing men for employment post-release, it was more common for participants to describe 'purposeful activity' in terms of how certain forms facilitated general self-improvement un- or indirectly related to future work. Participants frequently used the concept of 'betterment' during interviews: 'every [prison] job you should

get something solid out of it, like what will better you in life' – Donovan. Sometimes, discussions about bettering oneself carried implications of being or having been a 'bad' or 'not good' person, and wanting to change:

Martha: **What was your motivation for choosing activities?**

Webster: I just want to be a better person.

Martha: **And you think they helped with that? Or not?**

Webster: In ways, yeah […] I'm just more mature than when I first come in…I think a lot differently now as well.

However, it was more common for participants to emphasise that they were – and had always been – good people. For these men, rather than a moral endeavour, bettering oneself was a developmental means of gaining knowledge and acquiring new skills, particularly those they felt they could not access elsewhere or had missed out on as a result of past (and often illicit) lifestyles. Portraying prison work this way not only meant 'purposeful activity' was seen as beneficial but enabled some men to reframe imprisonment more generally as not having been 'a waste of time' (and in some cases, as being worthwhile).

Participants mostly described bettering themselves in this way in terms of learning useful and practical skills: 'I've done all these courses and I think they've benefited me, so when I get out I can put up a shelf, I can clean, I can cook, I can do everything!' (Honey). Trades-based skills in particular were often linked implicitly to masculinity and becoming more self-sufficient:

> I'm just learning how to install kitchens like install the sinks. do the plumbing work all that, so it is a good skill, you know what I mean. Even when you're at home and you want to do your kitchen, if anything needs fixing, I'll just do it myself, isn't it.
>
> Keaton

Other forms of 'purposeful activity' were discussed as ways to better oneself by honing interpersonal skills, especially how to talk to people ('[serving in the staff canteen] it's people skills, know how to talk to people and manners and stuff' – Sanchez). Noah, for example, described how being a Chapel orderly had helped him become more socially confident:

Noah: When I came to prison I was really, really shy…but the chapel they kind of picked up on it quite quickly and one thing they tried to do is to overcome my confidence [issues]…I would try to go to Chapel just to try and ease myself into that situation, and then [the chaplain] just said

we have a vacancy as the chapel orderly why don't you come down and try it out…that must have been well over two years now I'm still down there [laughing].

Martha: **[…]And has it helped you with your confidence?**

Noah: Well, you end up having to talk to people, saying 'is there coffee?' or 'do you want a cup of tea?', to the point where you get to know everybody that goes…so yeah, it kind of opens up your social doors.

The final way that prisoners portrayed 'purposeful activity' as bettering them was in terms of adjusting to new routines and behaviours, relating to punctuality, resilience and dealing with authority. For example, one participant discussed how he chose a wing cleaner job because he wanted to learn how to feel 'uncomfortable' so that he could 'stick to a nine-to-five life' on release:

> I'm teaching myself how to be uncomfortable. So sometimes I don't want to mop, I don't want to sweep, I don't want to get up and throw bins out, I don't want to do none of that, I don't want to sweep up the servery, I don't want to do nothing but I force myself to do it because I need to learn how to be comfortable while being uncomfortable, because when I hit the road that's one of the skills I need to have if I want to stick to a 9 to 5 life.
>
> Bart

To cope

With regard to the ways participants used 'purposeful activity' to improve their lives in custody, there were a number of ways that prison work helped prisoners psychologically and physically cope with and survive their sentence. Firstly, some participants described how prison work kept them busy and distracted and explained that this was a valuable means of helping them 'keep their head': 'I'll do laundry with the lads, keep me occupied, keep my mind off stuff' (Richard). Within these narratives, time spent locked in one's cell was portrayed negatively (as stressful or depressing, for example), while prison work was positioned as a means of avoiding such pains: '[work] gets me out of my pad…there's too much time behind your door, so it's stressful' (Tarek). 'Purposeful activity' that kept men busy and out of their cell also made imprisonment more survivable because it made time 'go faster':

> It's very easy to sit in your cell and do nothing but that can cause all sorts of problems: your mind can go round and round in circles. I like to be active, get off the wing and just go and do something, because then your time will go much quicker.
>
> Murray

For some participants, prison work had further – and more tangible – consequences for their experience of time, in terms of its potential impact on de-categorisation or parole: 'I just done [the business course]…to get that certificate because when it's time to sit my tag board I want as much certificates as I can so I can get early release' (Marley). Men who described the purpose of prison work in this way focused on what 'success' in 'purposeful activity' communicated to those who would make decisions about their future: 'I wanted to be like the Listener's PID worker…to make it look a bit good for my cat D and stuff, like you've actually changed and you've learnt certain things' (Jordan). The hope derived from 'purposeful activity', and its potential to be used as evidence of one's suitability to progress through the prison system or be released on parole, was thus another iteration of prison work's 'coping' function and the impact it had on making time feel survivable.

Prison work was also used as a tool for avoiding *extra* time, with several participants describing how they chose jobs to keep them out of trouble and therefore avoid disciplinary action that might extend their sentence. Marley, for example, explained that after completing his business course he applied for a wing job because he believed this would prevent violent interactions that might threaten his early release or risk extra days:

> [Working on the wing] it's easier and you know you can get drawn out in prison easy as well like I can go on free flow tomorrow and the [other houseblock] will come out and I might get into an altercation with one of them and just get into a fight…it's long, it's not worth it though, just trying to keep my head down and get my early three months…and just go home.
>
> Marley

'Purposeful activity' also made participants' experiences in prison easier to cope with by keeping them physically safe. For example, Phillip explained that having a job on the wing meant he did not have to meet prisoners he felt might pose a risk to him: 'it's just easier to be on the wing where everyone knows me…A lot less hassle. I'm not gonna put myself in a situation where I could be getting hassle and I don't have to be'. While the risks presented by

freeflow meant Phillip classified off-wing work as risky, other participants felt more physically and emotionally vulnerable on their wings, and so described specific workshops as spaces where they felt work helped them survive their sentence. A gay prisoner who worked in the tailoring workshop in Swinfen Hall, for example, explained that officers on his wing were disrespectful and tried to humiliate him, and that it was only the instructors from the tailoring workshop who checked on him and who he trusted to help him if he needed.

While some prison work therefore made participants' sentences more survivable, the inverse – that forms of 'purposeful activity' could make it harder to cope with imprisonment – was also the case. Donovan, for example, described how he avoided roles he thought would negatively impact his mental health:

> [Segregation is the worst job] because like you're seeing them kick off all day, like, how miserable would that make your day?! Seeing the next man getting bent up, tracking their faeces all around the place, like crying, trying to kill themselves, like literally, seeing all that horrible stuff all day long and you're doing prison time yourself! Like you're not the happiest person! We're in jail!
>
> Donovan

Prison work as a tool of survival also related to the financial remuneration it offered. Low rates of pay meant that many prisoners depended on family and friends sending them money to pay for toiletries, extra food and phone credit. For those without such support, 'purposeful activity' was the only means by which they could afford these 'luxuries'. While none of the participants in this study claimed to need the remuneration themselves, many discussed how important it was for *other* prisoners:

> These guys offered me a job and it was a £13 a week pay cut, which is quite a lot of money…but I felt I would get more out of this job, rather than frying chips every day or making sandwiches [...] We only get £15 here, you get more in the [contracts] workshops. So the problem with this job is there's no appeal to do it, because a lot of lads in prison haven't got any money, so if it's only just a £5 extra in a workshop, chances are they're going to work in there.
>
> Burton

To comfort

Prison work also provided participants with comfort, through various benefits that improved men's experiences of imprisonment over and above merely *coping* with it. Firstly, participants described how certain jobs had material benefits, such as extra gym sessions, more food and time out of cell, greater access to phones and freer movement around the prison ('you obviously get extra gym and get extra food from the kitchens and everything – it's alright' – Jamie)). While most of the above benefits related to prison maintenance and orderly work, there were other material benefits associated with specific workshops: one participant described a contract workshop in a previous establishment where men were occasionally allowed to take DVDs back to their cells, for example. Dean similarly discussed the perks of being visits, reception and stores orderlies, which he thought made them the best jobs:

> Reception you can get, like, when you buy stuff from the catalogue, you can get it back to the wing straight away. Loads of stuff gets thrown away which you can take back to the wing for yourself. Stores, same again, that's where stuff goes, you can get stuff to the wing – it's a trusted job you move around the prison, and visits because you're interacting with people from the outside.
>
> Dean

Prison work was also comforting because of the social benefits it could provide. Workplaces were often described as places to have a laugh and mix with friends and associates: wing cleaning was 'alright, you didn't have to wing clean at all really, it was just literally just chilling in my friends' cell' – Nise. Some of these relationships developed within workshops, so although the work was not initially selected for a social purpose, it became a motivation to remain there: 'the work itself was shit but…the people I was in there with, I got on with, so we had a laugh' – Claudio. Other participants, however, actively sought activities where people who they already knew were working: 'the light fitting I did because my dad was in prison at the time and he worked in there' – Dean. The framing of 'purposeful activity' in this way was most pronounced amongst men who were minorities in their establishment, in terms of their ethnicity, sexuality, offence or where they came from. The men from the North-West who all applied for tea-packing in HMP Wealstun exemplified the social benefits of prison work:

Martha: **You put in for [tea packs] as well?**

Daniel: Yeah, yeah.

Martha: **Did you already have your little North West area set up?**

Daniel: …they did yeah.

Martha: **So you got in [to Wealstun] and you got to go straight over [to tea packs]?**

Daniel: Yeah! Friends aren't they! I can't understand half of these [local prisoners] me, they speak mush…[laughing]

Martha: **So does that make it easier, having your group?**

Daniel: Yeah.

Work could therefore be instrumental to prisoners' social lives, friendships and support networks, but it could also imbue power and status that made the prison experience more comfortable. In some jobs, superior status was formalised via 'quality control', 'mentor' or 'red band' positions, for example. As Karteer explained, having one of these roles in a contracts workshop meant 'not hav[ing] to do the boring job; I can just watch and help people out and that'. Another participant described how being 'number one' cleaner in a previous establishment gave him authority over his peers:

> I'd run three landings. I used to have a clipboard with everybody's name on, and that person would be assigned to a certain job. So I might have one guy for the bins, one guy's mopping, one sweeping, one does showers, and I'd just walk around in the morning and check all different things and see what's been done... if it's not been done I say 'right, go sort that out'.
>
> Nico

Influence derived from prison work was also negotiated informally, as exemplified by servery jobs. A number of participants had worked on a servery, where they portioned out food at mealtimes for the men on their wing. It was a socially skilled and high-risk job, but its potential to imbue status and therefore make the prison experience more comfortable made it appealing to many. Aside from the material benefits (extra food), numerous participants explained that servery work was high status – and 'a position of power' (Theo) – because of its proximity to and influence over food portions: 'it's probably the most respected job…you're serving everyone's food and everyone has to respect you to get good portions, if that makes sense' – Adem. However, when prisoners lost control of these interactions, the job ceased to be enjoyable or a means of acquiring influence and comfort: '[it] does my head in, because people always ask for extra food, it's proper like scavengers, I hate it' – Bogdan. Informal prison work, such as barbering, could also provide status, respect and increased comfort: 'it's a useful thing

[…] obviously, every time you get your hair done – your hair cut – people are like 'who done your hair?'' – Josiah.

The final way prison work was used to comfort men was by making them feel 'good' in some way, in that it could be therapeutic, satisfying, or elicit pride. Generative and creative activities were most often described as being enjoyable – and comforting – in this way ('I think that [art] keeps my heart motivated' – Sasha), while cleaning was often referred to as being calming ('it's therapeutic…I like things to look neat' – Nico).

The problem with 'purposeful activity'

The above section has illustrated how 'purposeful activity' served numerous and diverse purposes for participants, while the section before it demonstrated the impact of individual staff and establishment-specific issues on prison work. As such, it is evident that the purposes and experiences of purposeful activity were not inherent to the work itself and instead related to participants' lives in prison, their aspirations for the future, and the interaction of these personal factors with the localised context of prison work provisions. For example, servery work was highly coveted and provided comfort (in the way of status and more food) to men who had, and felt able to use, authority, but was disliked by those who lacked confidence and status. Furthermore, the degree and nature of authority needed to fulfil the role effectively varied significantly depending on the prison in which one resided. The variable appeal of a single form of work represents a wider problem with 'purposeful activity' provisions as well as the processes organising prison work: that men had unequal access to different types (and benefits) of 'purposeful activity'.

To some extent, this arose because some 'purposes' were better provided for than others – there was an over-supply of work that men engaged in primarily because it offered time outside of their cell and other 'coping' and 'comforting' related benefits. By contrast, there was a dearth of opportunities that men perceived as preparing them for employment post-release, and such activities were routinely over-subscribed (as was the case with rail track engineering courses across the three sites). Consequently, staff allocating the limited spaces on sought-after courses were able to be highly discerning and risk-averse, with the result that highly compliant, trusted men were disproportionately likely to be given such opportunities. While this is understandable (and to some extent unavoidable given the workplace risk-assessments associated with 'purposeful activity'), it meant that a handful of favoured prisoners were repeatedly offered the

most desirable activities in each establishment. This was also the case with wing jobs, about which uniformed officers had the final say. As Crewe (2009) describes, staff tended to select already respected and influential prisoners to high-status wing-based positions because such men were best placed to help maintain order.

Beyond barriers to being allocated opportunities that helped men to 'prepare' or 'better' themselves, prisoners' initial decisions about what work they applied for were influenced by various factors. Unskilled contracts work, for example, appealed to prisoners who sought to socialise with specific friends, family or associates on other wings. As the group of men from the North West in HMP Wealstun who all applied for tea-packing illustrated, applying for undersubscribed activities increased the likelihood of men from different wings being allocated to the same workplace. More problematic, however, was how vulnerable men who depended on 'purposeful activity' to cope with the experience of imprisonment were inadvertently incentivised to do wing and contracts work: prison managers prioritised these activities to run when others had to close (due to low staffing levels and reduced regimes, for example), making wing orderly positions and contracts workshops the most reliable forms of prison work. In seeking *reliable* work, men who might have benefitted most from education and training often missed out: 'trust me there's people in here what need help writing letters, and their jobs are on the wing cleaning and that!' – Donovan. Access to 'rehabilitative' opportunities was further impacted by variable rates of pay: as Nico explained, 'the worst job is probably the best paid!'. In practice, this meant that low- and unskilled contracts work routinely paid significantly more than VET, generative work or classroom-based education. Participants understood that relatively higher rates of pay reflected the establishment's need to make undesirable work more attractive, with the consequence that education and training became a privilege that some prisoners were unable to afford:

> Certain people work because they ain't got money, they ain't got families what are sending them money so certain people go for the most high-paid job. It don't matter if they *want* to work there or if they *like* working there…they *have* to go where they're going to make money…Then it's like a vicious circle for them isn't it, because that time that they've wasted cleaning up the gardens, cleaning segregation, cleaning the wings, cleaning the showers, yeah, that's not helping them in any way.
>
> Donovan

‘Purposeful activity’ entrenched inequality in non-financial ways too. As this chapter has already demonstrated, influential prisoners had greater access to high-status roles (including as wing orderlies, for example) while more vulnerable men were inclined to work in low-status contracts workshops due to the relatively greater reliability of pay offered by such activities. However, there were numerous cases of high-status men working in apparently low-status activities and vice versa, suggesting that the status associated with one’s ‘purposeful activity’ allocation had little impact on a prisoner’s social standing. In Wealstun, for example, several participants explained that the pins and grommets contract workshop – a low-status and unskilled activity – was a place where powerful and high-status prisoners congregated to organise and facilitate illicit trading. Equally, terms such as ‘screw boy’ were reserved only for low-status men working as wing cleaners – an otherwise relatively high-status role. Consequently, it was evident that status impacted not only the forms of ‘purposeful activity’ a prisoner was able to access but also the social meaning of that work.

While there was unequal access to (and outcomes from) the few courses deemed to help prepare men for post-release employment, there were different problems relating to ostensibly ‘rehabilitative’ activities, which for many participants included classroom-based education and VET workshops. For some, these activities failed to fulfil their supposedly ‘rehabilitative’ purpose because of the level of qualifications they offered – in that they were deemed either too advanced or too basic to be useful for life post-release: ‘it's all good and well teaching people A Levels and degrees and things like that, but actually, really, when you get out of prison you’ll struggle to find a job that requires those things’ – Taylor. For others, the failure of VET and classroom-based education to be ‘rehabilitative’ was the result of their misallocation, with many participants describing how prisoners were routinely being allocated to courses and work opportunities that they did not want (or need) to do. While a small number of participants instead blamed specific instructors for the perceived inadequacy of education and training provisions, a significant proportion of participants took personal responsibility for the failure of ‘purposeful activity’ to ‘rehabilitate’ them. A small number of participants, however, felt that the ‘rehabilitative’ potential of education and training activities was undermined by the other purposes it served, chiefly the potential profit for providers (‘Obviously they get paid for the amount of people, they have to fill every course’ - Honey) and favourable data for the prison (‘education is bums on seat, they just want it full even if it doesn't suit you, just…for stats’ – Finn). As Taylor explained:

> It's more like a conveyor belt. People come in, they go straight into the classroom – do maths level 1 and 2 – and it's just a bums on seats, cash in the pocket exercise […] surely prison should be about making sure people are ready to leave prison rather than just kind of contracts and money and how many people they get through the door.
>
> Taylor

Most common, however, was for participants to explain that prison work in its present form could not 'rehabilitate' them because it failed to address the issues that they believed would undermine their efforts to find work post-release. Prison work, education and training focused overwhelmingly on the achievement of accredited qualifications rather than the development of soft skills and social and cultural capital. Numerous participants asked whether they 'sounded like prisoners' and whether I thought people would be able to tell they had been to prison, while others stressed that they could look professional and did not 'dress like prisoners' outside. These specific concerns reflected a wider anxiety about the process of finding and sustaining employment on release, and many participants were resentful of the lack of support provided by the prison in this regard.

Unlike Bart, the majority (74 per cent; $n = 65$) of participants claimed to have undertaken some licit work prior to imprisonment. However, most of these experiences were sourced either informally (through social networks) or via agencies, and consequently, had been insecure, informal, unskilled and low-paid. Participants who had undertaken these forms of work were generally confident they would be able to find similar jobs post-release, but most had already rejected such positions (and the lifestyles they afforded) in favour of illicit work, and were sceptical about (or rejected outright) the prospect of returning to such work post-release. Participants mostly believed that they would therefore need to apply for jobs with more formal recruitment processes. However, there was considerable apprehension about applying for jobs in this way, and participants frequently explained that they did not know how to write a CV or prepare for interviews:

> How do I write a CV?! 'Dear sir madam'? No that's not how you write a CV... Let's say you manage to write a CV, you don't know where to apply for jobs because people are doing it online now, you don't know how to work the online ting. You don't know how to do it, [then] you *do* do it, then you ain't got the basic skills you need to talk to someone for an interview…This whole process, people…literally don't know a thing about. Like me, I don't know a thing about it, this is why I'm so scared,

> because I don't know how to talk to somebody in an interview…how I'm supposed to respond to what they say in the interview?! I don't know nothing! Zero! ... These are the basic skills people should learn you know this is what people need to know when they hit the roads.
>
> Bart

Furthermore, 'purposeful activity' provisions rarely addressed or acknowledged the barriers to employment faced by prison-leavers as a consequence of having a criminal record, and anxieties about job searching in this context were exacerbated by awareness of increasingly competitive labour markets: 'if there's 20 man sitting down and one's got a criminal record, you think my man's going to get the job?! It's ridiculous' – Joelle. As Joelle's quote illustrates, it was common for participants to share anxieties about being discriminated against because of their criminal records. It was therefore widely accepted that self-employment was the best – and sometimes only – option ('a lot of [employers], they're just going to look at your record and think 'oh', you know what I mean? So you're going to have to go self-employed first' – Neel), although existing provisions provided little support for men pursuing this career path.

In addition to education and training activities, there were also various forms of prison work that were primarily functional and not even ostensibly 'rehabilitative'. Some participants described feelings of coercion, degradation and exploitation, and a small number invoked analogies with slave labour: 'For me, working in prison is modern day slavery. I'd prefer not to be paid; it's degrading' – Eleazar. For these men, the exploitative nature of contracts work related not only to its perceived purposelessness and low rates of remuneration (in comparison to work outside prison), but to the feeling that others – the prison and/or private businesses – were profiting disproportionately from their work: 'I was on Magic Carpets which is like a slave labour workshop. You just cut carpets for pittance while someone else profits madly off it' – Kiran.

Other participants framed prison work as exploitative because of an asymmetry of obligations between prisoners and the establishment. While participants accepted that the prison was required to fulfil contracts and reach attendance targets, for example, they also understood that it was supposed to provide sufficient and adequate 'purposeful activity' provisions, and accepted that, in turn, they as prisoners were expected to engage with and attend whatever activity they were allocated. For these men, the sense of exploitation and coercion arose from

the uneven consequences of failing to fulfil these obligations. From prisoners' perspectives, while their establishment perpetually failed to meet regulatory expectations regarding activity provisions and time out of cell without apparent without consequence, their own, personal, failure to meet the prison's expectations were dealt with consistently and punitively:

> Basically what they're saying is if you don't work in prison, you're going on basic, but what if I don't want to work?! You know what I mean?! If you don't want to work, they basically force you to work, it's like slave labour. It's like, you know, it's not educational is it, you're working for them to make them money, that's what it is, isn't it, and then they're paying us peanuts. It's not on, is it?
>
> Daniel

There were additional problems with prison work that related primarily to its practice as opposed to its purpose. While 'purposeful activity' could improve the experience of one's sentence, the inverse was equally possible, in that it could make prison less comfortable and less easy to cope with. For a small number of participants, the activity itself was physically painful,[41] while for others it was movement to and from workplaces that presented a risk of violence. The absence or loss of prison work – and its associated income and mental health benefits – also presented the potential for distress for many prisoners. More common, however, was for prisoners to highlight the psychological frustrations associated with assessment, both for and during 'purposeful activity'. Several participants recalled discovering (some time after the fact) that instructors had written negative reports about them. Louis described falling out with an instructor but believing they had dealt with it informally:

> Everything got resolved, shook hands. Then two weeks later he left…didn't say nothing to me, just left the report. It's a bit bad that, but the left report saying that I was aggressive to him and I'm not allowed back up there!
>
> Louis

With regard to assessments *for* 'purposeful activity', the vast majority of participants explained that applying for activities was routinely stressful and described how frustrating it was that they rarely (if ever) knew when or whether they would receive a response to their submissions. This was compounded when applications for jobs or courses were denied – most did not know why

[41] A prisoner in Isis who worked in mattress recycling had a long-term problem with his hand which was exacerbated by the cold (he was moved to another activity after he alerted staff).

they had been unsuccessful or who had decided. Being rejected from numerous activities without explanation bred paranoia about the fairness and reliability of allocation processes, and this was often exacerbated when men discovered that others (and sometimes *which* others) had been successful:

> [The instructor's] telling me "we've already got enough people on the course, you need to wait for this to be over so we can put you on the next course", but I'm seeing different people in there every time!
>
> Bart

Conclusion

This chapter has explored how participants experienced different forms of 'purposeful activity'. While types of activity were similar across all three sites (and broadly reflect provisions across England and Wales), the *practice* of these forms of work, education and training were highly variable due to differences between establishments and because of individual staff who facilitated them. As a consequence, similar forms of activity – a business class or art, for example – were practised in distinct ways because of the demographics of an establishment, the experience and orientation of the instructor, and other local factors such as drug use or rates of violence.

As the second part of this chapter identified, participants mostly used prison work to improve their experience of imprisonment, and not to improve their chance of securing employment post-release, despite the vast majority of men believing that the latter was *supposed* to be the primary function of prison work. By exploring four types of purpose served by 'purposeful activity', this chapter highlighted two explanations for why prison work was overwhelmingly used in this way. The conditions of contemporary imprisonment in England and Wales mean men want (and often need) a means of coping with it and/or ways to make it more comfortable. HMIP inspections of all three sites around the time of the fieldwork evidenced the challenges facing men living in each establishment: the inspection in HMPYOI Swinfen Hall conducted the year after fieldwork found 'impoverished conditions' and 'inadequate access to basic amenities' (HMIP 2017:12), as well as significantly increased rates of drug use, violence and use of force (ibid.); in HMPYOI Isis in 2016, inspectors were concerned by high levels of violence, self-harm, boredom and frustration, and noted difficulties men faced accessing 'clean kit, showers and other basics' (HMIP 2016: 6); and inspections in HMP Wealstun two years before and three year after fieldwork, reported that already easily-available drugs and new

psychoactive substances (NPS) had become more ubiquitous, and that rates of self-harm increased significantly (HMIP 2015, 2020). That 'purposeful activity' was widely used as a means of coping and comforting prisoners underlines the limited availability of alternative resources to help men manage contemporary conditions of imprisonment.

In addition to the factors that pushed men towards using 'purposeful activity' for purposes relating to their lives in prison, most participants found it difficult to identify or access 'rehabilitative' activities. Participants from across all sites felt that there were few or no opportunities that would improve their prospect of employment post-release (or that would help them save money to support them financially on release and thus reduce the need to make money illicitly again): classroom-based education was often deemed too detached from employability, while VET was often considered too basic or was unrelated to personal professional aspirations, for example. The dearth of 'rehabilitative' prison work opportunities across all three sites was explained in part by an apparent failure – locally and nationally – to understand and account for prisoners' work experiences, aspirations and anxieties, and this was exacerbated by issues with staffing and funding that impacted each establishment's ability to allocate and deliver activities effectively.

In examining the consequences of such varied purposes and practices of 'purposeful activity', this chapter identified two further themes in prison work: its relationships with status and exploitation. In terms of status, the 'high' or 'low' status of different forms of prison work broadly related to the various 'purposes' it served, with activities that 'prepared' and 'bettered' prisoners generally higher status than those that helped men cope with imprisonment. Notably, activities with the highest rates of remuneration were generally low status, both because conventionally low status and undesirable forms of work (such as factory-like contracts work and biohazard cleaning) needed to be incentivised, but also because the need to earn money in prison signified the absence of existing financial resources and support, as well as the inability to make money illicitly. However, the status men could derive from 'purposeful activity' was most reliably related to a prisoner's existing status: high-status men used their social capital to reframe and reformulate activities as high-status, and vulnerable, lower-status prisoners rarely experienced status enhancement from ostensibly high-status activities. The relationship between work and status underlines how the different purposes men could derive from prison work impacted not only what activity they engaged in but also *how* they engaged with it.

In terms of the relationship between 'purposeful activity' and exploitation, participants' frustrations at the inadequacy of contemporary opportunities were compounded by an awareness of private sector involvement in activity provisions (both in privately contracted workshops and through contracted education providers). Prison work was also framed as exploitative because of low rates of remuneration (in comparison to pay outside prison), and because of the asymmetrical obligations of the prison in comparison to prisoners. All these factors underlined prisoners' disempowerment: they were unable to challenge labour practices or pay structures and had few (if any) means to improve working conditions in the way workers in the community might be able to (through trade union organisation, for example). While men could refuse to participate in 'purposeful activity', that work, education and training are formally framed as 'rehabilitative' (by prison staff and policy makers and thus in sentence plans) meant doing so could have consequences beyond loss of earnings, as such behaviour may materially impact re-classification and release.

Prison work was therefore considered inadequate but also 'necessary': the vast majority of participants valued prison work while also finding it disappointing, uncomfortable and exploitative. While apparently contradictory, this position was not experienced as such by those undertaking 'purposeful activity'. As Goodman (2012) found with prisoner fire-fighters in California, participants in this study had long learnt 'to live with the contradictions of a state that simultaneously responsibilizes them for their deviancy while affording them progressively fewer opportunities to obtain stability' (ibid.: 370). Furthermore, despite the frustrations that routinely resulted from participants' engagement with 'purposeful activity', men across the three sites were overwhelmingly compliant with the processes surrounding prison work and in their workplaces. This approach was partly explained by the material and social benefits of prison work and the punitive consequences of resistance, but it also underlined the extent to which men relied on such activities in order to cope with the experience of imprisonment. Together, the findings presented in this chapter regarding the provisions, experiences and purposes of 'purposeful activity' suggest that men's experiences of prison work, education and training are highly personal. However, they are not random, and the following chapter identifies and explores the factors that structured prisoner masculinities and work experiences across the three sites.

5. Men at work: situating prisoners in post-industrial economies

The exploration and analysis of 'purposeful activity' demonstrated that men had varied experiences of prison work and found diverse purposes within its assorted forms. The previous chapter has shown that men seek – and have unequal access to – different forms of 'purposeful activity', and that experiences of work, education and training in prisons are highly varied as a consequence. Furthermore, in examining the meanings and purposes men derive from 'purposeful activity', it is evident that these are not necessarily inherent to the activity itself, but a consequence of how and by whom the activity is experienced. While Chapter Four discussed the *what* of prison work (what forms it takes and what purposes it can serve), this chapter considers who participates in it, in terms of the masculinities and work experiences men import into prison, and the extent to which these are embedded in specific locales. By focusing on participants' experiences and masculinities *prior* to imprisonment, this chapter provides the foundations for discussion in Chapter Six about how different masculinity 'types' shape engagement with 'purposeful activity', and how these together, prison work and prisoner masculinities relate to experiences of imprisonment more broadly.

This chapter begins by exploring the various local labour markets and labour market histories of the cities and regions where most participants were from: London, Yorkshire (Leeds and Bradford), the North West (Manchester and Liverpool), and the Midlands (Birmingham). The following section then defines and explains 'typologies', considers examples from other penological studies, and then describes how the classification presented here was developed. Four 'types' of prisoner masculinity are subsequently introduced before the latter part of the chapter considers the relationship between masculinity, work and locale, highlighting how some 'types' are more common in one city or region than in others.

Men, place and work

As sociologists including McDowell (2003, 2009), Walkerdine (2006, 2010) and Nayak (2003, 2006) have shown, masculinities are shaped by local economies and labour market histories. While some criminologists, such as Alexander (2000), Fraser (2015) and Ilan (2011; 2013), have embedded their explorations of work, criminality and young masculinities in terms of place (in London, Glasgow and Dublin respectively), few studies of *prisoner* masculinities have considered locales in this way, with research by Phillips (2012) and Maguire (2021a,

2021b) being notable exceptions. Locale also played a significant role in this study: the 'accessibility' of certain work experiences – and thus masculinities – was highly dependent on where participants had lived and grown up. Making sense of these trends requires some understanding of the histories and labour markets of the cities and regions in question.

In terms of living and working in London, there was rapid decline in the city's manufacturing sector and the loss of the docks in East London during the 1960s, 1970s and 80s (Datta, McIlwaine, Evans, Herbert, May and Wills 2007; Hobbs 2013). While work in these sectors declined nationally, losses were particularly acute in London, and as Sassen (2001) explains, this was because manufacturing jobs in London were lost not just to automation but to other parts of the country – primarily the South East – where it was cheaper to run large factories. The 1980s and 90s saw significant growth in professional, financial and business services in London, while the shift towards a service-based economy also 'fuelled demand for low-paid workers to service both the institutions of the new financial economy (as porters, cleaners and security staff, for example) and the professional and managerial elite themselves (as domestic cleaners, restaurant staff and nannies)' (Datta et al. 2007: 410). Work in London in the twenty-first century reflects how this post-industrial shift to a service-based economy facilitated significant polarisation: the most and least 'high-quality' jobs (those that are well-paid, secure and skilled) represent an increasingly significant proportion of the labour market as there is a 'hollowing out' of mid-quality opportunities, creating an 'hourglass'-shaped labour market (Goos and Manning 2007; McIntosh 2013; Lee, Sissons and Jones 2013).

Nearly three-quarters of the 23 participants from Yorkshire were from either Leeds (nine participants) or Bradford (eight participants), cities that in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries were dominated by textile production with employment in wool and cotton mills (Ballas 2004). The vast majority of these jobs were lost to deindustrialisation in the second half of the twentieth century, although Leeds adapted and emerged by the beginning of the 1990s 'as a regional capital with an expanding financial services sector [and] a continued dynamism of a strong and diversified manufacturing base' (Ballas 2004: 148). The resilience of Leeds's labour market, which continued to grow in the 1980s and 90s while nearly all cities saw a contraction of total employment, was in stark contrast to the experience in Bradford (Turok and Edge 1999). Bradford experienced considerably higher rates of redundancy and unemployment that to some extent continue to impact the city. In the twenty-first century, Leeds has seen substantial growth in finance and high-skill, managerial and professional

opportunities as well as low- and un-skilled service work, and an enduring (although declining) number of manufacturing jobs (Gonzalez and Oosterlynck 2014). This has led to a degree of polarisation similar to – although less extreme than – that which occurred in London. As a result of its dependence on finance- and construction-led growth, the 2008 financial crisis and resultant recession hit the city particularly badly, with unemployment nearly doubling between 2007 and 2009 when it reached 10 per cent (Gonzalez and Oosterlynck 2014). While job losses in Leeds were considerable, the financial sector was not hit as severely as many anticipated, with manufacturing and construction in fact suffering most.[42] By contrast, Bradford's contemporary labour market has been marked by above average rates of employment in elementary occupations, manufacturing and professional trades, as well as enduringly high rates of unemployment (Centre for Cities 2022; ONS 2022).

Fifteen participants came from the Midlands, with nine from Birmingham, where the labour market historically centred around the manufacturing and engineering of cars, metals and electrics (Pollard 2004). In the post-war era, work opportunities in these sectors increased sharply, making Birmingham (and the West Midlands more widely) a 'magnet for migrants' (Pollard 2004: 175) from both elsewhere in the UK and internationally. However, the region's dependence on manufacturing made it particularly vulnerable to deindustrialisation and the recessions and economic crises of the 1970s and 1980s (Pollard 2004),[43] with the resulting rates of unemployment particularly devastating for the region's unqualified and immigrant populations (Hall et al. 2016). Birmingham subsequently reoriented its economy towards leisure and retail, and manufacturing continues to represent a significant employment sector in the East and West Midlands including in Birmingham itself, although unemployment is also persistently high (Pollard 2004; Centre for Cities 2022; ONS 2022).

There were fewer participants from the North West (11), the majority of whom were from Greater Manchester, followed by Liverpool.[44] Manchester had a successful industrial labour market with established cotton mills, chemical and pharmaceutical producers and printing

[42] Employment in the construction sector saw a 23 per cent decline between 2008 and 2011 (Gonzalez and Oosterlynck 2014).
[43] Between 1971 and 1987, the West Midlands lost 46 per cent of its manufacturing employment, amounting to nearly 150, 000 jobs; at 20 per cent, unemployment in 1982 was twice the national average (Pollard 2004).
[44] Of the seven participants from Greater Manchester, four were from the city of Manchester, and one each was from Wigan, Bolton and Salford. Of the remaining participants from the North West, three came from Liverpool, and one from Preston.

presses, and Liverpool's economy centred around its docks. However, automation and deindustrialisation had severe consequences for the North West, leading to substantial economic decline, unemployment and 'jobs gaps' (Yates and Clark 2021). Indeed, in the 1980s and early nineties, the city of Manchester lost 19 per cent of its jobs while Liverpool lost 33 per cent (Turok and Edge 1999). Since the turn of the century, both Manchester and Liverpool have undergone significant regeneration, although this has been accompanied by high and increasing rates of low-paid work (Yates and Clark 2021).

This section has demonstrated the varied labour markets of the cities in question: London and Leeds are notable for large financial sectors (and the high-pay and high-skill opportunities these bring, alongside low-paid service work that supports such business), while Manchester, Liverpool and Birmingham are marked by relatively recent 'regeneration' efforts, and a shifting of their economies to leisure, tourism and retail (and the associated growth of low-paid, insecure work). The significance of labour market *histories,* and in particular legacies of deindustrialisation, are also evident. While London's docks and factories began closing in the 1960s, Liverpool, Manchester, Bradford and Birmingham felt the repercussions of this transition most acutely in the 1980s and 1990s. As Chapter Two demonstrated, local experiences and economic changes have an enduring impact on the ways men today find and experience work (McDowell 2003; Nayak 2006; Walkerdine 2010). In order to understand how these labour markets shaped participants in this study (and the way they adapted to and engaged with prison work and developed masculinities), this chapter will next explain and present a typology of prisoner masculinities before discussing how locale, and its relation to experiences of work, worklessness, deprivation, inequality and crime, shapes masculinities and the incidence of each 'type' in different places.

Penological typologies

A typology is a form of classification that is 'generally *multidimensional* and *conceptual*…[and] characterized by labels or names*'* (Bailey 1994: 4, emphasis in original). Typologies are a means of making sense of data by making it less complex, and while they are primarily a descriptive tool, description is 'a necessary foundation for explanation' (Bailey 1994: 15). In describing and simplifying data, typologies help social scientists identify similarities and differences between cases and types and facilitate easier comparisons between them. There are potential hazards when using typologies, such as their being static, overly simplistic or unmanageable (depending on the number of classes identified), and lacking in

universality. Typologies may also be considered reductive, of both the field and individuals within it. However, as Crewe explains, 'without some reduction into classes, the danger is that a complex social setting is presented as an undifferentiated mass of individual accounts with some hazy, central tendencies' (2009: 154). Other issues relate more to the ethics of using classification, particularly for prisoners who are routinely classified in various ways and with significant consequence for their experience of imprisonment, release, and life in the community. While many of these criticisms relate to social scientific research generally, the risks of typological analysis and description can also be minimised by – and outweighed by the benefits of – the careful selection of variables, the development of meaningful and insightful types, and the use of quotes and case studies to humanise the people comprising different groups.

Typologies have long been used in prisons research to demonstrate the diversity of responses to imprisonment, with Sykes' (1958) documentation of 'argot roles' being one of the earliest examples. Sykes' (1958) classification of prisoners as 'toughs', 'ball busters' and 'center men' – describes the different ways that men responded to the problems of imprisonment. Prisoners' 'roles' were defined in terms of institutional (or 'indigenous') factors relating to the prison's structure and organisation. In describing *roles* rather than people, Sykes' (1958) classification presents relatively faceless types or strategies that do not convey a sense of the real people 'playing' them. This is due in part to the theory's basis in the indigenous-deprivation model and related assumption that prisoners are stripped of their identities by a totalising institution. By contrast, Irwin and Cressey noted that 'observers have overlooked the dramatic effect that external behaviour patterns have on the conduct of inmates' (1962: 145), and consequently developed a typology that combined deprivation (or 'indigenous') and importation models. The resultant typology of prisoner subcultures – of which Irwin and Cressey (1962) identified three: 'thief', 'convict' and 'legitimate' – illustrated the role prisoners' existing traits and experiences played in their adaptation to prison, and provided a sense of the men on which the theory was based by using quotes and detailed descriptions of specific participants.

In terms of contemporary examples of penological typologies – and in particular those relating to prison masculinities – Crewe (2009) developed a typology of prisoner adaptations and considered issues around compliance and masculinity in an English prison, while Symkovych (2018) outlined four 'tiers' of the prisoner hierarchy in a Ukrainian prison. There are also a handful of examples of typologies relating to prison masculinities and prison work:

Bandyopadhyay (2006) describes how relationships with prison work shaped and demonstrated the masculinities of her participants in an Indian prison, and Pandeli outlines five 'types of criminals' (2015: 119) in private-contract prison workshops in a private prison in the UK. All four of these typologies explore in greater detail than earlier examples the interaction between the orientations men bring with them and the prison structure, and they illustrate more clearly the actuality of the people behind each 'type' with detailed descriptions and a wider usage of quotes. Crewe's (2009) and Bandyopadhyay's (2006) typologies in particular demonstrate the benefits of classification as a tool for describing, comparing and analysing prison masculinities, and represent a stark contrast to much other prison masculinities literature – especially in the 1990s and early twenty first century – that tended to identify or explain only one or two masculine forms. Crewe, for example, finds 'that there is no such thing as the typical prisoner' (2009: 154) and underscores the diversity and nuance of contemporary prisoner adaptations and masculinities by detailing five 'types' (and one sub-type), while Bandyopadhyay (2006) uses discussion of her 'types' to illustrate the existence of multiple hegemonies, and thus challenge the prevailing discourse at the time around the hegemony of hypermasculinity within prisons.

With regard to using a typology in this study, the theoretical value of this technique initially became apparent when in the field. While conducting research, it quickly became clear that there were very different types of men, with distinct masculinities and orientations to work that were not captured by existing research. Developing a typology to represent this nuance was a means of fleshing out these masculinities and highlighting the key contours and characteristics of these ways of being a man in prison. In terms of the practical benefits of this method, the large number of participants involved, and the comparative nature of the research design, meant the development of a typology made the data more manageable and facilitated the identification of key differences and similarities between cases and groups. The typology was developed inductively, although it was also informed by existing literature and an earlier study on the same topic (Morey 2015; Morey and Crewe 2018). First, participants' experiences, behaviours, orientations and aspirations – both in prison and outside – were considered, with particular focus on licit, illicit and prison-based work. Analysis was then conducted using Merton's (1938) theory of the acceptance or elimination of 'culture goals' and the use (or not) of 'institutional means' to achieve them. Four types – *tradesmen, entrepreneurs, soldiers* and *strugglers* – were identified. In naming these groupings, work orientation-related nouns, rather than verbs, were selected. Using nouns was intended to underline that each type represents

people and identities that were relatively rigid (although participants could feasibly change 'type' over time), as opposed to 'strategies' that participants had chosen or could frequently switch between. These 'types' are *polythetic*, meaning they do 'not contain cases that are identical on all variables' and that participants were grouped 'by overall greatest similarity' (Bailey 1994: 7). As with other conceptual qualitative research, the identification of polythetic cases meant there were a number of participants on the 'borderline' of multiple 'types'. For example, Nise was classified as a *tradesman* despite having no licit work experience, because he had spent time training full-time for a sports career, was young (meaning he had had less opportunity to engage in licit work), and corresponded with other *tradesman* features.

As the typology was developed on the basis of factors relating to participants' lives, identities and behaviours both before imprisonment and while in prison, this chapter will focus exclusively on the former, before the final chapter considers how men adapt their masculinities to the prison context, and explores the role, experience and meaning of 'purposeful activity' for each 'type'. The degree to which this research describes and analyses participants' lives and identities outside prison marks a point of difference from many existing studies of prisoner masculinities (with Phillips' (2012), Sloan's (2016b) and Maguire's (2021a) research notable exceptions). Doing so presents an opportunity to build on the theoretical insights from non-criminological studies of (work and) masculinities and to situate participants' experiences within specific locales, cultures and labour markets, which in turn means the research is able to provide a novel contribution to the field of prison masculinities.

The first four sections below each begin by outlining the relevant 'constructed' (rather than 'ideal') type: 'a description of the most commonly found characteristics…analogous to a measure of central tendency such as a mean, rather than to the end point of a continuum, as is the ideal type' (Bailey 1994: 10). This is followed by in-depth descriptions of a handful of typical participants from the group who were selected to highlight the fundamental tenets of the 'type' as well as some of the ways in which members of the group differed from one another. As Crewe explained regarding the presentation of his own typology, 'the use of case studies to illustrate each type demonstrates their empirical grounding and their lived authenticity' (2009: 155) and helps avoid the 'reification' of 'theoretical constructs that do not exist empirically' (Bailey 1994: 15).

Tradesmen

The first type – *tradesmen* – represented nearly a quarter of the sample (23 per cent; $n = 20$). In terms of demographics, men in this group were disproportionately likely to be white and from outside London.[45] Most *tradesmen* had stable upbringings in communities where most people were engaged in licit work and there was little crime or violence. *Tradesmen's* parents usually worked, with many self-employed or running their own small businesses, and it was common for men in this group to cite their father as their role model. Men in this group tended to have close relationships with their family and described a reliable support network of people that had and would continue to help them personally and professionally. Outside the home, few *tradesmen* had enjoyed school, although many said they had been popular and on sports teams (usually football), and they were the group least likely to have been expelled or excluded. Post-education, *tradesmen* moved immediately into licit employment, and being a hard worker became a central tenet of their masculinity. The jobs *tradesmen* embarked on were not necessarily 'trades': they were varied and included skilled and unskilled manual labour as well as service work. While *tradesmen* did not enjoy every job they had done, they had at some point found an occupation they identified with.

In terms of their illicit work experiences, *tradesmen* did not identify as 'criminals'. While some simply avoided acknowledging their convictions or protested their innocence, others admitted their offences but framed them as one-off mistakes (and often saw others as responsible instead). There were, however, some distinctions between the types of offences men in this group were serving sentences for, which meant *tradesmen* usually fell into one of two sub-types. The first comprised men who, despite being committed to licit work, had become involved in (mostly non-violent) profitable crime, such as drug dealing or fraud – usually over relatively short periods of time and often while still in licit employment. These men tended to be serving their first sentence and had rarely, if ever, been involved in the criminal justice system before. *Tradesmen* in the second sub-type explained they only ever made money through licit employment. These men were serving sentences for violent, sexual or driving offences, and because such convictions rarely related directly to experiences of work, many avoided talking about them in detail (or at all). The nature of offending, and length of time they had been involved in it, varied quite considerably with *tradesmen* in this sub-group: some, like

[45] 75 per cent ($n = 15$) of men in this type were white, in comparison to 55 per cent ($n = 43$) of the sample as a whole, and only 10 per cent ($n = 3$) of Londoners corresponded to the *tradesman* type.

Ryan, described one-off drink driving incidents, while others, like Dean, had more extensive criminal histories. The factor that meant these men were classified as *tradesmen*, however, was that they had rarely benefitted financially from crime, which – as Dean explained – was because their licit work meant they did not need to:

> I did a lot of things like burglary, robbery, sort of sold a little bit of drugs, but I never really made money off of it. I didn't really need to make money off it…like, burglaries I done most of the time because I was drunk or just for the fun of it. Robberies, again, coz I was drunk, just for the fun of it, just for being an idiot. I never really made a penny.
>
> Dean

Tradesmen were also discernible by their modest aspirations for the future: most conceded that great wealth was likely unattainable through the licit incomes at their disposal, but they sought out and valued financial stability and the means to provide for themselves and their families. Being able to support their family reflected the importance *tradesmen* placed on the traditional male breadwinner role, respectability and being 'decent' – and while breadwinning depended on how much they earnt, the latter values were achievable through the practice of work itself. The *tradesman* type therefore represented a traditional working-class masculinity developed in a context where the means of embodying this practice were scarce: they had 'learned to labour' (Willis 1977) in economies where there were not only no longer 'jobs for life', but few jobs at all (McDowell 2003; Nayak 2003). While the limited involvement most men in this group had with criminality meant this was not a protest masculinity, *tradesmen's* limited access to cultural or economic capital meant they reaped little patriarchal benefit or power over other men and instead occupied a marginalised but 'complicit' form of masculinity (Connell 1995; Connell and Messerschmidt 2012).

Murray, Ryan and Paul were all 'typical' *tradesmen*. Murray – a white man in his mid-twenties – had grown up in the South East with his parents and siblings. Throughout school, he had been bullied and struggled to make friends ('I didn't have the confidence to go into classes, they spread rumours about me and things'). Murray left school as soon as he finished his GCSEs and went to a Further Education college instead. During this time, Murray also completed a course that enabled him to start doing security work part-time, which he enjoyed greatly and felt he excelled at because of his interpersonal skills: 'I could talk to people, and communication is the biggest thing in security…they said I was good, I did well in the job'.

Security work not only helped Murray's confidence but was a way for him 'to tell the bullies that I'm not going to be bullied anymore, I'm going to sort of put my foot down'. As with other *tradesmen,* Murray's job was also a means of achieving and demonstrating respectability – particularly to his family ('I definitely did it to make the family proud'). Although Murray eventually quit his job after having a knife pulled on him ('I thought, this isn't my life, I'm not going to risk my life, I don't get paid enough'), he enjoyed the financial security employment brought him. Reflecting the modest aspirations typical of *tradesmen,* Murray described wanting to follow in his parents' footsteps and 'try and live the life that they're living'. This did not require high levels of expenditure, however, and Murray explained he had not known what to do with his income (he gave some to his mum, bought gifts for his girlfriend and stocked up on uniform).

While Murray was earnest and self-effacing, Ryan – a white man from London in his mid-twenties – was more easy-going and talkative. Ryan was sporty and described his time at school mostly in terms of football – what team he was on, where his friends played, different tournaments. As was typical of *tradesmen,* watching his parents work while he grew up was formative for Ryan and the value he placed on work ethic and respectability:

> … we used to have to go to work on the weekends on the market stall and we learnt from early you have to work for your money. So we was always brought up with that work ethic and it's taught me a lot if I'm honest, because it's always made me want to have to get up and go, and motivation to go and work, and to be a somebody.

After finishing his GCSEs, Ryan was offered a competitive apprenticeship and he jumped at the chance to leave formal education: 'I was always hands-on. I left school and went straight to work manually...Academically, I'm not the smartest but I'm good with my hands'. However, the apprenticeship required Ryan to live away from home for long periods of time and the starting salary (as an apprentice) was minimal, so after around 18 months he quit and moved back home. As was common with *tradesmen* who had committed one-off non-sexual offences, Ryan looked back on past life-decisions like this regretfully: 'it was a thing where I was quite, my mindset was still immature, because I should have stuck it out, I would have been on £1,000 a week if I stuck to the end'. *Tradesmen* like Ryan were pensive about turning points like these, and there was a sense that they felt having made different choices might have avoided their subsequent offence and imprisonment. Back in London, Ryan began working in recycling. While he enjoyed his job, Ryan also 'thought it was a dead end', so after suffering a serious

accident at work he received compensation and quit. Once he had recovered from his injuries, Ryan started to work as a driver – he saw this as his career and was proud of what he had achieved at a young age:

> I was one of the youngest drivers in England to work for [the company] because they take drivers on with a lot of experience…they're high-end company, they're big they're all over the UK... it was hard to get in with them and I got in with them.

Ryan worked as a driver for over a year before he was in a near-fatal drink-driving accident that led to his conviction. After the accident and before he went to prison – aware that his driving ban would mean he could not return to driving work for a number of years – Ryan completed a qualification in a new industry that would enable him to go straight to work post-release. Ryan's commitment to work was emblematic of *tradesmen's* masculinities: being a successful man meant 'grafting' and having a strong work-ethic and licit income ('I've been on a good annual salary in two different jobs, and they're not just overnight! I've worked at them for a couple of years…I've always gone to work' – Ryan).

As with Ryan and Murray, Paul found his upbringing in Yorkshire pleasant but unremarkable: 'a quiet life really, just a normal life'. A reserved but self-assured white man in his early thirties, Paul was raised by his mother (who was 'quite strict' but also his 'best friend'). Paul described himself as a child as 'always an outdoors kid, never a computer lad' – he loved sport, particularly football, and this aided his popularity at school: 'I was always like you know one of the best at sport, properly bright, always had friends'. During high school, however, Paul lost interest in education and dropped out before taking his GCSEs to start working:

> I left when my National Insurance card came…I started working for my uncle…it was all the easy work I was doing, really you could call it apprentice work…I was always put in a van with someone who was just round the local area yeah and I loved it. I thought of myself as a little man…some of my pals were still at school and I was working, getting a wage so I thought yeah, I was brilliant at the time.

Over the next 10 years, Paul was employed in a number of different jobs ('I could tell you about 100 jobs that I've had'). Paul mostly did unskilled manual work, including warehouse work, and he actively avoided the service sector ('I didn't like stuff like that…yeah, classroom and office no, not for me'). In his mid-twenties, Paul embarked on a career in personal training: 'I had a friend's older brother what were doing it…he had a nice car at the time, his lifestyle, I

thought it was something I've always been into, sports, and I always like going to the gym'. After completing the necessary qualifications, Paul built a client base through word of mouth and started to make a decent living. In his spare time, he enjoyed going to town with friends to drink and go clubbing ('just doing what single lads do really'), and occasionally this led to fighting, for which Paul was once arrested (although he was never charged with an offence). It was in this period that Paul became involved in money-laundering, which eventually led to his prison sentence. That Paul profited from his offending was unusual for *tradesmen*, although the discourse of self-reliance, and specifically of not relying on illicit work, was still present. Paul was adamant that he lived comfortably on his personal trainer income, and that the proceeds of money-laundering merely meant he could afford a 'better' and more comfortable lifestyle: 'if you wanted better clothes or you wanted to go out for a nice meal…you know, instead of thinking 'bills next week', and then once you've done that you get used to that kind of living'. Paul pleaded guilty immediately and felt he was sentenced harshly. As was typical of *tradesmen*, when discussing his offence, Paul was at pains to demonstrate his difference from 'real' criminals, a sentiment that further underlined Paul's sense of unfairness about his treatment by the criminal justice system: 'I never expected to get a sentence like this, you know. I'm not a drug dealer, I'm not violent, I just had money in my house'.

Entrepreneurs

Entrepreneurs were the smallest group, representing 18 per cent (n = 16) of men in the sample, and they were disproportionately likely to be Black, and from London.[46] Men in this group were charismatic and self-aware, and they made efforts to underline their emotional and academic intelligence. *Entrepreneurs* were also cultural omnivores, identifiable by varied tastes and social connections that they presented as evidence of their exceptionalism – they were enduringly positive, ambitious and confident, and framed every aspect of their life as a meaningful part of their journey to greatness. Men in this group were also analytical and reflective – about society as well as their own experiences, emotions and personalities. In terms of their lives outside prison, as with *tradesmen, entrepreneurs* had comfortable and happy childhoods, often in locales where crime and violence were uncommon. Primary school had been enjoyable, and *entrepreneurs* often excelled academically and socially. Secondary school, however, tended to mark a turning point: *entrepreneurs* became intrigued by money and status

[46] 69 per cent (n = 11) of *entrepreneurs* were Black, despite Black participants representing only 28 per cent (n = 25) of the sample as a whole, and 63 per cent (n = 10) were from London, despite Londoners comprising just 34 per cent (n = 30) of the sample.

could be achieved through fighting and criminality. Despite this, education was enduringly important to *entrepreneurs*, and the vast majority had completed their GCSEs and gone on to Further Education colleges, with some continuing to university.

As adults, *entrepreneurs* had engaged in a mixture of licit and illicit work. While men in this group had had diverse licit work experiences (many in the catering or service sectors), their illicit work had invariably been drug dealing. *Entrepreneurs* had initially enjoyed drug-dealing and the financial and social opportunities it presented, and tended to explain drug-dealing as akin to running a business that involved sales, interpersonal skills and some management of more junior workers (although many worked alone in order to minimise risks). Over time, however, this work became stressful. In part, this was because *entrepreneurs* could contrast illicit work experiences with licit ones, and while such jobs presented their own frustrations, men in the group appreciated they had provided unproblematic incomes, with (relative) regularity, and the potential to make loved ones proud. Licit success and respect were important to *entrepreneurs*, so while few had fully desisted from dealing, all men in this group presented illicit work as only ever having been temporary. Within this narrative many *entrepreneurs* portrayed their time in prison as potentially beneficial and as an 'opportunity'.

Just as *tradesmen* sought to differentiate themselves from 'real' criminals, *entrepreneurs* sought to distinguish themselves from 'usual' drug dealers, who they described as violent, gang-affiliated men wholly committed to criminality. Some *entrepreneurs* emphasised the different sorts of drugs they had sold (marijuana or 'party drugs' like ecstasy) or their contrasting clientele (students or wealthy city workers). Others acknowledged they had behaved like 'usual' drug dealers when they were younger but explained they had changed. Ultimately, however, *entrepreneurs* accounted for these differences with reference to their being more mature, intelligent and sophisticated than their drug dealing peers, and by explaining that they had always seen such work as short-term and a means of facilitating future – licit – work. While men in this group bore some resemblance to Reid's (2017) 'humble trappers', the *entrepreneur* was more progressive and 'softer' than the 'badman' masculinity she describes, largely because of their focus on licit and mainstream success and status. Bakkali's (2022) research on 'road capitals' was therefore particularly relevant to *entrepreneurs.* As Bakkali (2022) explains, young men involved in drug dealing and 'road life' – as *entrepreneurs* were – sought to exchange economic, social and cultural 'road capital' to make transitions to wider social spaces. As Bakkali states, there were various barriers to this

strategy, but it ultimately underlined the 'highly aspirant nature of street affected youth and the tremendous creative energy they have mobilised in order to…attempt to renegotiate their terms of inclusion' (2022: 432).

As a reflective, chatty and charismatic extrovert who seemed immediately at ease, Kelsey – a young Black man from Yorkshire – exemplified *entrepreneur* personality traits. Somewhat atypically for *entrepreneurs,* Kelsey's father made his living dealing marijuana and had been in and out of prison throughout Kelsey's childhood.[47] Despite this, and being separated, Kelsey's parents had an amicable relationship and he saw his father regularly when he was out of prison. Kelsey's home life was otherwise stable and comfortable, and as a youngster he had enjoyed and excelled at school. In his early teens, Kelsey's mum moved him and his siblings to a different part of Yorkshire. At his new school, Kelsey began acting up and was eventually sent to a Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) for a month until his mother got him a place at a school back in his home city. Kelsey completed his GCSEs before unsuccessfully applying for a vocational course at a local college.

Following this disappointment, Kelsey felt he 'didn't have any other options' and so found himself 'stranded, with nothing to do for a couple of months'. Without any structure or opportunities organised in the foreseeable future, Kelsey began 'making money the way you shouldn't…selling weed, little car thefts'. While he had dabbled in some of these activities before, it became 'more like a full-time job' at this point. Kelsey explained that he did not find his illicit work stressful and doing it with friends meant they would always find something to interest them, 'whether it's going for a walk or going on our bikes somewhere', if they became bored. Making money this way was largely opportunistic and not hugely profitable ('we wasn't rolling in the money…we weren't no top kingpins and stuff, but, you know, we had everything we needed, we could eat whenever we wanted…[had] weed…electricity'). Eventually, Kelsey was arrested for an impulsive, drunken robbery and served a short custodial sentence before turning 20.

Between his first and his current sentence, Kelsey had completed a personal training course and been employed in a variety of jobs including as a cleaner, in a fast-food restaurant, in call

[47] Most *entrepreneurs* either did not have a relationship with their father, or their father had done licit work.

centres and in sales. Despite his personal training qualification, Kelsey had struggled to find work in this sector ('never mind not getting the job, I didn't get an *interview!*'), but after further research into this career, decided he wanted to pursue further education in order to work in sports as a physical therapist, an aspiration to which he remained committed. Kelsey's licit employment was interspersed with periods of illicit work, chiefly robberies and selling cannabis, although he was adamant these episodes never overlapped: 'If I don't get a job straight away…my time of earning money is occupied another way. Most of the time it has been by the opportunity of cannabis'. When discussing the future, Kelsey was committed to engaging only in licit work post-release, in part because he planned to get married ('I need to get a job ASAP to fund the wedding!').

Another typical *entrepreneur,* who was younger and slightly less outgoing than Kelsey, was Tarek, an Asian man from the North West. Well-behaved throughout most of his education and achieving good GCSEs, towards the end of school, Tarek began 'messing about' and 'drifting off into the bad environment around the wrong people'. Tarek's parents were small business owners and his father had tried to keep him off the streets (and out of trouble) by finding a part-time job with a family friend in a fast-food takeaway. Tarek had worked hard at the takeaway for a number of years while at school and in college before he and a friend began drug dealing. This illicit work funded a 'good lifestyle' for Tarek ('eating good, driving good, looking good') but it also brought 'bad attention' and the risk of violence and robbery ('people want to have some of your cake, so you've got a cake then they want a slice too, cheeky bastards…they love to try and set you up!'). As a result, Tarek had become involved in drug dealing-related violence to protect both his safety and profits: 'if someone comes out with a gun…you're going to retaliate…send out a message to all the other people who are sitting there plotting to have a slice of your cake'). Tarek had stopped drug dealing of his own accord ('I realised that this isn't me, isn't lasting, it's not good, and then I fixed up and sorted myself out') and begun manual work with a family member, which he had enjoyed and persevered with until his imprisonment.[48] Had he not come to prison, Tarek expected he would have continued down this new career path: 'I was making money the right way so I would have stayed, and I would have started my own business…I would have tried making good money'.

[48] Tarek was serving a sentence for a non-violent and non-financial offence he said he did not commit.

Like Kelsey and Tarek, Alexander – a Black man from London in his mid-twenties – had a relatively untroubled upbringing. Raised with his siblings by a single mother who did 'what she loves to do' for work, Alexander described having a 'tight, close-knit' family and 'not a care in the world'. As a child, Alexander portrayed himself as 'always good…quite shy as a kid, I wouldn't really talk much', although he saw himself as outgoing now. At primary school, Alexander was popular and well-behaved:

> *Everyone* I would say was my friend in primary school. I never got into no trouble with nobody. I don't know, I seemed to get along with everyone, anywhere I go. That's what my mum used to say – I could just make friends like that, it's mad, it's just my character.

In secondary school, Alexander started 'mixing with the wrong crowd': a group of friends who would bunk off school and get involved in fights. After a few years Alexander transferred elsewhere, but his reputation (and behaviour) followed him, leading to exclusions and eventually expulsion before completing his GCSEs. As was typical of *entrepreneurs,* Alexander presented himself as self-assured, although he was also analytic, both about how it felt to be 'confident' and about the consequences of being popular and a 'leader'. In terms of the impact Alexander's social status had on his life after being expelled from school, befriending new peers and fighting more was 'a lot of fun', and it meant he started getting 'a lot of attention' and feeling 'cool' and 'big'. This enabled Alexander to become 'more of an aggressive person, because I had my team behind me. I could kick off and I know I've got like 10 other guys that are going to jump in'. During this period, Alexander developed a reputation amongst male peers as 'that guy [people] wouldn't really want to mess around' and with girls as 'yeah I like that guy, he's kind of got authority'.

Outside school, Alexander and his friends would smoke, drink, go to parties, have fights and sell drugs. Mixing in crowds where there was a lot of territorial violence, including the use of weapons, led to Alexander being the victim of two serious stabbings before he turned 16. Alexander described the attacks themselves as frightening and traumatic, but he noted that they also increased his popularity – something which Alexander found simultaneously enjoyable and alarming: 'I went back to school on my crutches and some girls was coming up to me 'I like you, I like you because you've been stabbed' [laughing] I was like oh my god! Are you serious?! That's the only reason you like me?! That's disgusting!'. While Alexander's

involvement with violence was unusual amongst *entrepreneurs*, his thoughtful reflections on these experiences was representative of men in this group.

After finishing school, Alexander ended up at a college where he knew fewer people and took the opportunity to mix in different circles: 'I'd been hanging around with the wrong crowd for too long, I needed to branch out…I don't mind chilling with the nerds. So I went…and done music [at college] with the nerds!'. By the time he completed his course, territorial and drug-related violence had died down ('we started to mature, like now times there's no group…everyone's got a life'). Alexander applied for various jobs, which led to a catering apprenticeship and various positions in retail and warehouses through agencies. However, Alexander's jobs were precarious and poorly paid and he wanted to be able to buy clothes and socialise with friends, so began illicit drug-dealing work alongside his employment. In his early twenties, Alexander found out his girlfriend was pregnant and began to feel under more financial pressure. When he struggled to find consistent licit work outside work outside of the agencies he had used before, Alexander turned to 'full-time' drug dealing:

> I thought woah! If I can't get a job, I need some sort of income, no matter what, and drugs were the only option I had. It was either sell drugs or be broke, so I thought I'm going to sell drugs because I've got responsibilities.

After 18 months or so of selling drugs 'full effect' (when it was 'like a proper job') Alexander was arrested and given his first (and current) sentence. Missing out on time with his child and his nephews while on prison meant Alexander wanted to return to education post-release ('education is good for your future, it's a passport to the future') – in the hope that this would facilitate a better life for his family: 'I would be probably be happy in life if I've got a good job, good haircut, my child is doing well then once I've got everything sorted…then I can consider having another child'.

Soldiers

At a third of the sample (n = 29), *soldiers* represented the largest and most ethnically/racially diverse type.[49] Men in this group had mostly grown up in inner cities in economically deprived

[49] Black and white participants each comprised of 34 per cent (n = 10) of the *soldier* type, and men from all ethnicities included in the study were represented in this group.

areas (disproportionately in London and surrounding counties)[50] where they had been exposed to violence and crime from a young age. *Soldiers* routinely described witnessing or being involved in traumatic experiences as children or teenagers, sometimes inside the home and sometimes with peers. It was common for *soldiers* to describe themselves as having misbehaved in school from a young age, with the result that the majority of this group had been expelled from mainstream provisions and sent to PRUs. After leaving education (often involuntarily but not reluctantly), *soldiers* generally dedicated themselves to drug dealing and/or robberies, often recruited by 'elders' from organised groups from their immediate locale. Many *soldiers* described their illicit careers as a series of 'graduations', from selling sweets or cigarettes in school to weed and then crack cocaine and heroin, and sometimes then to robberies of other drug dealers. It was commonplace for *soldiers* to have been involved in violence as both victims and perpetrators through this work, often with tragic and life-changing consequences. *Soldiers* were reluctant to label these experiences as painful or frightening though, and instead described extreme and often weaponised violence with blasé, casual, and matter-of-fact language.

A small number of *soldiers* had made efforts to move away from their illicit careers and find formal employment, particularly as they got older. This usually involved moving to a new area away from friends, associates, and family, and although these relatively extreme lifestyle changes tended to be effective for a short while, they had not been viable longer term. There were several reasons why so few *soldiers* had considered, sought, or sustained employment. First, *soldiers'* illicit work was all-consuming, both emotionally and in terms of time, and this was compounded as their activities escalated and became riskier. Second, *soldiers'* illicit work paid well, meaning there was no financial need for formal employment, particularly the kind of jobs they felt they would be able to get given their lack of qualifications and experience. Third, *soldiers* identified with their work and often described themselves as drug dealers, criminals, or robbers. *Soldiers* used discussions about illicit work to exemplify their skills and masculinity – their resilience, strength, resourcefulness, and willingness to take risks and make sacrifices.

[50] 66 per cent (n = 19) of *soldiers* were from London, Essex or the South East despite men from these locales comprising only 44 per cent (n = 39) of the wider sample.

Soldiers were typified by their desire to be self-sufficient and provide for loved ones as well as to be able to gain status through conspicuous consumption. These values related to *soldiers'* fears around being under-estimated, pitied or looked down upon, and to avoid this, *soldiers* tended to take responsibility for their actions and emphasise the extent to which they had chosen their criminal careers. Overall, *soldiers* were resilient problem-solvers who positioned themselves morally as neither 'good' nor 'bad' but as neoliberal actors who took advantage of opportunities to make money and earn respect. They were aware of their relative deprivation and the limited opportunities available to them, and described a sense that it was fair for them reject 'shit work' and use the resources at their disposal to protect themselves and their families both financially and physically. In many ways, *soldiers* resembled Reid's (2017, 2023) 'trappers', in that they were vulnerable young men who had developed a masculinity that offered 'some remedy to existential suffering' (2023: 176). However, *soldiers'* illicit careers also had significant costs, including that they bred paranoia and were often extremely stressful (one *soldier* described being diagnosed with stress-induced alopecia). As with Reid's participants, while some *soldiers* had made efforts to find licit employment, opportunities were scarce, and their illicit work experiences left many 'unequipped for a socio-economic life that demands the performance of niceties' (2023: 176), which ultimately elongated their transitions to adulthood.

Fraser and Israel were typical soldiers who had experienced trauma throughout their lives, both at home and in local communities. Fraser – a young white man from a deprived urban area in the North West – was unpretentious, frank and matter of fact during interview. As a result of domestic violence in his parents' house, Fraser had lived with his grandmother since he was a toddler. Growing up with older brothers who had served or were currently serving prison sentences, Fraser aspired to criminality and always had 'someone to lead me to the path I wanted'. Fraser did not 'blame' his brothers or their influence for his criminal experiences, instead steadfastly framing his offending as very much his own choice and responsibility. Fraser was anti-authority and easily bored at school. As he got older, Fraser started fighting, which led to his expulsion from various schools and PRUs. Fraser was a promising footballer as a child, but lost interest in sport once he became involved with older boys in his area who introduced him to drugs, petty crime and anti-social behaviour. After leaving school without qualifications, Fraser quickly became known to local police and was arrested regularly. Fraser never considered getting a licit job and after a few years began dealing drugs instead, which he felt was considerably easier, quicker and more profitable than formal employment. Drug-

dealing risked violence and injury, but Fraser normalised this and discussed physical risks casually and fatalistically ('you're gonna shoot them, they're gonna shoot you'). Furthermore, Fraser's work afforded him and his girlfriend the lifestyles they desired ('I want the better things in life, the better brands') and enabled him to financially support family members.

As with other *soldiers,* Fraser's thoughts about his past and future were dominated by a fear of poverty and deprivation. Therefore, while Fraser had begun to consider desisting from crime because of the impact it had on loved ones (the police raiding his nan's house and his brother getting arrested because of him, for example), he remained unconvinced because of the likely loss of income and instead discussed how he could minimise the undesirable outcomes of crime (e.g. by dealing outside of his local area). Fraser was open and reflective in talking about post-release aspirations and did not pretend that he was committed to finding licit employment:

> … if I was offered a job now, I'd take it, but I know I can sell drugs and make 1k in half an hour when a job offers that in a week, so I'll take the risk, or I would have done. I dunno…it's kinda worth it for the money!

Israel – a mixed-race man from a city in the West Midlands – was charismatic, mature, and used more emotional language than many other *soldiers.* Like Fraser, Israel spent much of his childhood living with his grandparents and was particularly close to his grandmother, 'that person I could always go to and speak and vent how I'm feeling no matter what'. When his grandmother became ill, Israel moved in with his father who was violent to both Israel and his stepmother. By his late teens, Israel's father's substance misuse issues escalated and led to Israel moving in with a girlfriend. Unusually for *soldiers,* Israel stayed in education until taking his GCSEs, although he had been confined to a separate unit within the school because of disruptive and violent behaviour ('I was the head honcho down there!'). From a young age, Israel was 'robbed quite a bit' and then began robbing other young people, because as he started to feel that 'trying to be kind and nice to everybody is not the in thing to do'. This escalated quickly, and Israel 'started to get involved in gang culture', carrying knives and guns and engaging in violence and crime. After leaving school, Israel made some efforts to engage in education and licit work by starting a college course and getting a job at a fast-food restaurant, although these only lasted a month and a week respectively. Around this time, Israel's grandmother passed, which led him to 'delve deeper into the life of crime' drug dealing and doing robberies.

Israel excelled at his illicit work and 'was seeing so much money', but this success also contributed to inter- and intra-gang frictions which led to Israel becoming both a perpetrator and victim of serious violence. While some altercations were about money, Israel explained it was mostly 'about showing who's the hardest…who could just be the most meanest, baddest gang member'. The violence Israel described was ruthless and extreme, had often involved weapons, and resulted in multiple friends' deaths as well as Israel himself being stabbed and shot at numerous times. Israel described these violent experiences unemotionally, in a way that was typical for *soldiers*: 'it was just a whirlwind…shootings, stabbings, friends dying here and there, people getting locked up, people getting 35 years'. Overall, Israel enjoyed the 'thug lifestyle' and the financial rewards it offered, although it had been 'stressful' at times and led to multiple prison sentences. Israel also described how his illicit work meant he had 'a bit more of a persona to try and portray', which meant his 'happy side never really come out unless I was around my friends or family'. Indeed, the emotive way Israel talked about loved ones represented a stark contrast to his discussions of crime and violence.

Josiah was a small, inexpressive but quietly confident young Black man from London who described himself as a 'normal' kid 'always making jokes…making other people laugh…kind of a class clown'. Josiah described growing up in a happy household with his mother and sister in an area that 'wasn't really that bad'. Once Josiah started secondary school he met children 'that grew up in a badder area' who introduced him to crime and violence, which changed his outlook on life: '[they] would be like 'there was a shooting the other day'…and I'd be thinking rah! This is actually mad, like, this mad stuff actually does happen, because I didn't really see it when I was mad young'. Josiah 'got attracted to the bad stuff' and his behaviour in school deteriorated to the point that he was expelled. As was common for *soldiers,* Josiah subsequently attended a PRU until he stopped attending any form of education altogether. While Josiah and his mother were close ('I felt like I could speak to my mum, I didn't feel like I had to hide anything from her'), she was a poor disciplinarian ('if someone told her that I was doing bad she wouldn't believe it…she was really, not *soft,* but she weren't really hard on me') so despite efforts to encourage him back to education, he was 'too far gone by then'.

Josiah progressed to being 'on road just living life, doing what I wanted when I wanted', which involved 'girls and drugs mostly'. Josiah found dealing marijuana easy and necessary ('everyone's smoking so you can make money with it…obviously you have to feed your habit kind of thing so obviously you had to make money. I'm not going to ask my mum for money

to buy weed!'), but quickly graduated from this 'chilled' lifestyle to more serious drugs and extreme violence: 'everyone was changing…people were actually getting shot and guns were more common and weed weren't enough money'. While this escalation was primarily described as a means to funding a stereotypically *soldier* lifestyle involving extravagant conspicuous consumption and carrying a gun, Josiah explained that it was also exciting: 'the adrenaline, shootings and stuff like that, adrenaline rush, it gets addictive'). Through this 'addiction', Josiah became heavily involved in serious locale-based violence. While he enjoyed feeling powerful ('bare times, big men think because you're a little boy…and then when you pull out your firearm you see their face change, they're fucking shitting themselves and you think, 'who's the big man now?''), it also bred fear about revenge attacks ('I can't go to the shop without [my firearm], and just, yeah, mad paranoid'). As other *soldiers* often described, this lifestyle was physically and emotionally exhausting: 'it gets tiring, sometimes it gets stressful…it's like I always have to look over my shoulder'. Josiah explained that sometimes he wanted to change ('you just want to be normal'), but also felt that doing so would require moving to a new city where he could be anonymous, and that this would be expensive and logistically difficult (he also later denied that he ever found the lifestyle stressful). When Josiah was caught with a firearm and sent to prison before turning 20, he said 'no one was really surprised'.

Strugglers

Just over a quarter of participants (n = 23) were *strugglers*, and they were overwhelmingly white and from Yorkshire or the North West.[51] *Strugglers* tended to have experienced acute deprivation as children and had chaotic upbringings, often with parents who had substance misuse issues and/or were involved in domestic violence. As a result, *strugglers* were the most likely to have experienced the care system and to have been raised by family members other than their parents. Difficulties at home contributed to disrupted and disruptive school experiences, and most *strugglers* were excluded at various points prior to leaving education altogether – which was usually before turning 16. Stability – financial, emotional and professional – remained elusive throughout *strugglers'* lives, and as young adults, this manifested in fragmented work experiences involving a mixture of licit and illicit work. Most of the licit work *strugglers* undertook was unskilled, insecure and poorly paid, and they rarely

[51] 83 per cent (n = 19) of *strugglers* were white, and 73 per cent (n = 17) were from Yorkshire or the North West.

stayed in the same job for more than a few months. In terms of illicit means of making money, unlike other groups who engaged in specific types of criminality, *strugglers'* experiences were marked by opportunism and lacked organisation or specialisation. *Strugglers'* haphazard approach to illicit work impacted its financial viability which in turn had consequences for their lifestyles, personal relationships, mental and physical health and their masculinities. Rather than being identifiable by their professional or criminal experiences, *strugglers* were therefore discernible by disorganisation, insecurity and volatility – in both their work and personal lives: many *strugglers* described themselves as having a temper and detailed violent incidents where they had 'snapped' (Mikey) or 'blacked out' (Jamie). *Strugglers* were also the most likely to report using drugs (aside from marijuana, which was used across the sample) and to identify addiction as a motivation for crime.

While other participants articulated relatively clear ideas of themselves and their masculinities, *strugglers* lacked confidence and presented the least coherent identities. *Strugglers* were open about their anxieties, particularly concerning their personal relationships and moral status (being 'good'). In terms of relationships, *strugglers* were the most likely to have children and they spoke more than other men about concerns for the wellbeing of their partners, children and other family members. With regard to being 'good', *strugglers* were more likely than other men to describe feeling shame and regret for past actions, including criminal behaviour. *Strugglers* framed their pasts in terms of morality and tended to present themselves as being a good person who was trying to make amends, which contrasted with other men's emphasis on professional and financial success: 'I'm a good person. If I see someone's upset, I have to make sure they're alright, things like that. I'm sympathetic' – Jamie. The self-effacement typical of *strugglers* meant they often took time to 'warm-up' in interviews. In general, though, *strugglers* went on to express emotions more freely than others – especially about romantic relationships and incidents that upset them – and they were particularly willing to identify their own vulnerabilities and experiences of deprivation. *Strugglers* shared many similarities to the vulnerable and marginalised masculinities described by Maguire (2021), in that there was little sense of 'choice' in their trajectories. As in Maguire's (2021) research, the *struggler* corresponded to a (usually) un-spectacular form of protest masculinity that represented and served to reproduce their exclusion and deprivation (Connell 1995).

Jamie and Mikey both grew up with parents who were drug addicts, which eventually led to Jamie living with his grandmother and Mikey being fostered. Jamie – a white man in his late

teens – became very emotional during interview and cried while describing traumatic incidents from his childhood ('I've seen horrible things, so I've always been older than my age'). As a younger teen, Jamie had done informal, cash-in-hand labouring alongside his father (who – despite his drug addiction – had 'always been a worker, always worked for his money…not gone out stealing and things like that unless he was ill'), but made a living mostly from drug dealing. Having parents who were addicts meant Jamie felt considerable guilt and turmoil for his illicit work history – as was typical for *strugglers* – but he also described a sense of inescapability about this path:

> They're the most horrible drugs and it makes me sick to think that I've sold them myself, they ruined *my* life let alone my mum and dad's lives…but if I wouldn't have sold them, someone else would've anyway, and selling drugs and smuggling drugs from countries and things like that that's the way I see my friends, older people make money…I've grown up around these drugs; I've grown up around violence.

Throughout his interview, Jamie focused on his relationships – with his parents, his ex-girlfriend and their son – as opposed to his work experiences. As with other *strugglers,* Jamie detailed painful incidents and discussed the ways he felt he had been both a 'good' and 'bad' son, partner and father: 'it makes me sick that I've been in and out of jail for [my son's] life. I was lucky I was there when he was born'.

Mikey was from the North West, white, and in his mid-twenties, and described himself as 'a very, very calm person, but…can snap very quickly'. While he was initially shy during the interview, Mikey became more animated towards the end. Mikey 'didn't have the best upbringing': both his parents had been drug addicts and died when he was a young child, and he found it difficult to recall many other details from his primary school years other than 'fucking about on the estate and being a little shit'. Following his parents' deaths, Mikey moved around various extended family members until 'things got really bad' and he was fostered by a friend's family. As a teen, Mikey robbed bikes with his peers, stole cars to 'mash' up, smoked weed and was generally anti-social, 'just through sheer boredom'. After finishing school, he took a plastering course at college, which he found 'alright' and easy. He then worked in a warehouse, where he 'pushed the same amount of dirt around on a bus for 12 hours straight', until a short spell in prison for stealing a car. Mikey was released after a few months but could no longer work in the warehouse because of his conviction, so found a job gravedigging with an agency. Despite enjoying gravedigging, it paid poorly, so he quit when a friend told him

about demolition work that paid cash-in-hand. Mikey enjoyed this work too but said that after about a year a large number of eastern European men joined the firm and offered to work for less money, so the foreman began telling his English colleagues there was no work available anymore. Unemployed, Mikey found himself 'unstuck' and with 'things to pay' so started selling drugs. Moving into illicit work was straightforward as Mikey's friends were already 'up to no good, so I knew where to go and what to do'. Drug-dealing itself was 'stressful to death, but it's easy'. Mikey spent a year selling drugs across the country until he was caught and spent a few years in prison. Shortly after his release, Mikey went to the jobcentre and signed on, but after being told it would take six weeks to receive payment he returned to drug-dealing, which led to his current sentence: 'How am I meant to feed myself?! She said 'do you know about food banks?' and I just went 'right, sweet, I don't want your money', picked my bag up, went out, told my probation officer I signed on…and then just went to selling drugs again'.

Before coming to prison, Mikey had started a new relationship with an old friend and became a stepfather to her daughter. Mikey was proud of the ways he had adjusted to this new role and detailed incidents where he had been more mature, supportive and generous than his stepdaughter's biological father:

> So I bought her an Xbox for her birthday, and then he's got his back up about that because obviously he was only planning on getting her little £10 shit things or something […] he's more or less said 'well you've outdone me'. It's not a competition mate! It's something that I know your daughter likes, yeah, so I'm going to get it her. She's been getting bullied at school, she's had a hard time, so she deserves it.

Jay – a white man in his early twenties – grew up in a city in Yorkshire with a single mother and his siblings. As a child, Jay misbehaved, ran away from home, and refused to do schoolwork – in part because he found it difficult: 'I didn't know how to read and write and just, I don't know, maths and that, I struggled'. He was expelled from several primary schools after assaulting staff and was placed in various PRUs before, after a few years out of education, doing a course at college. Jay had also been in a gang and involved with crime during this period, which led to time spent in secure settings: 'been getting locked up from the age you *could* get locked up'. In terms of work, Jay had made money illicitly through 'burglaries and nicking cars and thefts' since he was a teenager. Jay's discussion of his illicit work demonstrated a marked difference between *strugglers* and other men who invariably criticised

those who participated in domestic burglaries or thefts from people who were not themselves involved in crime. While Jay primarily 'did it for the money', he also acknowledged that driving stolen cars and committing crime provided him with self-esteem and a 'buzz': 'when I was young and I drove my first car and that, I felt right good in myself: 'yeah I can drive!'. That's what made me go out [and do] more burgling, for cars, that buzz, you know'. Alongside illicit activities, Jay sporadically undertook factory and warehouse work found through agencies. For Jay, these jobs were unenjoyable and just a means of earning an income, so he invariably only stayed for a couple of months each time ('I didn't like any job I did but it's got to be done').

As was typical of *strugglers* and *soldiers,* Jay had been involved in numerous traumatising situations growing up, including being the victim of a serious stabbing and witnessing a friend's murder. The way these groups of men discussed such experiences, however, was markedly different. While *soldiers* tended to breeze over incidents and their repercussions, *strugglers* like Jay were more emotional, portraying these events as turning points in their lives. Jay and other *strugglers* also described more extreme feelings in relation to romantic relationships and heartbreak than other men:

> I come home from work one morning – done a 12 hour shift – all the wardrobe is empty, all my daughter's stuff took, saying 'I don't want to be with you no more'. So that made me upset, first love, broke my heart. I was still in love with her and I wouldn't stop harassing her because I wanted to prove I wanted her back and it's got to that point where she kept phoning the police but the police wasn't enough. I wanted her back, you know. I kept going to her house, but they put a restraining order, I signed it and stuff, that still wasn't enough…it just got that bad breaching restraining order and that's when I started getting remanded.

Jay had since begun a new relationship and had another child, and was adamant he was now 'making things right'. As was typical for men in this group, Jay described his future in terms of how he could become a good man and father: 'I want to be working, giving my kids what they want – that would be successful for me – giving my kids a good life'.

Embedded masculinities: localised experiences of finding, keeping and leaving work

In presenting this typology, several themes are evident across all four groups: experiences of violence (as both perpetrators and victims), volatile familial and/or intimate relationships,

precarious employment (or exclusion from the labour market) and economic deprivation. While most participants had found themselves in physically, emotionally and/or financially vulnerable positions as a consequence of these circumstances, they responded in diverse ways, and this section considers how the masculinities outlined by this typology developed in relation to intersections of locale, race and ethnicity.

With regards to the role of race and ethnicity, the racial composition of participants varied considerably between regions, and most of the correlations between *race* and type mirror those between *locale* and type. While this research focused primarily on participants' work experiences, there were several findings relating to the intersection of place and race. First, none of the study's white participants corresponded to the *entrepreneur* type.[52] To some extent, this disparity appeared to be accounted for by the high incidence of *entrepreneurs* from London, where the majority of participants were Black or mixed-race.[53] There was a similar (albeit less extreme) overrepresentation of white participants in the *tradesman* group,[54] suggesting that Black men were either less able to 'capitalise' on their social and cultural capital, or did so in different ways. The second, point of analysis relates to the study's Asian participants, who, despite representing a relatively small proportion of the sample (nine per cent (n = 8)) and being overwhelmingly from Yorkshire (75 per cent (n = 6)), were evenly distributed across all four masculine types. Third, while *soldiers* were disproportionately likely to be Black or mixed-race, they were also overrepresented by men from London and the South East, and 42 per cent (n = 5) of white participants from these regions were *soldiers.* A similar trend was evident amongst *strugglers,* who were overwhelmingly white and from Yorkshire and the North West: while few Black or mixed-race participants corresponded to this type overall,[55] in Yorkshire and the North West, just under a third of Black and mixed-race participants corresponded to the *struggler* type.[56]

With an understanding of the intersection of race and place (as well as the challenges involved in dissecting the impact of these factors with the data collected through this research), the remainder of this section uses the insight from the beginning of the chapter (regarding the local

[52] Two *entrepreneurs* were Asian, 11 Black British, Black Caribbean or Black African, and three mixed-race.
[53] 77 per cent (n = 23) of participants from London were Black or mixed-race.
[54] 35 per cent (n = 15) of white British participants were *tradesmen* in comparison to only 11 per cent (n = 5) of participants of colour.
[55] 9 per cent (n = 3) of black and mixed-race participants were *strugglers.*
[56] 29 per cent (n = 2) of Black and mixed-race participants from Yorkshire and the North West were *strugglers.*

labour markets and histories) alongside the above definition and illustration of the typology of masculinities to discuss the ways in which experiences of licit and illicit work, and thus masculinities, were embedded in specific locales.

Embeddedness manifested on one level in terms of the sectors participants had experience of: amongst those from London, 43 per cent (*n* = 13) had worked in the service sector work, 33 per cent (*n* = 10) had done unskilled or low-skilled manual work, and 33 per cent (*n* = 10) had no licit work experience.[57] Work experiences amongst participants from the Midlands were similar, with service work most common (40 per cent; *n* = 6), followed by un- and low-skilled manual work (33 per cent; *n* = 5) and then those who had no work experience (27 per cent; *n* = 4). Service sector work was far less common amongst participants from Yorkshire and the North West, with only 17 per cent (*n* = 4) and 18 per cent (*n* = 2) respectively having done such work. Low- and unskilled manual labour was much more prevalent amongst men from these regions: 74 per cent (*n* = 17) and 73 per cent (*n* = 8) of participants from Yorkshire and the North West respectively had experience in this sector. It was also considerably less common for men from these regions to have had no licit work experience, with only four participants from Yorkshire (17 per cent) and one participant from the North West (nine per cent) reporting never having worked.

Work experiences in different cities and regions were impacted by how participants found work opportunities. Agencies had been used disproportionately by participants from London, which meant that men from this region were more likely to have had roles that were part-time, temporary, seasonal, and in retail and leisure sectors. Several participants had enjoyed such roles, including Alexander who had taken temporary work in a toy shop over Christmas ('it was cool…best bits was just meeting the little kiddies that wanted to play with the toys, it was pretty cute') and Charles (*entrepreneur,* London), whose friend helped him find work as a steward during the Olympics: 'everyone was young, it was like a youth club. I proper enjoyed that job…[and] it was full of girls!'. However, this kind of work often presented hurdles for young men. As existing studies acknowledge, service sector roles tend to require behaviours such as deference (to both customers and managers) and adherence to dress codes that are at odds with many young masculinities and that young men, and particularly Black and/or working-class young men, are stereotyped as less suitable for (Skeggs 2004; McDowell 2003,

[57] Percentages do not add up to 100 as some participants had undertaken multiple types of licit work.

2009). Several participants – especially those from London and the West Midlands – had encountered difficulties in these regards. Issues with managers, who participants felt kept them under particularly close supervision and were highly prescriptive about their appearance at work, as well as the ways they were allowed to interact with customers, were pervasive:

> This [manager] had me on my toes, like 'Do this! Do that!'. I'm thinking raaaaah, give me a break! Because I was new, you know. I was a little rough as well, I'd have my shirt out…I don't think she liked me.
>
> Calvin (*entrepreneur,* London)

Part-time, zero-hour contract, and seasonal work – whether through an agency or not – also impacted participants economically, as low rates of pay combined with inconsistent and often limited hours meant licit work rarely felt sustainable. Charles and Marley (*entrepreneurs*, London), for example, had become stewards in stadiums after friends referred them. While they enjoyed these jobs – which were sociable and sometimes facilitated watching live sport – they were irregular and usually offered very long or very short shifts. The temporariness and unpredictability of such work meant that participants found themselves repeatedly having to find new opportunities. Difficulties finding long-term and well-paid work were particularly acute in London where many participants were aware of the highly competitive labour market and their relative disadvantage as young, working-class and (mostly) Black men: 'you go online, apply for a job, but it's probably about a thousand people that's applying for that job, so it's like, you don't know, you just have to be lucky in that situation' (Alexander). This process was disheartening, and it was common for participants from London in particular to describe unsuccessfully applying for large numbers of jobs:

> I tried to [work in a call centre] but they didn't accept me. There was other stuff that I tried to do… I applied for a couple of stuff on the internet, but no one accepted me. I think I tried to work in a shop doing retail once, but that didn't work, they never accepted me either.
>
> Kash (*entrepreneur,* London)

Kash's use of the language of 'acceptance' underscored how personal these rejections felt to some participants. In response, Kash, Alexander and others had (re)turned to illicit work (discussed further below), which was easier to find and invariably more profitable: '[getting a job] takes so long, that's why I thought drugs is the only way I'm going to get money right now, so that's what I did' (Alexander). Furthermore, in contrast to the negative emotions many

participants felt while looking for work and signing on ('do you know how embarrassing it is to sign on at the Jobcentre?!' – Javani (*entrepreneur,* London)), joining organised illicit operations often felt affirming: 'you feel accepted, you feel like, yeah or not even accepted, you feel *respected'* – Keaton (*soldier,* London).

Participants from Yorkshire and the North West found licit work opportunities more readily. While some had used agencies or applied for jobs formally, it was most common for men in this region to report finding work through their social networks. The un- and low-skilled manual work that participants from these regions were able to find through their friends and family were stereotypically masculine and suited to informal recruitment practices, in that they tended to be cash in hand or with small businesses.[58] Brad (*struggler,* Yorkshire) for example, described getting a job through 'some lads who come in the pub what my mum work at, my mum got me it through them, so just word of mouth really', suggesting that finding employment informally through social networks was more fruitful in towns and smaller cities where relatively smaller communities made interconnectedness easier. Participants mostly enjoyed these forms of work, in part because the physical work and long hours meant men were able to earn enough to fund a satisfactory lifestyle, but also because they usually involved working in all-male groups: 'there was just no judgement, do you know what I mean? It was just lads, we'd have a laugh, do daft shit…as you cracked on with the work it was fine' – Mikey (*struggler*, North West).

However, jobs procured through casual interactions were invariably insecure, and it was common for men from Yorkshire and the North West to have worked in small firms and without formal employment contracts. Indeed, most participants who had worked 'off the books' and 'cash in hand' described issues including missing pay, having been offered work or training by someone who subsequently disappeared, and employers who behaved unprofessionally or dishonestly. Phillip had experienced multiple problems of this kind with his boss while working at a small maintenance company:

> [The boss was] mouthy, greedy [laughing] and just not very business-like or looking after his workers. We'd get a text at 10 at night saying 'you're starting at four in the morning'…I'd ask him for pay slips and he was like 'I'll get it sorted, I'll get it

[58] In removals, demolition, garages or on building sites, for example – work for which young men are traditionally actively sought.

> sorted'. Never did get them sorted, and then he still owed me some wages and he never gave me them. Then, when I had to sign on at the job centre, there was no recollection of me ever paying tax while I was at that job, and I eventually found out that he wasn't paying any and was in loads of debt.
>
> Phillip (*tradesman,* Midlands)

In the absence of formal contracts, men from Yorkshire and the North West were also more likely to have been dismissed or made redundant. Participants' stories of losing work in these ways often related to questionable practices: Mikey (*struggler,* North West) described being let go by a firm who wanted to hire Polish workers instead because they worked for less ('my cousin got laid off first, then I got laid off and then the other lads, they were losing their jobs every two week or something'), and Shaun (*tradesman,* Yorkshire) had been made redundant by a company when they closed, only to see them reopen the following week under a different name. Leaving or losing a job unexpectedly was not only financially destabilising but disrupted working identities and masculinities that relied – at least in part – on a steady income: 'I just felt disappointed…going from 250 quid a week to nothing at all. And it were weekly pay as well. So obviously I was getting used to spending. Going from that to nothing, it were a big kick up [the] ass' – Rob (*struggler,* Yorkshire). The impact of losing a job was, however, mediated by participants' personal circumstances. *Strugglers* were particularly vulnerable, and often managing mental health or substance misuse issues. In describing instances where they had lost a job, men in this group often linked such experiences with subsequent involvement with illicit work, borne out of financial necessity and limited social resources for finding replacement licit work. By contrast, *tradesmen's* strong support networks meant that men in this group were usually able to find new forms of licit work with relative ease, which minimised disruption:

> Speaking to my friend through the times when I knew I was going to be made redundant, his dad just said…'if the time comes that you get made redundant, I'd like you to come and start work for me, if that's something you're interested in'. So literally on the way home from being made redundant, that morning, I rang my friend up and just said 'it's sort of happened' he said 'right, you can start on Monday then' and that was it. So I went out of one job straight into another.
>
> Shaun (*tradesman,* Yorkshire)

Though exploitation and insecurity were therefore common to most participants' licit work experiences, the nature of this insecurity varied depending on locale and the type of work undertaken. Beyond the distinct licit opportunities available in different cities and regions, the wider socio-economic context of each place, including rates of inequality and deprivation, also shaped participants' masculinities and orientations. London, for instance, is one of the most unequal cities in the country, while Yorkshire and the North West are more equal but have higher rates of deprivation (Lee et al. 2013; Centre for Cities 2022; ONS 2019b). Inequality and deprivation can be both indicators and causes of crime (ONS 2019b), and participants' *illicit* work experiences illustrated the significance of local criminal 'labour markets' and histories (Hobbs 2013; Fraser 2015).

Strugglers' criminal careers – and thus the illicit work experiences most common amongst participants from Yorkshire and the North West – usually started when they were children with bicycle theft, shoplifting and selling stolen goods, often alongside peers from their locale. As these men got older, they progressed to stealing cash boxes, domestic and commercial burglaries and other more organised and profitable operations: 'started slashing lorries…met a good friend and they said there's some serious money in them, my pals just got 800 grand's worth of laptops' (Shaun – *struggler,* Yorkshire). This type of illicit work sometimes required planning but was generally quite casual – several participants described doing jobs because their friend needed money that day, for example. It was also relatively infrequent, which meant that *strugglers* were usually able to do licit work in the daytime when it was available. Drug-dealing was also common, although it was usually quite informal and less organised than that which *soldiers* or *entrepreneurs* participated in, and *strugglers* rarely identified with this work in the way that men in other groups did.

By contrast, drug-dealing and robberies related to drug-dealing were by far the most prevalent forms of illicit work amongst participants from London, and, considerably more common in London than elsewhere.[59] The drug-dealing that *soldiers* and *entrepreneurs* from London (and to some extent Birmingham) described was also more professionalised than that detailed by participants from the North West and Yorkshire, which – although sometimes entrepreneurial – was usually smaller scale. Some Londoners' drug-dealing related to 'county lines', whereby

[59] Of thirty participants from London, 83 per cent (n = 25) disclosed having made money drug dealing, in comparison to 57 per cent (n = 33) of those who lived outside London.

dealers travel 'from their urban hub to provincial towns and cities within a wide radius of their home turf, not just to deliver their product to that location as a 'weight' but also to retail it there themselves' (Coomber and Moyle 2018: 1324). Reflecting research on the practice showing that county lines are highly concentrated in London (ibid.), only participants from this region discussed involvement in such work, and it was associated with a very particular illicit work experience. In comparison to drug-related work participants from outside London had been involved in, men from London were more likely to have engaged in 'full-time' drug-dealing, which often involved staying away from home (sometimes for weeks or months at a time). These participants had a distinct attitude to their illicit work, which felt like a job: they put the time and effort into entry-level and low-status tasks in order to progress up the hierarchy where they would gain status and money. Several participants had been successful in these pursuits and recruited their own 'workers', enabling them to demonstrate their success and minimise their physical and criminal risk:

> I was killing it selling drugs…had two people working for me, another girl working for me bagging up the drugs and another girl bringing the drugs up [to Portsmouth], bringing the money back down. So I didn't even have to step foot up there! All I had to do was answer the phone. So that was it, couldn't get arrested!
>
> Joelle (*soldier*, London)

Echoing Reid's (2017, 2023) findings, participants involved in this form of drug-dealing tended to have become involved as young teens, which together with the long and regular hours they worked, made licit employment difficult to fit in and relatively less appealing in terms of the comparative financial benefit it offered. Consequently, many of these men 'opted out' of licit work, and others who found it difficult to find consistent employment returned to drug-dealing after facing setbacks on the labour market.

Conclusion

This chapter has presented a typology that forms a descriptive base from which understandings of prisoner masculinities and work experiences can be furthered. None of the described 'types' correspond to a hegemonic masculinity within society-at-large (Connell 1995).[60] These types instead represent a multiplicity of marginalised masculinities: distinct responses to post-

[60] The extent to which there was a locally 'hegemonic', 'dominant' or 'dominating' masculinity within the prison will be explored in the following chapter,

industrial and neoliberal labour markets rooted in participants' varied experiences of deprivation and social, cultural and economic exclusion (Connell and Messerschmidt (2005). As Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) note, participants' marginalisation did not mean they lacked agency. Indeed, the heterogeneity evident across this typology – in terms of participants' diverse ways of being 'working-class', 'aspirational', 'criminal' and 'respectable' men – supports recognition of the 'geography of masculine configurations' (ibid.: 847). While this chapter has shown that definitions of these terms relate to where, and with whom, participants grew up and spent their adulthood, it has also demonstrated that men have unequal access to different 'training routes' for masculinity, and that this accessibility is to a considerable extent linked to locale, and its intersection with race and ethnicity.

The significance not only of the household, but also the locale in which participants grew up, was illustrated by the differences between *tradesmen* and *entrepreneurs.* Men in both groups tended to have been raised in relatively comfortable households, with working parents and within which experiences of deprivation and trauma were rare. However, while *tradesmen* had mostly grown up in towns or smaller cities and amongst similarly comfortable households, *entrepreneurs'* households were often situated in locales (mostly in London) where deprivation, trauma, crime and violence were commonplace. This corresponded to disparities between the ethnicities of men in each type as well as differences in sort of work available in their locales. These points of departure had consequences for participants' attitudes towards work and success which shaped their distinct masculinities. *Tradesmen* were largely content with reproducing their parents' lifestyles and aspired to modest careers. However, the resources needed to embody the working-class masculinity that *tradesmen* strived for were increasingly elusive, and it seemed this masculine ideal had begun to 'haunt' them in the way described by Walkerdine (2015). In this context, *tradesmen's* subsequent experiences with criminality seemed like frustrated, desperate responses to a sense of loss, and invariably led to a sense of shame. Therefore, while the *tradesmen's* commitment to traditional gender roles meant their masculinity was 'complicit' in hegemonic masculinity, they were unable to fulfil this idea even on a local level (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005). By contrast, *entrepreneurs* aspired to move out of their local area to somewhere with less deprivation crime, and had concluded that, to do so, they would need to earn considerably more than their parents (who had mostly worked hard in respectable working-class jobs). *Entrepreneurs* defined success as being upwardly mobile businessmen with considerable wealth and status but had struggled to find secure or financially sustainable employment in the cities where they lived. Men in this group instead made

conscious decisions to utilise the 'street capital' (Bakkali 2022) developed in their immediate locale to seek (or sustain from their childhood) profitable forms of illicit work that were easily accessible through peers and local social networks. Therefore, while both groups were committed to achieving licit (professional) success, the detail of these aspirations, combined with the distinct local labour markets of most *entrepreneurs* and *tradesmen,* meant that men in these groups had had very different work experiences.

Men in the *tradesmen* and *entrepreneur* groups tended to express optimism about their personal and professional futures. Amongst *soldiers* and *strugglers,* however, there was considerably more trepidation. *Soldiers*' identities tended to be rooted in their illicit careers, and the status, wealth, and conspicuous consumption they provided. Most men in this group enjoyed and felt they had been good at this illicit work. That it had also provided reliable and easy access to masculine capital – invariably 'street capitals' (Bakkali 2022) – made the prospect of leaving drug-dealing behind in favour of licit work seem high-risk and relatively unappealing. In this way, *soldiers* invariably experienced a sense of 'trappedness' (Reid 2017), whereby their options for the future (continued commitment to licit work or resentful resignation to engaging in 'shit work' they had previously rejected) both represented significant risks and costs. Most *soldiers* expected to grow out of drug dealing and its associated violence, or simply wanted to avoid further (and increasingly lengthy) periods of imprisonment, and some had already begun mourning the status, wealth and excitement they would have to leave behind:

> I *want* to go legit, literally just because I'm sick and tired of going jail. It's long for man innit. If someone said to me, you can sell drugs for the rest of your life, you never go jail, you'll never get arrested – I'll carry on doing it… I love making money, I love the cars, I love the girls, I love the chains, I love the jewels, I love the holidays. I love all of it, but the bit that I don't love about it is the jail side innit.
>
> Joelle (*soldier,* London)

In many ways, the *soldier* type sits uncomfortably in existing theory: the illicit work they engaged in was organised, profitable and distinctly neoliberal and 'hegemonic', while its associated violence might be considered an expression of 'protest'. In fact, similar to Reid's (2017) nuanced exploration of the 'badman' masculinity, *soldiers* aspired to (and often achieved) a masculinity that was both 'dominant' and 'dominating' within their milieu (Messerschmidt 2012). Furthermore, as Bakkali (2022) notes, 'road life' has become increasingly commodified by mainstream brands and media, and numerous men (including

several who have experience of imprisonment) have successfully capitalised on their 'street capital'. This shift in the (potential) status of *soldier*-type masculinities suggests that it is involved in the 'contestation' for hegemony on local and regional levels.

While *soldiers* were motivated by their desire to escape economic hardship and the low-status associated with it, *struggler* masculinities were rooted in desires to be 'good', 'decent' and 'better' men, primarily by overcoming personal issues relating to deprivation, mental and physical health, substance misuse, violence or abusive relationships. As a consequence of these problems, both licit and illicit work had been hard to secure and sustain, and *strugglers* believed that, despite their willingness to 'graft', their local labour markets offered few prospects in the foreseeable future, licit or otherwise. Pessimism about finding reliable work on release, in tandem with a masculinity relating primarily to their *moral* qualities, meant that *strugglers'* pragmatic approach to making money was only minimally impacted by imprisonment.

As discussed, the *struggler* type corresponded to a form of vulnerable and unspectacular protest masculinity similar in several ways to those described by Maguire (2021) and Connell (1995). The forms of deprivation that men in this group experienced, which were rooted in their locales, meant that their bodies and morality were the only sources of masculine capital that they reliably had access to. Their resultant masculinities were therefore more unpredictable and disorganised than those in other groups, despite developing in a predictable cycle of crime, licit work and imprisonment (Maguire 2021).

In demonstrating the heterogeneity of prisoner masculinities, as well as their embeddedness in local labour markets (both licit and illicit), this chapter has evidenced the values, experiences and aspirations that participants imported into prison. With this foundation, the following chapter will deepen theoretical understandings of how different men adapt to imprisonment, specifically by analysing ways in which different men approach, experience and engage with 'purposeful activity'.

6. ‘A good and useful life’

> The purpose of the training and treatment of convicted prisoners shall be to encourage and assist them to lead a good and useful life.
>
> Rule 3, Prison Rules 1999

Prison work is ostensibly supposed to help men ‘lead a good and useful life’. As Chapter Four demonstrated, the majority of participants in this study believed both that ‘purposeful activity’ *should* be rehabilitative but that it failed to fulfil this aim in practice, for them at least. It has also been established that men import different work experiences – both licit and illicit – into prisons alongside distinct masculinities and aspirations for the future. Imprisonment denies men the vast majority of resources they may have previously relied upon to construct their masculinity, including those relating to work. This chapter explores how *tradesmen, entrepreneurs, soldiers* and *strugglers* each adapted their masculinities in the context of imprisonment, with particular focus on the role of ‘purposeful activity’. The chapter begins by explaining how each type approached the experience of imprisonment and adapted their masculinities within this context. This is followed by analysis of why – and how – each group engaged with different forms of prison work. The third section goes on to consider whether ‘purposeful activity’ is *meaningful* to men in prison before concluding with a discussion about why ‘a good and useful life’ felt elusive to so many of this study’s participants.

Prison masculinities

Tradesmen

The traditional working-class masculinity that *tradesmen* performed prior to imprisonment was inaccessible to these men while in prison and directly challenged by their (often new) ‘criminal’ status: not only were they unable to work and perform the role of breadwinner for their families, the respectability and social capital of these men was also undermined by the stain and shame associated with their new ‘prisoner’ and ‘criminal’ status. *Tradesmen* framed their imprisonment as an interlude in their life and adapted by developing a temporary prison masculinity based on their imported values of respectability and hard work, but achieved through alternative means given their reduced and altered resources available in prison.

The most significant way *tradesmen* sought to establish their respectability and demonstrate their work ethic – and thus their masculinity – in prison, was by physically and socially distancing themselves from other ('real') prisoners. To demonstrate this, *tradesmen* contrasted their experiences of and approaches to imprisonment with those of other men: other prisoners were happy staying on their wing, took drugs, behaved aggressively, got into fights and did pointless jobs and courses, whereas they avoided violence,[61] worked hard in trusted roles for charities and the prison, and were polite ('I'm not here to sort of fight or mess around…I'm here to get my head down' – Murray; 'I always say please and thank you to [officers], and you know, manners! I say manners don't cost' – Paul). Men in this group were also enthusiastically compliant with the vast majority of the prison's rules and processes. This had material consequences, with *tradesmen* tending to be on the 'enhanced' level of the IEP scheme and considered (both formally and informally) as 'low-risk'.[62] These statuses also facilitated *tradesmen's* allocation to 'high-trust' roles, of which there were only a handful in each prison, that further underlined *tradesmen's* sense of their own exceptionalism: Burton, for instance, described his role with a charity as 'the most trusted job in the prison, there's only four of us out of 800 odd prisoners'.

Perhaps most important, however, was the impact compliance and high-trust work had on *tradesmen's* interactions with staff, in that they engaged with a wider variety of both uniformed and non-uniformed staff than their peers and were more likely to describe exchanges that made them feel less like prisoners ('staff always say I'm good, they like me and that. I ain't had problems here, they say I don't deserve to be here as well' – Nise). Having their respectability and good character recognised by staff not only supported *tradesmen's* endeavours to differentiate themselves but minimised the wider stain and sense of contamination they felt from being in prison: '[being trusted by staff] makes me feel like I'm not as much of a bastard as society would like to make out, do you know what I mean? I can be decent; I can be trusted' – Taylor.

In addition to *tradesmen* feeling staff viewed them differently, men in this group were also identifiable by the way *they* perceived staff. Many in this group identified and expressed

[61] While two men in this group had been victims of prison violence (it seemed that both were victimised because of their convictions for sexual offences), the vast majority had claimed to have had no personal involvement, as either victim or perpetrator.
[62] The 'low-risk' status related to *tradesmen's* risk level within the prison rather than outside.

empathy with prison officers and instructors ('you've got to put yourself in their position: if you was a prison officer, would you trust you? No' - Paul), and this was intensified amongst those, like Paul, working in prisoner-facing roles who sometimes had to deal with the sorts of behaviour that staff encountered ('you've got to be a bit thick skinned as well, you can imagine how some [prisoners] are, can't you!'). *Tradesmen's* perceptions of staff enabled some in this group to see themselves more as an 'employee' of the prison than a prisoner: 'with reception [orderly], you're on your own – not on your own, I'll be with all the other staff – but you haven't got all the prisoners around you' – Murray.

While *tradesmen* therefore presented few challenges to their establishments in terms of compliance, men in this group often became frustrated when they felt there was a lack of 'professionalism' (Liebling, Hulley and Crewe 2011). Such criticisms sometimes related to the prison's processes themselves, but on other occasions it was that processes had not been adequately followed ('they brought people on [to the enhanced wing] that you wonder how they got their enhanced' – Murray). Most common, however, were reproaches regarding a lack of fairness, which for *tradesmen* was primarily defined by being adequately rewarded for their compliant behaviour:

> If you make yourself known and you're trusted and stuff, you're going to get more than people who aren't interested, and are smashing their cells up, aren't you? It's only fair isn't it, in life: if you earn it, you get it.
>
> Elliott

This appeal to and definition of 'fairness' encapsulated the way *tradesmen* adapted their masculinities in prison. In aligning themselves with compliance and rule-following, *tradesmen* created both closeness to prison staff and distance from their ('criminal') peers. This social positioning, and the behaviours that facilitated it, helped *tradesmen* project their respectable and 'normal' masculinity and provided easier access to high-trust work which further underscored their 'exceptionalism'.

Entrepreneurs

The way *entrepreneurs* described themselves having been prior to imprisonment was as business-minded, emotionally intelligent, charismatic, and driven by an ultimate desire for legitimate wealth and professional success and status. This masculinity was not incongruous with either criminality or imprisonment: *entrepreneurs* were pragmatic about the use of illicit

means to achieve their goals and many referenced successful businessmen who had criminal convictions.[63] Furthermore, several *entrepreneurs* said they had long expected to serve a custodial sentence, and many presented imprisonment as potentially advantageous, either because of the education and training opportunities it provided or because it had pushed them to move away from crime ('where I didn't do no maths in school…I thought I may as well use it to my advantage now, so I done a bit of maths' – Alexander; 'I knew I would have to stop [selling drugs], either when I choose to or because I go to prison' – Eleazar). In prison, *entrepreneur* masculinities continued to be based on intelligence, charm, and their aspirations for licit wealth and status. One way men in this group established their masculinities was by investing time in education and training activities to 'better' themselves, and occasionally criticising those who did not use their sentences so productively: 'why do people come to jail and you don't get, like, get a qualification or do some distance learning…instead of just working on the wing wasting time…you haven't even done nothing to better yourself' – Donovan. In addition to education and training courses, *entrepreneurs* often worked in trusted roles cooking or doing cleaning off-wing (while these roles were trusted, they were less high-risk than the generative roles that were common for *tradesmen*). While *entrepreneurs* valued this trust, they understood that it was limited, conditional, and easily lost. The benefit of trust as a masculinity resource, therefore, was primarily in what it could facilitate (access to different people spaces or positive assessments by probation staff, for example), rather than how it felt or what the moral quality being trusted communicated (which *tradesmen* coveted). This approach was underlined in *entrepreneurs'* evaluation of their peers who they felt misunderstood and misused trust:

> I've seen a lot of boys get in trouble just doing dumb shit in prison. Man, they let the trust get to their head, say they're going to work but going to the wrong wing to speak to their mates. Next thing you know, the officers are looking for them everywhere, and that could get the prison locked down. So yeah people that the trust get to their head and they push it too far.
>
> Donovan

> I was talking to my cell mate, he's done so much for the prison and then got treated like any other prisoner today, and he didn't know how to act, poor guy. No matter

[63] Although these examples were cited more as evidence that one could be successful *despite* prison, not because of the skills that led them there, or that they developed while imprisoned.

> how well you're trusted – and no matter how well everything is – they're always going to treat you like a prisoner at the end of the day.
>
> Javani

Entrepreneurs also expressed their masculinities through their conduct outside of prison workspaces. Echoing Wilson's (2004) discussion of Black men 'keeping quiet' in prison, *entrepreneurs* were largely compliant (although not enthusiastically so). However, this was a pragmatic approach – a means to an easy life and avoiding trouble and extra days – rather than a representation of their commitment to or belief in the rules themselves. Like *tradesmen*, *entrepreneurs* were often critical of the provisions, standards and processes in prison ('they've got a lot here but it's just not well organised…it's not being run efficiently' – Charles). However, while *tradesmen* often sought to produce change in their establishments by suggesting solutions, the value to *entrepreneurs'* masculinities was in making astute observations and evidencing their analytic capabilities.

Relationships were another masculinity resource used by *entrepreneurs* in prison. In terms of relationships with peers, while many *entrepreneurs* had been involved in violence early on in their sentences, they described such incidents as shameful and regretful, and this change in behaviour contributed to their 'narratives of maturity' (Murray 2023):

> There's not a lot of violence in jail unless it's created. You can defuse the situation before it's actually out of control, but it depends on what type of man you are […] If there was an argument, for example, and I *see* there's an argument, what I would do is try and defuse it…I'm walking and talking like older men would do rather than younger men, because I think that personality suits me more.
>
> Tarek

Tarek's quote illustrates how – like *tradesmen – entrepreneurs* constructed their masculinities by distinguishing themselves from other prisoners. While *entrepreneurs* portrayed themselves as more driven, intellectual, charismatic and articulate than the general prison population, they also discussed creating social distance from *soldiers* specifically, echoing Warr's (2023) findings regarding the narrative labour Black prisoners engaged in to avoid racist perceptions of gang-affiliation:

> There's been people that's even come up to me like 'how comes you don't chill with the man dem?!' and things like that, like, 'how comes you're just there playing chess

> with my man all the time?'. Coz it's more stimulating than yous lots convos! [laughing] That's why! And I think maybe they could probably get the vibe that I think I'm better than them, you get what I mean, especially how I talk…I used to talk exactly how all these lot talk. On my first sentence I was reading a lot and ever since my first sentence I don't think my vocabulary's ever gone back to where it came from.
>
> Kelsey

With regard to how *entrepreneurs* used relationships with staff to express their masculinities, men in this group tended to adopt an informal, friendly and sometimes overfamiliar way of interacting, and many gave examples of times staff had complimented or expressed affection towards them. However, this approach had mixed consequences. On the one hand, positive relationships with staff helped *entrepreneurs* access the types of 'purposeful activity' they wanted: *entrepreneurs'* compliance, sociability and likeability, alongside their enthusiasm for education, 'rehabilitation' and 'bettering' themselves, meant that staff often prioritised men in this group when allocating activity spaces. Javani, for example, described how he was offered a classroom mentor position because the teacher was fond of him ('she just liked me from the first time she saw me like... she thinks I'm funny, I can be sometimes!'), while Eleazar secured a job in the staff mess after developing a friendly relationship with an activities manager ('I'll stop and talk to her on free flow and ask her to help get me a good job'). On the other hand, being outgoing, informal and friendly alienated other staff, and risked being interpreted as manipulation and conditioning. Occasionally, this impacted *entrepreneurs'* work experiences:

> They tried to sack me from the Hub job…because they said I knew that this [custodial manager] didn't like me…because I had a problem with her when I first come to this jail…apparently she said that I used ones of the govs against another gov.
>
> Kash

For some in this group, discussions of staff relationships focused primarily on female staff, which corresponded to many *entrepreneurs'* imported identity as self-identified 'players'. Unable to engage in heterosexual relationships in prison, men in the group used female staff to demonstrate their masculine charisma. *Entrepreneurs'* interpersonal skills and friendly informality facilitated the development of close relationships with female staff, and these were highly valued as means of demonstrating their charm and attractiveness as well as their difference from less socially adept peers. While it was not possible to observe many of these relationships in practice, *entrepreneurs* were keen to present them as respectful and

appropriate. Indeed, men in this group primarily displayed 'chivalrous' (Crewe 2006b) orientations towards female staff, and contrasted their mature and charismatic behaviour with that of peers who did not know 'how to treat a woman':

> This jail is full of kids, people are making silly noises outside their door, looking at females disrespectfully. It's childish, embarrassing…stop acting like children. Be *men,* even if you're not a *gentleman,* be a man, you know, respect people.
>
> Alexander

> You're a woman so when I would speak to you, I'd make sure it's polite, I make sure I'm using you know I'm not speaking by using slang I'm trying to speak full English.
>
> Tarek.

Soldiers

In discussions of their lives before prison, *soldiers* described accomplishing their masculinity – and a sense of being respected (and often feared) – through successful illicit work, wealth and conspicuous consumption, promiscuity, and the display of a particular aesthetic involving muscular physiques and/or high-end clothing (Reid 2017). *Soldiers* imported this respect-centred masculinity and their 'road capitals' (Bakkali 2022) into prison, where they engaged in 'bravado, bragging and 'banter'' (Murray 2023: 163) with their peers in ways similar to the Hoods in Murray's research[64] and had identified various substitutes for the goods and behaviours they were no longer able to display: conspicuous consumption related to shower gels, canned drinks and other items available through the prison canteen, and fashion was adjusted in line with clothing permitted by the establishment. Men in this group rarely discussed these resources explicitly, but their importance was evident through observations. *Soldiers* also sought to maintain a masculinity based on their (illicit) financial and professional success by describing how depriving the experience of imprisonment was. Making clear how much they had lost and how large an adjustment they had to make in prison was a way for *soldiers* to emphasise how central wealth, consumption and status were to their sense of self:

> [In 2]013 man was talking about me, like even when I come to jail, 'I heard you was chilling out there, I see the picture of you with your drop top [car]'…everyone was

[64] Murray defines bravado as 'behaving in a bold manner, intended to impress or intimidate' (2023: 163), 'banter' as 'friendly joking conversation…often intertwined with power and humiliation' (ibid.), and bragging as 'boastful talk about something a person owned or had done' (ibid.).

> jealous of man, and when I come jail [this time], it's like yeah, man's in jail. No one cares no more.
>
> Joelle

In contrast, the resources for constructing a masculinity based on violence, virility and astute criminality were proscribed but feasible in prison, and the risk associated with demonstrating such qualities made doing so more rewarding in terms of masculine performance. With regard to *soldiers'* desire to evidence their sexual prowess, only two participants in this study's sample claimed to have engaged in sexual relations while in prison and both were *soldiers*.[65] Gus and Lawrence both described intimate relationships with female staff during previous sentences: 'there was one officer… she got warned to stay away from me…people saying 'he's a charmer, you want to stay away from him'…After about six months, we went upstairs and we used to kiss and stuff' – Gus. Each of these men admitted they would be more cautious about engaging in such behaviours again because of the potential repercussions,[66] although both continued to engage in highly sexualised talk about female staff and boasted of their ability to seduce them. For other men in this group, virility was demonstrated through discussions of women, sex, conjugal visits and (as with forms of consumption) the difficulty of being deprived of them: 'I can't be myself inside, because you can't be sexual unless you get lucky' – Zane.

Frequent public acknowledgement of the material goods, leisure activities, status, wealth and sexual relations that *soldiers* missed while in prison went beyond mere expressions of the pains for being deprived of them. In the relative absence of physical evidence of their taste, status, wealth and virility, *soldiers* used discussions and proclamations of *how much* they were missing out on – and of how much *more* they were missing out on than others – to demonstrate their masculinity. Equally, the value *soldiers* placed on the goods and experiences that they *were* able to consume in prison, and especially those which were difficult to access (sexual relationships, for example), increased significantly.

Violence was considerably easier for *soldiers* to engage with while in prison, although there were specific dangers attached to such conduct, including the high-risk of being caught,

[65] While this does not mean they necessarily had engaged in such relations, or that others had not, it was insightful that it was only men in this group who wanted to discuss them.
[66] Lawrence explained he had recently felt 'little signals' from an officer, but was more focused on going home so decided he 'wouldn't properly pursue anything unless she was explicit'.

difficulty avoiding retribution and striking the right balance between respected and resented violence (Jewkes 2002). Many *soldiers* felt they had little choice but to engage in violence in prison, however, as their reputations and prior involvement with (locale-based) violence meant they were already known to other prisoners, especially if the establishment they were in was close to where they lived: 'trouble happens on the road, then you come to jail and then even fucking more trouble happens!' – Porter. As a result, prison was comparatively more dangerous for men in this group, with *soldiers* the most likely to report perpetrating and being a victim of violence during their current or previous sentence(s). The ways in which *soldiers* used violence to demonstrate their masculinities, however, was heterogenous. A handful of men in this group reported gratuitous, excessive or unpredictable behaviour ('basically, what I used to do to pass my time, I make sure I batter someone every month, so I do a headcount. I'm on number six at the moment' – Kezi), and some described violence involving staff ('my man's trying to strip search me, tries to punch me in my mouth…I pulled my trousers up and we started fighting for like 10 minutes' – Bart). These incidents and approaches were unusual, though, and the majority of *soldiers* only used violence when it felt 'necessary':

> If someone gives you any problems you've just got to deal with it. Either you win, lose, whatever happens, you just got to back yourself. You can't be like 'bro just leave it', because then a lot of people take advantage of you and you become a target.
>
> Sayeed

While less common, some violence had occurred during and because of 'purposeful activity'. For example, Kezi claimed he had organised for someone to be beaten up because they were smoking spice in the workshop and everyone else would lose their bonus if he were to be caught, and Calvin recalled losing his temper after discovering a teacher had given him IEPs he had not known about: 'with my maths teacher, me and her was alright…then she started to give me sneak IEPs…got me put on basic. I went crazy, started throwing things around the classroom'. Other *soldiers* detailed negative interactions with specific officers or instructors too, and, like Calvin, used such incidents to present a form of anti-authority machismo ('Went to D Cat, was there two months! Got kicked out for calling an officer tiny!...He makes up I was following him around the wing intimidating him! Bullshit!' – Elod). These experiences contributed to highly polarised attitudes towards staff, with many in this group expressing widespread distrust and dislike of prison officers in particular: '[I] don't like them, they don't like me' – Kiran. While some *soldiers* manifested their cynicism in an oppositional attitude towards the prison, the majority were pragmatically compliant despite their anger and

frustration: ‘What am I going to do? Miss out on seeing my wife because I wanted to stand up against [an officer]? You have to take it on the chin, but then you do feel like a doughnut.’ – Bart.

However, it appeared that some forms of ‘purposeful activity’ provided an ‘emotion zone’ where *soldiers* were able to express a ‘softer’ facet of their masculinity (Crewe et al. 2014). Morgan, for example, spoke passionately about his desire to impress his mother with the skills he acquired while working in the staff canteen (‘I've told my mum and that about it…I can cook a proper meal, like proper from scratch, none of this chicken from Iceland, I'll get the best chicken cuts. I’m excited to cook’). Other *soldiers* described the transformative effect of relationships with prison work staff. Joelle, for example, joined Radio Broadcasting ‘fully ready to come out of jail and continue selling drugs’. Despite being unexpectedly allocated to the course and an initial aversion to it, the instructor – Nate – developed a constructive and respectful relationship with Joelle. After a couple of weeks, Joelle became passionate about pursuing the subject on release and changed his orientation to prison:

> The only person who's trying to help man, is Nate. He's the only one I see bringing [employers and industry experts] in. No one else is bringing man in! That's why I'm sticking. I don't even have to be there…but I go to class because I know my man Nate is actually trying to help me. No other tutor I think gives a fuck.
>
> Joelle

This example is illustrative of how skilled and caring prison work staff built trust with *soldiers,* and how, by doing so, men like Joelle began to let their guard down and engage enthusiastically with ‘purposeful activity’. *Soldiers’* generalised wariness of staff was understandable: most men in this group imported into prison an assumption that professionals in the criminal justice system stereotyped and looked down on them, and many of the interactions they recounted of their time in custody had reinforced and confirmed their suspicions. Furthermore, several Black *soldiers* recalled instances when they felt excessive force had been used against them by staff they believed to be racist. However, the experiences of Joelle and other *soldiers* exemplified the group’s underlying willingness to develop new skills and interests, and in doing so, to display a softer facet of their masculinity.

Strugglers

Outside prison, *strugglers* were – in their own descriptions – humble family men with pragmatic approaches to licit and illicit work. They had to be physically and emotionally 'tough' because of difficult upbringings and tumultuous adult lives, but most men in this group also strongly identified with being otherwise caring and 'good', especially towards their children and romantic partners. Coming to prison therefore fundamentally undermined *strugglers'* identities, as they could not protect or financially support their loved ones. This was painful and frustrating, and *strugglers* often expressed anxiety about their children's well-being and their own intimate relationships while they were in prison: '[conjugal visits] would calm a lot of worries off your mind because it's not like you just want the physical…but also for peace of mind…that she's not looking elsewhere to sort of go get that.' – Nico. *Strugglers* therefore had to suspend this aspect of their identity during their sentence, and instead developed a masculinity in prison based on being strong, compassionate, modest and morally 'good'. The reliance amongst *strugglers* on physical and moral means of adapting their masculinity in prison underscored their lack of access to material and economic resources, which had been similarly significant in the development of their unspectacular form of protest masculinity prior to imprisonment (Connell 1995).

Humbleness and modesty, for example, were demonstrated through acceptance of their low-status as prisoners, and denigration of those they believed cared about prison hierarchies: '…you get people that think they're better than everyone else in jail and I look at them and I think, you're in the same boat as me mate!' – Daniel. *Strugglers'* professed belief in community and equality in prisoner society was evident in other expressions of their masculinity: *strugglers* were more active and enthusiastic than other prisoners in portraying themselves as caring and friendly, and sometimes demonstrated this quality through generative prison work ('I'm like the chapel orderly, but I'm not really, I just go there to help other people just give them the support because it's mainly people struggling' – Scott). To some degree, these characteristics were also used by *strugglers* to help them avoid conflict in prison: 'I can get on with anyone, I ain't got one enemy, I'll have a laugh with anyone, I don't care what you're in for! I don't care who you are if you're alright with me.' – Shaun. Despite this, it was evident that *strugglers'* primary motivation for centring their integrity and 'goodness' was to demonstrate that their actions reflected their morals. Kieram, for instance, described how taking on a generative role facilitated his supporting others ('I was a listener […] just to help others really, you know help others, show others that they're not there by themselves…I did

help quite a few guys.'), while other *strugglers* recalled instances where they had physically or verbally defended others (both peers and female staff) or otherwise helped those in need:

> There's a kid down there, he don't have much. I give him extra food; I give him shower gels you know. I won't let nobody trouble him. People try and bully him, and I straighten them out.
>
> Nico

The other central facet of *strugglers'* prison masculinities was strength, which developed from an imported sense of resilience and (physical, emotional and economic) resourcefulness. *Strugglers* were adept at making the most of limited resources, and while their deprivation was enhanced in prison, men in this group developed various strategies for demonstrating strength. Some men in this group developed prison masculinities based on their emotional strength and resilience, which they demonstrated through their ability to cope with the psychological consequences of imprisonment:

> I'm quite strong me, if you know what I mean. I'm not as weak as some of the guys […] just in coping strategies! Some people can't handle it, they can't handle prison and it's not for them. You can tell – well, prison's not for no one – but just how you adapt in certain situations. Some people find it hard to adapt in this kind of environment.
>
> Webster

Emotional strength and the ability to overcome vulnerability was also evident in *strugglers'* discussions of addiction and mental health issues. While few described experiencing mental health problems at the time of the interview, many recalled difficulties they had experienced in the past – both in prison and in the community. Despite evident intention for these stories to illustrate emotional and psychological resilience, they invariably highlighted *strugglers'* vulnerability. This vulnerability was also evident in discussions of drug use in the prison. While only a handful of participants admitted using drugs in the establishment they were currently located, all who did so were *strugglers,* and men in this group were also disproportionately likely to highlight issues caused by drugs, and spice in particular: 'the biggest thing in prison they need to sort out: spice. That's number one. Get rid of that, they'll get rid of most problems' – Brad. While *strugglers* who discussed drug-use in prison did so very critically, it was evident that drugs impacted their prison experiences more than those in other groups: *strugglers* were more likely to live and work with people who used drugs (on drug treatment wings and in

contract workshops, for example), and economic and emotional vulnerabilities made them more liable to exploitation and manipulation by those organising illicit trading in the prison – regardless of whether they themselves had or wanted to use drugs.

In contrast, several *strugglers* imported interests in fitness and bodybuilding. Some of these men used muscular physiques to demonstrate these interests and embody physical power ('I think I had an easy time because of my strength' – Nico). It was more common, however, for *strugglers* with these interests to describe dissatisfaction with their current physique and frustration with the lack of resources available in prison to help them remedy this:

> I look terrible now, but when I was out there, I was like, obviously in really good shape. Like magazines…you know when you see them on the front, I was in that good nick, like, because I was just constantly training, nutrition.
>
> Andrei

Some of these discussions felt strained and further underlined that *strugglers* were aware of their vulnerability, low-status and lack of masculine (and economic) resources. For example, in discussing their own muscularity, some participants referred to how visible displays of strength required no economic capital and could protect them against victimisation. Conversely, a handful of *strugglers* conveyed independence and a different sort of strength by explicitly rejecting these conventional markers and suggesting they were superficial or juvenile: 'everyone seems to want to get big for some strange reason…one gym session a week does me, I can't be bothered' – Finn.

Another way in which *strugglers* incorporated physicality and strength into their prison masculinities was through violence. After *soldiers, strugglers* were the group most likely to be involved in prison violence as both perpetrators and victims. However, while *soldiers* tended to use violence to enhance their status within the prison, *strugglers* usually framed their physical altercations as retaliation and self-defence, a means of mitigating physical and reputational injury and a way to manage their underlying vulnerability:

> I was seeing this bird before I come in, and I didn't know she had a boyfriend, and her boyfriend come here, obviously found out while I've already been here, and just come up and tried swinging a bat at me, [I] just weaved and knocked him out.
>
> Brad

Brad's story highlights two aspects of *strugglers'* violence and the impact it had on their masculinities. First, *strugglers* wanted to be perceived as competent and willing fighters able to physically defend themselves (and others). For those who were confident in their abilities, these discussions were used to further underline *strugglers'* strength ('I don't care how big they are, if you come and try and take me down, I'm taking you out' – Mitchell). *Strugglers* who claimed minimal involvement with violence still asserted they would defend themselves when necessary, but tended to emphasise the resolve and honour involved in standing up for themselves as opposed to the strength they would display in doing so ('I won't shy away from a fight, if it comes then I'm not going to run off' – Daniel).

The second facet of *strugglers'* violence illustrated by Brad's example was that it often related to imported tensions ('started off with trouble on free flow, people I had problems with from the outside I ended up fighting and went Block' – Jamie), in part because most *strugglers* had engaged in violence relatively frequently before coming to prison. While much of the violence that *strugglers* engaged with could therefore be depicted as defensive responses to imported conflicts, men in this group were also considerably more likely than others to describe violence that originated within the prison, often rooted in racial or regional (rather than local or postcode) tensions: 'soon as you go up [to the North East] with a Yorkshire accent you've had it. If you didn't stand your ground, you'd have died' – Shaun.

So far, this chapter has demonstrated how each group adapted their masculinities while in prison. *Tradesmen*, for example, were marked by considerable shame about their imprisonment, and used enthusiastic compliance to demonstrate their respectability in the absence of licit work. By contrast, *entrepreneurs* portrayed their being in prison as an opportunity, and depicted their masculine identity as relatively unthreatened by imprisonment because of its basis in their intellect, charm and cultural omnivorousness – which *entrepreneurs* could evidence through relationships with staff, social distance from peers (predominantly *soldiers*) and engagement with education and training. Like *tradesmen, soldiers* lost important signifiers of status in prison, chiefly their illicit careers and ability to engage in conspicuous consumption. *Soldiers* adapted and took risks to recreate these resources in prison – using various combinations of illicit trading and relationships, bravado, violence and goods from the canteen to evoke a masculinity of fearlessness and success. It was also evident that despite their 'dominating' (Messerschmidt 2012) masculinity, men in this group were highly vulnerable: *soldiers* – and particularly Black *soldiers* – were the type most likely to describe physical,

sexual and 'administrative' (in terms of what was written about them on prison systems and reports) victimisation by staff (although they did not use this terminology), often with racist undertones (Warr 2023). When supported and secure in their masculinity, however, some *soldiers* had been able to use 'purposeful activity' to present more emotional and vulnerable sides to themselves. While the previous chapter demonstrated that *strugglers* were quite upfront about emotions they experienced before coming to prison, they were less forthcoming about their vulnerabilities in prison, where efforts to portray physical and psychological strength took on heightened importance and seemed more strained. *Strugglers* were more effective in using their imported caring identities to develop a modest masculinity based on 'goodness'. While this led *strugglers* to emphasise acts of kindness towards their peers, it also lent itself to an 'underdog' status which men in this group used to justify (and glorify) self-defence and other violence. Consequently, *strugglers'* violence tended to be presented as moral efforts to protect those who were more (or equally) vulnerable from 'bullies'.

Masculinity and the prison 'labour market'

The previous section has demonstrated participants' resilience in adapting to prison and making use of the limited resources available to them. The resultant masculinities are diverse and nuanced, and poorly captured by much existing literature. It has also been demonstrated that, just as participants' masculinities before imprisonment shaped how they felt about and engaged with work, the way men adapted their masculinities in prison influenced their approach to different forms of 'purposeful activity'. These orientations – and the masculinities that contributed to them – led to material differences in the sorts of work men from each type wanted and were able to engage with during their sentences. This section therefore discusses how different groups felt about the various forms of work available to them within the prison 'labour market'. While prisons do not have 'labour markets' in a literal sense, each establishment has a supply of potential 'workers' – each with their own demands and expectations (mediated as they are by the context of imprisonment) – and these potential 'employees' interact with the employer (the prison) by way of applications for different jobs and courses, for example. As such, the concept of a prison 'labour market' within which prisoners express preferences and aversions for various sorts of 'purposeful activity' – while also having distinct skills and resources at their disposal to achieve their personal aims – is a useful explanatory tool for understanding how different men engage with prison work.

Education and training opportunities were particularly popular amongst *entrepreneurs,* who actively sought such opportunities because they valued and prioritised the learning and development of new skills as well as achieving formal qualifications ('I like educating myself to be honest' – Alexander). *Entrepreneurs* considered practically all forms of education and training desirable and wanted to complete as many qualifications as possible, so in a number of cases there was little obvious strategy or intention behind specific subject choices: 'I get through courses really quickly, I done industrial cleaning Level 1 and then I'm doing business' – Timi. The exceptions to this were music and radio broadcasting courses, which were particularly popular amongst men in this group:

> [I] did radio broadcasting in Birmingham, became the mentor in that class […] the classes were more like a proper studio…soundproof, record your tune and mix it down…It was good still. I did that for my whole six months of being there!
>
> Javani

However, the value *entrepreneurs* placed on education led to many of these men expressing dissatisfaction at provisions in their establishments being too basic, poorly taught or not offering a sufficient breadth of subjects ('Level 1 [plastering] didn't have much to offer. I mean, like, we completed it pretty quickly and we were sitting around' – Tarek). The desire for more advanced educational opportunities was compounded by frustrating experiences with the Open University: around a quarter of *entrepreneurs* had investigated courses but changed their mind because of limited options or after having waited for a prolonged period for their application to progress ('I had the option [to do an Open University course]. I was going to, but it took too long' – Marley).

In terms of how other groups felt about education and training, like *entrepreneurs*, many *soldiers* sought creative opportunities, although men in the latter group were more often motivated by imported interests in music and art rather than the opportunity to gain qualifications ('I like to get involved with music Miss. I make music, I write my own songs, I make beats' – Bart). *Soldiers'* orientations to other forms of education were variable: some sought it out (one *soldier* was studying for an Open University qualification), some disliked it intensely ('I don't like education it gives me a headache' – Yannic), and others discovered new passions after being allocated to a course they had not personally selected: 'I didn't know how much I like English. I fucking love that shit seriously' – Calvin. Attitudes towards education and training were relatively more consistent amongst *strugglers*: most tried to avoid classrooms

and viewed the prospect of (more) academic qualifications as superfluous to their futures, although a handful of men in this group described transformational experiences (Jay, for example, had 'learnt everything from jail', including how to read and write). *Tradesmen* were the least likely to apply for education or training courses, and while some had participated in such activities, it was always for short periods or when the prison provided no other options. Discussions of education and training were more likely to prompt *tradesmen* to express the frustration they felt when allocated work they did not want to do, and in particular, classroom-based education:

> Some people get put on education when they don't ask, which I don't think is very fair…I'm sure if you're 21 or over, education is voluntary. But they make it out like it's not, so if you're on the education list and you don't go, you're gonna get a negative comment.
>
> Phillip

Tradesmen were also critical of and resistant to contracts work: 'I did one day in a [contracts] workshop in my local [prison] – horrendous […] it was just loud, rowdy, very, very loud. Atmosphere was very edgy; I didn't like it in there' – Paul. As a consequence of their more extensive licit work experiences, both contracts work and education and training activities felt pointless to *tradesmen*: 'for me, because I've worked all my life, I just think it was an absolute waste of time' – Burton. More specifically, contracts work was portrayed as a poor imitation of 'real' work, while education and training seemed unnecessary because the majority of *tradesmen* had already identified careers and achieved the necessary qualifications. Contracts work was also uncommon amongst *entrepreneurs,* who similarly felt it was a waste of time. There were two exceptions to this, however, with *entrepreneurs* who had chosen contracts workshops where they had high-status 'Quality Assurance' positions that provided, higher pay, and meant they did not have to do (as much of) the contracts work itself.[67]

Strugglers were the most likely to undertake contracts work. While a small minority of this group were opposed to such workshops on principle ('what's it going to get [prisoners] when they're released? ...they're not going to be doing that when they get out' – Luke), many others worked in contracts because of the reliability of such activities, the relative safety they offered

[67] While these positions were high-*status*, they were not particularly high *trust* because the work itself was menial and low-risk.

vulnerable prisoners, and generally higher rates of remuneration. Despite this, some *strugglers* objected to specific contracts workshops in their establishment. This mirrored other efforts by *strugglers,* as outlined above with regards to their use and discussion of muscularity, to try to resist being at the bottom of the prison hierarchy: by criticising a contracts workshop they did not work in, they established an activity that was lower status than theirs. Sewing and tailoring workshops were the most frequently maligned forms of work, seemingly because such labour was stereotypically feminine ('horrible…I felt like fucking Hayley Cropper [from Coronation Street] working on sewing machines' – Brad). However, in making these arguments, it seemed some *strugglers* had found this relatively more skilled work challenging, suggesting another reason for its denigration:

> Sat behind a sewing machine all day, I'm not a woman that's what women do, I can't do that! I was fucking up. They ended up giving me a set of scissors, snipping all the bits [of thread] off because I can't do it.
>
> Daniel

The other type of activity popular amongst *strugglers* was orderly and maintenance work. Cleaning jobs in particular were highly sought after, and *strugglers* were more likely than other men to discuss their enjoyment of the practice of cleaning ('yeah, love cleaning […] being fresh, seeing everything fresh' – Scott). The preference for cleaning as opposed to orderly work more generally was unique to *strugglers,* and may have been in part because of the low-stakes associated with this role, as well as the fact it was over-seen by wing staff. Men in this group were mostly aware of their low status, so roles such as servery or laundry orderly – which required a degree of authority – were consequently more difficult: 'there's a lot of people who always want extras and 'can I get some more please'…so that's like 70 people on the wing asking for extra, extra, extra, extra, so it's a bit of a pain' – Kieram. However, a small number of *strugglers* had undertaken these roles because they offered opportunities to demonstrate fairness through the denial of preferential treatment to their (more powerful) peers ('[servery] does my head in because people always ask for extra food it's proper like scavengers I hate it. But someone has to do it, so I did it.' – Bogdan). *Soldiers* also sought wing orderly roles – on serveries, in laundry or cleaning – because they considered such work easy and it facilitated easy socialising: 'I'm a worker on the wing, like, I chill on the wing and play Xbox all day' – Joelle; 'cleaner is a good job…you've got no targets, it's like, chilled, out on the wing' – Tristan. This type of work was common amongst *soldiers* in part because they applied for it, but also – as their involvement with violence and illicit trading underlined – because many

were relatively higher-risk, meaning they were less likely to be allocated work off-wing. However, orderly and maintenance positions were often allocated (or needed to be signed off) by uniformed wing staff. Given these roles also allowed *soldiers* to exert some power and get involved in illicit trading on their wings, the most non-compliant men in this group often found them difficult to obtain (‘that officer there, he's like ‘as long as I'm here you'll never get a job’’ – Yannic). Barriers to employment (in these and other roles and activities) were particularly acute for those who were or had been involved in illicit work:

> Every time I say things like ‘maybe give me a job behind the servery, I want to change my ways’…they'll be like ‘oh yeah change your ways’ [mocking]…because they caught me with a phone before.
>
> Neel

Entrepreneurs and *tradesmen* were generally less enthusiastic about orderly work. The only *tradesmen* who did wing work were those who felt at risk or had been bullied in other forms of work because of their convictions for sexual offences: ‘I’m not gonna put myself in a situation where I could be getting hassle and I don't have to be’ – Phillip. For *entrepreneurs,* wing work was framed as an interim way to pass the time between courses, as these were short term and it took time to apply and be allocated new educational opportunities. In contrast to *soldiers* and *strugglers, entrepreneurs* found orderly positions relatively easy to acquire as they were low-risk, reliable and influential. Some men in this group were positive about such roles because they were able to use the additional free time for self-study (Timi had done a Level 1 Spanish course in his cell, for example), but others saw themselves as above menial work and resented having to educate themselves, as they felt the prison should provide more, and more meaningful, opportunities: ‘I was a wing cleaner for a little while, that was dead…I don't see the point’ – Donovan. Off-wing orderly and maintenance roles appealed to more *entrepreneurs,* however, and it was particularly common for men in this group to work in kitchens and staff messes. These roles usually involved a qualification, and as they were off-wing and involved high-risk equipment (such as knives) they were also high-status and high-trust, which was valuable to *entrepreneurs’* sense of masculine self-esteem.

The most trusted roles, however, were prisoner-facing, generative jobs as mentors, listeners, or administrators for the prison or third-sector organisations, and red-band orderly positions, and the majority of participants considered such activities to be the most desirable. This was

primarily because of the relative freedom they afforded and the benefits of high-trust work being on one's file, but some men had other more specific reasons. Claudio (*soldier,* London), for example, explained 'the only reason I think jobs are good, is for if you're trying to get [drug] parcels, visits orderly that's a banging job […] because it's the easiest to get parcels in'. As a consequence of the increased opportunity to convey items into the prison that Claudio noted, only the most 'trustworthy' prisoners were given off-wing orderly or generative positions. *Tradesmen,* therefore, were most experienced in this form of work and many were undertaking it at the time of interview. Across all three sites, such positions seemed almost exclusively filled by men from this group because their enthusiastic compliance, avoidance of violence and the nature of their relationships with staff meant they were generally considered low-risk and highly trustworthy. *Tradesmen* were aware that it was easier for them to get these roles than it was for others, but most believed it was an instance of the 'fair form of unfairness' that Taylor described:

> If [prison staff] find someone who [they] know is trustworthy, [they're] more likely to pick them. Even if they're doing 10 different roles, you're still probably more likely to go for someone you trust than the person who you have to take a chance on.
>
> Noah

Indeed, a number of *tradesmen* described being 'headhunted' for high-trust roles because of their compliant reputations ('I kind of got shoved into it really more than anything, you know what I mean, 'we need you to do this, bloody do it', but I enjoyed it!' – Taylor).

'Purposeful activity' and the experience of imprisonment

The previous section has shown how and why different types of men engaged with (or avoided) each form of purposeful activity. However, prison work experiences had distinct consequences for participants, depending on their masculinity, their status and position in the prisoner hierarchy and the degree to which they were able to do work that they chose. The following section therefore explores in more detail how 'purposeful activity' shaped the experience of imprisonment for each group of men.

As described above, *tradesmen*'s prison work experiences were facilitated by their wider approach to prison (their enthusiastic compliance with rules and processes) and characterised by the prevalence of high-trust, prisoner-facing and generative jobs – as mentors, listeners, for third-sector organisations or as red-band orderlies. In terms of the purposes prison work served

in the lives of *tradesmen*, only a handful of men in this group portrayed their engagement with 'purposeful activity' as 'rehabilitative', and they tended to be those whose convictions would have repercussions for future employment (such as those convicted of driving or sexual offences). The majority of other *tradesmen* rejected the idea that prison work could or should serve a 'rehabilitative' purpose in their lives. These participants viewed their offences as 'one-offs' so were not worried about re-offending, but they also felt they had already 'learnt to labour', and planned to return to the licit form of employment for which they were qualified and had undertaken prior to their imprisonment:

> I don't believe I've had any experience in prison that's helped me towards being motivated…I've always had motivation, I've always gone to work, I've never been out of work…that's what I'm good at, going to work.
>
> Ryan

Despite dismissing the need for rehabilitative prison work, some *tradesmen* explained that they had inadvertently gained or improved skills that might benefit them professionally in the future, chiefly greater confidence and listening skills: 'I look at things with different angles now from what I used to, now I assess things before I open my mouth' – Lyle.

Tradesmen were similarly dismissive of suggestions that the work they did in prison served a generative purpose, despite the ubiquity of prisoner-facing roles among this group: while some explained that they enjoyed helping others, it was rarely their initial, enduring or primary motivation. Instead, *tradesmen* framed the 'purposeful activity' they engaged with as serving instrumental purposes only relating to their lives in prison. First, prison work was a way for *tradesmen* to make their sentences more survivable, both physically (especially in relation to men convicted of sexual offences) and psychologically, by helping to pass time, create a routine akin to what they were used to outside, facilitating as much time out of their cells as possible, and provide them with a sense of control:

> To me and to all of the lads who work [for a charity], they say it's probably the best job in the prison…if we've got all our work done we can go back at 4pm, you know, half an hour early is a big difference, to get a shower, get on your phone before all the rest come back…it has its little benefits like that.
>
> Paul

Generative, high-trust work was particularly well-suited to providing *tradesmen* with these benefits because it offered stability (they were rarely cancelled and were usually long-term) and was mentally stimulating ('you've got a lot of responsibility in this job, you've got to be switched on!' – Burton). Second, *tradesmen* used prison work to become 'trusted', which they valued as a means of differentiating themselves from 'criminal' peers and prisoner stereotypes: 'it's sort of like a promotion in a way, from a prisoner to a listener. You're still a prisoner but you've been trusted' – Murray. While this chapter has evidenced that participants from all groups spoke about differentiating themselves from other prisoners, *tradesmen* were particularly reliant on prison work to do so, as the roles they undertook demonstrated their distinction visually (through lanyards, specific t-shirts, their photographs on posters and notices on their cell doors) and through their ability to move around the prison more freely. Third, *tradesmen* sought prison work, and high-trust roles in particular, because this helped evidence that they were low-risk, which in turn supported applications for early release, parole and re-categorisation ('it was nice for me to feel trusted because I knew I could put that towards a cat D' – Louis). These forms of work not only reflected well in themselves, they also made it easier for *tradesmen* to avoid interactions that could threaten their status, as they often involved working independently and in close proximity to staff, thus reducing the risk of *tradesmen* getting caught up in prisoner politics on wings or in workshops.

By contrast, only a small number of *entrepreneurs* described prison work as being instrumentally beneficial to their lives in prison, and those who did invariably focused on how 'purposeful activity' could support applications for parole ('when it's time to sit my tag board I want as much certificates as I can so I can get early release' – Marley). More common was for *entrepreneurs* to portray 'purposeful activity' as fulfilling primarily rehabilitative purposes. Men in this group took a strategic approach to prison work and sought education and training opportunities to 'better' themselves in a general sense, with a couple also describing opportunities that helped prepare them for specific forms of employment on release. *Entrepreneurs'* licit employment histories prior to their imprisonment meant that finding a licit job in the future felt attainable and less daunting than for their peers with more limited experience of the formal labour market. However, while most men in this group had clear ideas about the sorts of success they aspired to, the connections they drew between 'purposeful activity' and future work were usually vague or tenuous: 'I'm doing these courses because…I want to have a strong foundation for when I get out' – Tarek; **'**the cleaning industry [course], I wanted to do because that could kind of benefit me on the outside as well so I did that' –

Karteer. By attaching rehabilitative purposes to prison work and seeking opportunities that would deliver that aim (however vague), *entrepreneurs* were able to frame their sentences as a chance to invest in their future. *Entrepreneurs*' tendency to undertake some generative and creative work was also illustrative of their commitment to self-improvement. Men in this group explained that such opportunities helped them learn new skills, become more articulate, and demonstrate and increase their cultural capital ('I'm learning how to kind of be a DJ radio presenter so it's cool […] I thought let me try something else instead of just writing lyrics let me try and make a radio station so that's what I did' – Alexander).

Entrepreneurs were typified by their positivity, enthusiasm and insistence that they were not wasting their time – and engaging in 'rehabilitative' 'purposeful activity' was fundamental to this orientation. However, as discussed above, many *entrepreneurs* were frustrated by the dearth and inaccessibility of higher-level qualifications and the limited subjects covered by courses in their establishment. This dissatisfaction, alongside boredom when they were unable to engage in self-improvement, threatened to undermine *entrepreneurs'* positive and aspirational masculinities, and thus their pragmatic compliance while in prison. In discussing their disappointment with prison work, and thus with the establishment and wider prison system too, *entrepreneurs'* hope and enthusiasm seemed fragile and frantic, as if feeling and being able to prove that they were making the most out of their situation was a coping strategy as well as a means of achieving their masculinity. The importance of engaging in 'rehabilitative' and productive activities meant that some *entrepreneurs* sought their own ways of 'bettering' themselves when they felt the prison was unable (or unwilling) to. This led several of the group to learn from peers or engage in self-study. However, while this type of activity was often spoken highly of by those who partook in it, being 'unofficial' meant it offered fewer tangible benefits (no accredited qualifications, remuneration or time out of cell, for instance) and risked *entrepreneurs* being drawn to high-risk – and potentially illicit – ways of making money:

> I've been here 15 months and don't feel I've benefited. Everything I've learnt, I've done myself: going to the library etc. … I met a prisoner in here for insider trading, he's given me the names of books and I got them sent in, learning the tricks of the trade.
>
> Eleazar

While *entrepreneurs* and *tradesmen* were usually able to exercise a degree of choice in what 'purposeful activity' they engaged in, *soldiers'* relative lack of compliance meant they were often allocated work they had not sought out. Activities *soldiers* had not applied for were sometimes recognised as incidentally providing benefits ('I do anything really just get out of my pad' – Martin), but more often such work induced anger, underlined narratives around discriminatory treatment and was depicted as purposeless:

> They put me on bike workshops, I'm 28 years old. I'm not gonna be fixing or riding pedal bikes. The instructor said there's no end to the course and I can't get off it, so I just stopped going and got six IEPs.
>
> Lawrence

As Lawrence's experience demonstrates, participants who did not want to do their allocated activity had limited options, and while most *soldiers* participated resentfully in such work, some – like Lawrence – refused and were penalised.

Work that *soldiers* expressed a preference for and applied to do – chiefly wing work and some creative or educational courses – was seen as more purposeful, with men in this group motivated by various ways 'purposeful activity' could make their experience of imprisonment more comfortable. The first of these ways related to *soldiers'* imported desire for status and conspicuous consumption into prison, which manifested in men in this group emphasising the material perks of wing work, such as extra gym time or more food. Fraser exemplified *soldiers'* motivations by describing each job he had undertaken during his sentence exclusively in terms of the instrumental benefits to him during his sentence: waste management offered fresh air (so he quit when it became too cold); being a cleaning orderly provided more time unlocked ('out all day! Living life!'); and servery work meant bigger food portions for himself and his friends.

The second way men in this group used prison work to make their sentence more comfortable derived from the value they placed in being respected (and feared), which was vital to their physical safety and masculinity. While some *soldiers* imported (and so sought to maintain) reputations for being 'tough', others felt the need to develop this reputation inside. Prison work was often instrumental to establishing and maintaining social status because of the access and influence offered by certain jobs. Fraser again exemplified how prison work was useful in this sense:

> I give the lads bigger meals…and say no to others. It's not control, I just see it as looking after me mates. If I don't do it, it'll just be someone else and then I might not get enough food. And everyone knows they can't bully me for food because I'll go mad. I get on with most people, most of the guys on the wing say 'Fraser's not as dickhead'.
>
> Fraser

'Purposeful activity' that *soldiers* enjoyed the *practice* of – such as creative opportunities or educational interests they discovered following a chance allocation – were framed slightly differently. While these activities also served purposes relating to *soldiers'* lives in prison, undertaking work that they were passionate about was a means of coping with and minimising the pains of imprisonment. For example, creative and educational work helped time pass more quickly, kept *soldiers'* minds occupied ('pretty much like art I think that it keeps my heart motivated if that makes sense it keeps my mind yeah like drawing it takes my mind off things' – Sasha), offered respite from anxiety and stressful situations ('art is good you know, really good […] it's calm. I'm sat there chilling, taking my time' – Ash) and helped them keep in contact with their families ('I sent [a drawing] to my mum and nan…I got her to photocopy it and send it to my mate and my other mate's mum, the two that are dead, because at the bottom there was a gap so I done fancy writing saying 'rest in peace my brothers' – Morgan). A small number of *soldiers* doing this type of work discussed how it might be beneficial for finding employment on release, however, such comments were vague and the vast majority of men in this group did not see work they had personally undertaken as 'rehabilitative'.

Strugglers were the least analytic about their experiences of imprisonment, and rarely approached their sentence with a sense of purpose or direction. Consequently, many *strugglers* were occupied by 'fire-fighting', which echoed their lifestyles before imprisonment. *Strugglers'* prison work experiences were characterised by the same inconsistency as their outside histories: they engaged with 'purposeful activity' opportunistically so there was rarely a discernible direction to their prison work choices ('a job's a job isn't it, in a jail' – Jay). During interviews, men in this group often could not explain why they applied for the jobs or courses they had done and, despite active engagement with prison work of all types, most described it as 'purposeful' only within the prison environment, rather than for on release.

The most pervasive purpose served by prison work during *strugglers'* sentences was making the experience of imprisonment survivable: by keeping them busy, helping time pass, providing a source of income, enabling contact with friendly peers and relieving boredom ('[barbering] was just something to pass the time…kills half an hour of your day cutting someone's hair' – Mitchell). In addition to the ways prison work helped *strugglers* cope, those who did wing work tended to reference specific perks including more and/or better food and regular gym access: 'I got house block orderly, get extra food on the servery, I was still getting loads of gym as well…wake up at 8 o'clock in the morning, quickly go to the gym for an hour every day' – Jamie. While the purpose *strugglers* found in this type of work resembled that of *soldiers*, there was a difference between these groups in the deliberateness of their engagement with specific types of 'purposeful activity': *soldiers* applied for roles that would provide particular perks they wanted, whereas *strugglers* accepted almost any form of work because they sought the generic, basic benefits associated with being 'employed' in prison (and identified additional, activity-specific bonuses afterwards).

Strugglers' largely directionless approach to 'purposeful activity' was also reflected in the relative absence of discussions about 'rehabilitative' prison work experience. Typically, *strugglers* had few qualifications before coming to prison (indeed, several in the group reported not being able to read or write properly). However, while some *strugglers* imported a resistance to classroom-based and formal learning, others valued gaining skills and basic qualifications (*strugglers* were by far the most likely to speak positively about English and maths qualifications, for example). Those who were interested in education and training rarely chose courses with specific post-release employment in mind though. Instead, the purpose fulfilled by *strugglers'* participation in prison education was a general ambition of 'bettering' themselves. In these narratives, learning was portrayed as intrinsically 'good' and 'useful', but not good or useful *for* anything in particular. That *strugglers'* ambitions for bettering themselves were much vaguer than those of *entrepreneurs,* for instance, reflected the relatively more modest professional aspirations the former had for their lives on release. The absence of post-release or 'rehabilitative' purpose in the education and training *strugglers* participated in was evident in their responses to questions about what opportunities they would bring into their establishment were they to be in charge: while most men from other groups answered passionately and in detail, *strugglers* were largely satisfied with what was already available and few identified a course or type of work that they themselves wanted to do beyond existing

provisions. These exchanges underlined the lack of a plan or strategy for *strugglers'* lives both inside prison and post-release:

Martha: **So if you were in charge of the prison what kind of work or educational opportunities would you want to offer?**

Fernando: Ummm [pause] I don't know... they've already got everything

Martha: **So you're satisfied? There's nothing you think would have been useful or good or anything?**

Fernando: You know what, mechanics, cars

Martha: **Is that something you're interested in doing?**

Fernando: No, not me personally. Loads of lads would do it, probably. I don't know.

Overall, the facets of 'purposeful activity' that motivated *strugglers* were rarely related to the practice of specific forms of work. Furthermore, *strugglers* were more driven than other prisoners by 'negative' purposes, in that they tended to use prison work to *avoid* experiences, spaces and feelings ('I was just bored…they just had me behind the door for 6 weeks and I just thought I might as well do a course' – Shaun). However, this attitude to 'purposeful activity' did not mean *strugglers* were less motivated than their peers, as the sense of the necessity to work – in order to cope with and survive imprisonment – incentivised greater compliance with staff and engagement with the regime.

This section has demonstrated that 'purposeful activity' of all types served multiple and diverse 'purposes' and functions in participants' lives. For instance, while men from all groups used prison work to cope with and improve their prison experiences, they did this in distinct ways and by using specific forms of 'purposeful activity' depending, in part, on what they were able to access. *Tradesmen* and *entrepreneurs* tended to engage with 'purposeful activity' in order to communicate their status, masculinities and imported orientations to work. For *tradesmen,* this meant getting into high-trust and often generative roles (which they were able to do given their enthusiastic compliance with staff and the regime), while education, training and qualifications were more common amongst *entrepreneurs*. *Entrepreneurs'* prison work 'careers' were partly due to an imported preference for this type of activity, but it was also because *entrepreneurs* found it harder than *tradesmen* to access the most high-trust work: the former's friendlier and more informal relationships with staff meant that while some were happy to give *entrepreneurs* preferential treatment or help them skip queues, men in this group

were sometimes seen as manipulative and therefore risky. Within the context of Warr's (2023) findings, it is likely that ethnicity played a role in the differential experiences of *entrepreneurs* and *tradesmen* in terms of access to trusted forms of prison work. While *entrepreneurs* did not frame their experience of trust (or the lack thereof) in this way, it is feasible that they did not feel comfortable disclosing such suspicions to me (as a white researcher endorsed and facilitated by the establishment).

In comparison, *strugglers* and *soldiers* were more driven to engage with opportunities that kept them physically safe(r) and provided material and psychological benefits. More specifically, for *strugglers*, whether wing work or off-wing work felt safer depended on the prison and their wing, and they actively sought the psychological benefits of routine and distraction, which were fulfilled by practically all forms of 'purposeful activity'. By contrast, for *soldiers*, wing work was invariably the best way to avoid violence, and material benefits were emphasised more often than psychological ones. *Soldiers* also sought to express their masculinity and enjoyed developing new skills (particularly in creative fields) but found limited access to work that fulfilled these purposes. This was due to a lack of provision in some establishments, but also to *soldiers'* reservations in seeking out such opportunities and the relatively higher risk levels of most in this group, which limited their personal access to certain opportunities. This suggests that *soldiers* were not only 'trapped physically, socially and psychologically' (Reid 2017: 177) in the community, but in prison too.

Discussions thus far evidence three key findings. First, despite most participants wanting to be 'employed' in prison and readily identifying various benefits of work, the vast majority of men in this study did not believe any of their prison work experiences had been 'rehabilitative' or would help them into employment post-release. Second, participants were resilient and resourceful in finding purposes for activities, as even forms of work that men had not chosen or wanted to do generally *became* 'purposeful' in some way. While this evidences prisoners' adaptability, it also suggests that in addition to prison work being a means of coping with one's sentence, it could equally be something prisoners had to cope *with*. Participants were fully aware of the punitive consequences of non-compliance with 'purposeful activity', and while some refused to attend or behaved disruptively while at work despite these threats, the vast majority accepted that they needed to engage. However, the spectre of participating in activities solely for the benefit of others (to make or save money for the prison, contracted providers or private companies) seemed to provoke prisoners to expend emotional labour recasting work,

education and training opportunities (and particularly those they had not applied for) as in some way purposeful. That most men had engaged in this reclaiming of a sense of agency and creation of 'purpose' underlines how prison work was simultaneously a means of coping with imprisonment and something that prisoners had to endure and recast positively. Third, the experience, function and practice of prison work were intimately related to participants' masculinities and their imported work experiences and orientations. Building on these findings relating to the practices and purposes of prison work, and the evident ambiguity of the term 'purposeful' given its 'official' use, the final section of this chapter discusses whether it is more appropriate to consider the *meaningfulness* of 'purposeful activity'.

Purpose and meaning

As mentioned previously in this thesis, there is a necessary distinction to be drawn between 'purposeful' and '*meaningful'* forms of prison work, education and training. 'Purpose' and 'purposefulness' here is defined in terms of an activity's or action's *instrumental* quality, and the way in which it can be used to fulfil another aim or outcome. 'Meaning' and 'meaningfulness', by contrast, represents an activity or practice engaged in as an end in itself, because the 'doing' of the activity is valued and valuable to the individual engaging in it.

That participants found purpose in even the most mundane and unskilled prison jobs was evidence of their ability to adapt to the prison environment and underlined the importance of each available resource for constructing masculine identities when many other tools were (temporarily) inaccessible. Whether work was 'purposeful' therefore offers only a partial understanding of prison work experiences and their relation to prisoner masculinities. Equally important to understanding men's identity work in prison was learning whether activities were *meaningful.* 'Meaningful', as opposed to 'purposeful', work was seen by participants as impacting their lives long-term including on release, in that it involved roles that fed their existing passions or ignited new ones, and offered learning opportunities marked by qualifications and formal recognition. Exploring the meaningfulness of work also avoids confusion arising from the intertwining of 'purpose' and 'rehabilitation' by both participants and official policies and narratives. While 'rehabilitation' and finding work post-release was important to many prisoners, such language often narrows discussions around prison work because it obscures in-prison consequences and only represents one way that prison work might impact men's lives. As this chapter has established, prison work was 'purposeful' in various ways – in that it achieved valuable ends – but rarely perceived as 'rehabilitative' by

participants. Discussion of the *meaningfulness* of prison work, by contrast, offers the potential for more nuanced discussions and understandings of the relationship between masculinity and 'purposeful activity'. The remainder of this chapter thus explores the meanings and problems of prison work.

Much of the work available across all three establishments, and particularly menial work as wing cleaners, on serveries and in contracts workshops, was popular amongst prisoners because of its instrumental benefits, but participants rarely considered it meaningful. The relative willingness of many participants – particularly *soldiers* and *strugglers* – to engage in instrumental rather than meaningful work that might impact their lives longer-term may serve as evidence of a lack of interest in or reluctance to seek out 'rehabilitative' opportunities. This conclusion corresponds to some extent with *soldier* and *strugglers* orientations to and experiences of licit work, in that they were most open about the prospect of returning to illicit work on release. However, the approaches of Joelle (*soldier*) and Jay (*struggler*), who described meaningful experiences in educational settings in prison that they had encountered by chance, highlight an openness amongst these types to different sorts of activities.

Indeed, several *soldiers* described examples of prison classrooms and workshops where the practice of the activity itself was meaningful. More common, however, was for *soldiers* to describe these experiences as meaningful because of the impact of the staff who instructed the activity, and the relationships they had developed with them. In talking about his experience in the prison's art class, for example, it was evident that Neel had enjoyed the course, cared about being successful in it and was proud of his work ('I'm still waiting for my certificate. I done loads of pictures'). However, in comparing his experience in art with other forms of 'purposeful activity', the most significant factor was the way the teacher – Charlotte – treated him:

> She used to help man out, she's a good lady Charlotte, she's a good person still…I remember she made me work hard, so she made me get my certificates. She knows as well that I'll be angry [that I don't have it yet]. I need to go speak to her.
>
> Neel

Neel valued his time in Charlotte's class because it felt as though she wanted to be there (which she showed by taking the time to teach him properly), that she got to know Neel and saw him as a person (as opposed to a 'criminal' or his offence), and that she cared for and was emotionally invested in him, which she demonstrated by pushing him to pass the course and learn new skills. *Strugglers* often enjoyed these courses too but – aside from a couple of

exceptions – spoke less passionately or personally about them and ultimately focused on how good instructors enhanced the prison-related benefits of the experience (e.g. helping to distract them or pass time).

Tradesmen were similarly unlikely to describe prison work experiences they felt would impact them long term, despite most being able to select the activities they engaged with. There were three main reasons for this. First, as discussed, most *tradesmen* did not feel they needed new skills or support finding work. The second reason related to the quality of the work experiences available in prison. Given the importance of work to *tradesman* masculinities, it is theoretically feasible that prison work could be meaningful were it to be an adequate substitute for (or extension of) the licit work practices with which they were already familiar. However, the structure, design, remuneration and practice of work in prison meant that *tradesmen* did not consider it 'real' work. Elliot exemplified this attitude by describing how he had been unable to adjust his routine to the prison's less demanding schedule:

> It was hard to get up for work [in the community] when I first started but you get in that routine. Bloody hell, I've been in here two years, and work doesn't start until nine in the morning, but I still get up at half six, seven o'clock in the morning.
>
> Elliott

The third reason that prison work was so rarely meaningful to *tradesmen* relates to the shame this group felt regarding their imprisonment. As *tradesmen* were adamant that they would not return to custody post-release, and they conveyed this intention by insisting and asserting that their prison work experiences were temporary. Indeed, *tradesmen's* intentions to discard their prison identities, and prison *work* identities on release – so they could revert back to their prior self – were crucial to their masculinities.

Given the findings presented in this chapter so far, it would be expected for *entrepreneurs* to report more meaningful prison work experiences: they wanted to 'better' themselves, were relatively trusted as a consequence of their pragmatic compliance, and so usually found it easy to access education, training and other opportunities. While I have demonstrated that *entrepreneurs* described various prison work experiences as bettering them and providing new skills, frustration that opportunities were relatively basic and generic was also evident:

> I've given up on looking at [Open] university courses because I don't think there's one that'll help me with what I want to achieve when I come out. I just feel like I'm better off doing my Level Twos and looking at courses when I get out.
>
> Kelsey

Furthermore, as highlighted in previous sections, the courses and forms of 'purposeful activity' that *entrepreneurs* sought out were usually short-term and therefore required men in this group to undertake other – and less educational – activities in the interim. Therefore, while most *entrepreneurs* had found some prison work meaningful, their experiences were also marked by a sense of missed opportunity, in that they wanted to engage with both a greater volume of useful work, and with activities that would be more aligned with their personal interests and ambitions.

Conclusion

This chapter began by exploring the diverse masculinities participants developed in prisons in three English regions. These masculinities developed through men's orientations and experiences outside prison (including in relation to work), and in response to the distinct ways imprisonment threatened (or did not threaten) their imported masculinity. While this research focuses on how masculinities shaped perceptions of prison work, the first part of this chapter explored participants' broader masculine adaptations to imprisonment. The prison masculinities presented in this section corresponded with hegemonic masculinity theory to the extent that there was a multiplicity of masculinities evident across all three sites, which were identifiable by their claims to power and their relations to one another (Connell 1995; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005). None of the types identified in this study corresponded to 'hegemonic masculinity' itself though: men from all groups were disempowered by the prison (although not always in the same ways), and for most, this compounded imported vulnerabilities and disadvantage which served to underscore their marginalised masculine position (ibid.). In terms of the extent to which there was a masculine hierarchy, *strugglers* embodied a subordinate masculinity. Beyond this though, the *soldier, entrepreneur* and *tradesman* types represented credible masculinities with no clear hierarchy between them, in part because men in each group had successfully and creatively carved out access to distinct forms of power within their establishments.

By following this discussion with analysis of how men from different groups approached each type of 'purposeful activity', the chapter also highlighted how participants' masculinities and imported work experiences shaped their engagement with prison work, education and training – and how their wider prison conduct impacted their ability to engage with it. Concluding the chapter with an exploration of the purpose and meaning of prison work then evidenced participants' resilience and resourcefulness: 'purposeful activity' was mainly a valuable masculinity resource and a tool for making men's experiences of imprisonment more comfortable and survivable. While this section provided examples of instances where participants felt prison work was a means of bettering themselves or preparing for employment post-release, the vast majority of 'purposeful activity' was not perceived this way.

In exploring the purpose and meaning of prison work for different types of men, this chapter identified various explanations for why 'purposeful activity' so often failed to be considered rehabilitative or meaningful by those doing it. Prison work provisions were too basic for many *entrepreneurs*, they were considered poor imitations of 'real' work by *tradesmen*, and rarely impacted the opinions of *soldiers* or *strugglers* about the desirability or feasibility of licit post-release employment. Structural issues with 'purposeful activity' were also evident: none of the three sites had sufficient activity spaces, meaningful experiences were rare and usually dependent on exceptional instructors (and therefore difficult to replicate), and prison timetables and security measures meant work remained inefficient (Legge 1978). The way men responded to a dearth of opportunities that might impact them long term illustrated participants' resourcefulness: prison work was continually repurposed, most often as means of coping with the experience of imprisonment.

That the most common and widespread 'purposes' of prison work related only to participants' lives in prison was significant. While this chapter has explained various reasons why prison work opportunities were not perceived as 'rehabilitative' or otherwise meaningful, it is also clear that the mental and physical wellbeing of a significant proportion of participants seemed to depend on their ability to work in prison. As was the case for some *soldiers* and *tradesmen* – who were concerned about locale-based violence and violence related to convictions for sexual offences respectively – being able to work in specific locations (such as on the wing) was important for physical safety. More common, though, was for participants to describe the social and psychological benefits of 'purposeful activity' in terms of the interactions, routine, status and distraction it provided. The repurposing of prison work in this way underlines both

the distress and destabilisation of imprisonment and the dearth of alternative resources for coping with it.

While prison work was demonstrably valued by prisoners, identifying the ways participants developed masculinities and engaged with prison work also illustrated the purposes and functions it served for establishments. As existing research notes, forms of work including orderly work in kitchens, cleaning wings or doing laundry as well as generative roles and contracts work were vital for each prison's daily functioning and financial viability (Legge 1978; Zatz 2008; Darke 2013). However, 'purposeful activity' was not only a means of *physically* reproducing and maintaining the prison, it also: incentivised compliant behaviour, made the prison (more) survivable and legitimate, and helped staff manage prisoner social dynamics. These functions of 'purposeful activity' reproduced existing inequalities. Higher rates of remuneration for contracts work, for instance, meant that men who lacked financial support from friends or family (as was the case for numerous *strugglers*) often became reliant on such activities which in turn made it difficult for them to engage with more 'rehabilitative' opportunities. The challenges that *entrepreneurs* encountered in accessing the most trusted roles, and that Black *soldiers* experienced in engaging with educational and training opportunities, were also evidence of ways in which racial inequalities were reproduced through prison work and the narrative labours prisoners of colour routinely negotiated in this environment (Warr 2023). *Tradesmen's* domination of generative and high trust roles represented the ways in which privilege was reproduced through these processes. That most men in this group had extensive experience of applying for jobs and being in employment gave them various advantages over other men in securing desirable roles in prison, including those that would support applications for de-categorisation and early release. Burton, for instance, explained how his work history helped him secure a position with a charity:

> This was like a job outside: you had a three- or four-page application form, with your work history, what do you bring to the role etcetera, and then after that you come for an interview…quite intense, which I think could be intimidating to people in prison. A lot of people have never been in work before, so if you see a three- or four-page application form, immediately you're under pressure, I think, if you're not used to it.
>
> Burton (*tradesman*)

In addition to exploring the ways 'purposeful activity' was repurposed by participants to cope with their experiences, this chapter has revealed how current provisions are commissioned and

designed without understanding of the prisoners it is apparently 'for', which underlines why it was so rarely 'meaningful'. One way in which prison work failed to account for the men who undertook it relates to the content of what was offered, in that provisions invariably failed to reflect the local labour markets to which participants would return post-release. As Chapter Five illustrated, unskilled manual work and the service sector represented the most likely forms of employment for many young men in prison, but there were few opportunities to gain relevant skills or experience. The other way in which prison work was disconnected from participants' experiences was that it failed to address the means by which young men found employment. As Chapter Five described, men from all groups relied on social networks and agencies to find work, and these methods invariably led to insecure and short-term opportunities (with exceptions for some *tradesmen*). Meanwhile, men who had sought work through other channels – including by applying directly to employers – reported repeated rejection, and often attributed subsequent engagement with illicit work to these experiences. 'Purposeful activity' provisions failed to address or acknowledge these experiences or barriers to employment.

Overall, then, this chapter has evidenced that prison work is valuable and 'purposeful' but rarely *meaningful,* and explained that this is because of the multitude of functions it is expected to serve, structural barriers relating to the organisation of productive activities in prison, and because provisions are designed without sufficient consideration or understanding of those participating in it.

7. Conclusion: 'purposeful activity' and the elusiveness of 'a good and useful life'

This thesis began with analysis of specific instances of prison work, and demonstrated that despite provisions being ostensibly similar across the three sites (and the jurisdiction) – in that most prisons offer maths, English, business, the same prison maintenance and third sector roles, and one or two menial contract workshops, for example – the experience of these activities varied considerably in practice. Prison work experiences were dependent on establishment- and instructor-specific factors, meaning the quality of activities was highly variable. This was in part due to the significant impact of an exceptional instructor, but was structurally a consequence of more senior staff – from policy makers to governors and other managers – lacking understanding of what makes prison work 'good' or 'effective' (and thus unawareness of how to achieve it). The impact of an establishment's population on how prison work was experienced was also evident. The unique population of Swinfen Hall, with a third of young men having been convicted of sexual offences, engaged with 'purposeful activity' in a different way to those in Isis, where prisoners' imported rivalries contributed to markedly higher rates of prisoner-prisoner violence. At both sites, the establishment's population made participation in prison work 'risky', but the nature of this risk – of the social and moral stain of working alongside sexual offenders in Swinfen Hall, and of perpetrating or being the victim of serious violence in Isis – had distinct consequences for young men's experiences of 'purposeful activity'. By contrast, findings from Wealstun demonstrated how other sorts of prison-specific factors, the illicit economy and availability of NPS, in this instance, impacted prison work experiences. Drug-users made tea-packing physically and socially risky, and men who were influential in the supply of drugs organised themselves to congregate in another contract workshop, pins and grommets.

While this part of this thesis demonstrated the impact of the prison on experiences of 'purposeful activity', the typology in the following chapter highlighted the importance of importation to prisoner masculinities. The original field of prisoner masculinities depicted identities and adaptations that were primarily compensatory responses to the deprivations of imprisonment, with some generic references to the importation of stereotypical and hypermasculine attributes and experiences, such as a propensity to violence or a history of worklessness. The large sample in this research, and its in-depth consideration of participants'

orientations to and experiences of licit and illicit work prior to imprisonment, provide evidence of the 'geography' of masculinities (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005): the four identified types were highly embedded in the labour markets, masculinities and histories of their locales. Nearly three-quarters of participants had experienced some form of licit employment prior to their imprisonment and the masculinities they had developed through work, as well as through the loss and rejection of employment opportunities, were fundamental not only to the way they adapted their prison masculinities, but to the aspirations they had for life post-release, and to how and why they engaged with specific forms of prison work.

As Chapter Six – 'A Good and Useful Life' – demonstrated, it is the interaction of men and masculinities with prison work provisions that forms the basis of the other key finding of this research: that while prison work is invariably *purposeful* – in that it serves a desirable and valued function for those participating in (and facilitating) it – it is rarely *meaningful* or 'rehabilitative'. Across the three sites, 'purposeful activity' was poorly resourced and prisons found it difficult to recruit sufficient – and sufficiently skilled and qualified – staff to deliver it. However, prison work also failed to fulfil its apparent rehabilitative function because it was designed in ignorance (or in spite) of the experiences, aspirations and needs of those who participated in it. Lack of understanding about men's diverse work experiences, both licit and illicit, and confusion about *why* they engaged in or rejected different opportunities meant that even with sufficient funding and staffing, contemporary provisions would be unlikely to 'rehabilitate' young male prisoners consistently or reliably: it was not designed to address the reasons men had lost or refused to engage in employment.

The scarcity of 'rehabilitation' delivered by prison work did not, however, mean that it was considered a failure by prison staff or prisoners. In terms of institutional functions, prison work was used to incentivise and reward compliance, and to punish non-compliance. Prison work was also an institutional tool in the sense that governors are assessed on performance indicators including engagement with 'purposeful activity' and 'time out of cell', and prisoner work was crucial to the maintenance and daily running of the prison, in the form of cleaning, meal preparation, laundry and other such practices. In the absence of meaningful or rehabilitative prison work, prisoners also found alternative purposes for 'purposeful activity': *tradesmen* sought generative roles to differentiate them from their peers and to support their endeavours for early release; *entrepreneurs* tried to educate themselves and learn skills that demonstrated their ambition and assisted licit aspirations for release; *soldiers* engaged primarily with work

that made their prison lives more comfortable, although some happened upon opportunities that bred new interests and passions; and *strugglers* – whose main motivation was to remain occupied – lacked direction in their prison work choices, but were able to reframe most opportunities as potentially (and vaguely) 'useful', or as capable of making them a 'better person'. That is, young men resourcefully re-purposed prison work to cope with and make more comfortable their experiences of imprisonment (and sometimes to better themselves more generally).

Contribution

In considering the function(s) of prison work, this thesis furthers debates about the aims of imprisonment more broadly. Imprisonment is presented as a means of delivering any or all of the aims of punishment, deterrence, rehabilitation and protection, and prison *work* is portrayed similarly. That current forms of 'purposeful activity' are largely unable to deliver the rehabilitation that they are apparently designed to provide undermines assertions that contemporary imprisonment is capable of fulfilling its 'rehabilitative' aim. Writing about the United States, Parenti stated that 'the main problem with prison labour today is the prison system within which it occurs' (2001: 249), and this research provides evidence of this being the case in England and Wales too. Participants' reliance on prison work to cope with and survive their sentences suggests that prisoners might only have the option of engaging in rehabilitative opportunities once they feel physically, emotionally and socially safe in the prison. This thesis has illustrated a multiplicity of ways in which prison work was used to make imprisonment more comfortable and more survivable, and it follows that only in reducing the *need* to use prison work in this way might prisoners have the opportunity to engage in rehabilitative activities (should they be available). That both staff and prisoners 'played along with' the idea that prison work did or *could* deliver 'rehabilitation' and help men find work on release – despite the findings discussed in this thesis – suggests that 'purposeful activity' in England and Wales is what Carlen calls an 'imaginary penality', that is:

> …penal policies and practices where agents charged with either the authorisation, development and/or implementation of a system of punishment address themselves to its principles and persist in manufacturing an elaborate system of costly institutional practices 'as if' all objectives are realisable.
>
> Carlen 2008: 1

Hörnqvist (2008) arrived at a similar conclusion, although from a theoretical and more quantitative standpoint than this thesis. By providing qualitative data from prisoners who participate in prison work, education and training, and by evidencing the role of wider prison conditions on the use and effectiveness of prison work provisions, this thesis has also furthered understandings and discussions of 'imaginary penalities' and the aims of imprisonment.

This thesis also contributes to debates about the relationship between the prison and the labour market. Established theories from Rusche and Kirchheimer (1939) and Melossi and Pavarini (1981) are generally Marxist in their analysis of prison work, presenting such practices as instances of exploitation resulting from the forcible extraction of prisoner labour power. This study, however, demonstrates that most participants felt quite detached from the prison work they participated in, to the extent that they did not feel particularly protective of their labour power or its outcomes. Furthermore, participants' engagement with provisions was incentivised but rarely *forced* (and often enthusiastic) (Parenti 2001; Goodman 2012). By analysing prison work experiences and orientations in terms of masculinity and wider relationships with work, this thesis demonstrates that the majority of participants offered their 'labour power' to the prison not for financial compensation, but for masculinity resources and as a way to improve their physical and psychological experience of imprisonment. Consequently, while exploitation was a theme in this research, such feelings were not derived primarily from the extraction of prisoners' labour (partly because forms of work that an individual felt *might* exploit their labour in this way were avoidable). Because participants generally felt detached from the work they did in prison, the sense of exploitation they reported was rooted not in their status or experience as workers, but as *prisoners*. Men were aware that, as an individual, they did not necessarily have to labour, produce or achieve anything in order for the stakeholders involved in the provision of prison work to benefit from their being there. By merely *attending* an activity, prisoners positively impacted key performance indicators (relating to time out of cell and rates of engagement with purposeful activity, for example) for the prison, education and training providers, and charities.

Implications

There are three primary implications of this thesis in terms of how its findings help us to think about masculinity and the nature of work in prison. Building on the above discussion about the function of prison work and the ways in which participants related to such practices, the first way this thesis furthers understandings of prison work specifically is in terms of definition.

Prison work theorists such as Zatz (2008, 2021) and Hatton (2021), as well as those who consider imprisonment more generally (Rusche and Kirchheimer 1939; Melossi and Pavarini 1981), encourage the analysis of prison work as a *form* of work, and *in relation to* work that takes place outside the criminal justice system. While there are legal, philosophical and economic reasons to analyse prison work *as work*, the vast majority of participants in this study did not view 'purposeful activity' as 'work'. Focusing on the ways in which prison labour is and is not like work outside prison means that much existing research centres issues of remuneration and the legal protections afforded to prisoner workers (Shea 2005; Pandeli 2015). In addition to the finding that most participants did not consider prison work to be *work*, my research has demonstrated that prisoners use and assess '*work*' activities in the same way as education, training and voluntary opportunities. In studying all forms of 'purposeful activity', this thesis has underlined how defining prison work in a more prison-centric way aids greater understanding of how and why men engage with it, as well as the consequences of this on masculinities and experiences of imprisonment more broadly.

This thesis also has implications for understandings of prisoner masculinities. As Murray states, 'few attempts have been made to show how men communicate their masculine credentials in practice' (2023: 235), and the typology I have presented provides empirical evidence of ways that subsequent research might approach and contribute to this field. This study utilises Connell's (1995; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005) hegemonic masculinity framework, and describes various 'dominant', 'dominating' and protest masculinities on the 'local level' (Messerschmidt 2012; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005). However, it also demonstrates that explorations of hegemonic masculinity itself are of limited relevance to penological research. As discussed at the beginning of this thesis, hegemonic masculinity is defined as that which 'legitimates hierarchical gender relations between men and women…and among men' (Messerschmidt 2012: 38), and the marginalised men who inhabited the prisons in this study did not have access to the resources that would enable them to embody such a masculinity, especially while imprisoned by the state.

Contrary to Murray's finding that 'young men are still categorised by clear and hierarchical status distinctions' (2023: 235), this thesis found little evidence of a hierarchy between the masculinities of any particular type (aside from *strugglers'* lower status). In the prisons within this study, multiple masculinities circulated, each with credibility. In providing a more empirically nuanced account of prisoner masculinities, these findings show why it is important

to identify and understand this diversity: not only do prisoners have different experiences of and orientations to work, their masculinities influence the way they engage with prison work and adapt to the experience of imprisonment more broadly. These findings also encourage the continued move away from the oversimplistic and misleading focus on hypermasculinity that initially dominated the field and suggest that the enduring preoccupation in prison masculinities research on hierarchy – or, more specifically, the frequent folding of prison masculinities research into studies of prisoner hierarchy – should be reconsidered. Recognising the existence of multiple credible masculinities will improve subsequent research into prison masculinities as well as prisoner hierarchies and societies.

New evidence in this thesis relating to the relationship between prison work and status also has implications for penology. In this study, the relationship between status and 'purposeful activity' was considerably weaker than in Gibson-Light's study from the United States (2019, 2020) or in Pandeli's (2015) research into contracts work in England and Wales. While different forms of work were easily identifiable as 'high' and 'low' status, participants frequently qualified and offset these labels: high-status work for charities or as red-bands was portrayed as 'for screw boys' or 'boring' by those not able to access it, and low-status work in contracts workshops was framed as providing access to the illicit economy or as representing a chance to 'coast' by higher-status men who engaged with it. The relationship between work and status was further undermined by widespread appreciation throughout the prisons of activity allocation processes. Men knew that desirable positions invariably had long waiting-lists, that there was a significant degree of 'randomness' to allocations (especially when people first arrived at an establishment), and that all activities were temporary. Consequently, most prisoners agreed that 'purposeful activity' was an unreliable reflection of status or character – and invariably benefited from this consensus at points in their sentence.

Policy and future research

While this research focused on masculinities primarily in relation to work experiences, it has highlighted the complicated and nuanced relationship between race, ethnicity, locale and the development of prison masculinities. Future research could explore these differences further and focus more specifically on disentangling the intersections between race, masculinity and prison work experiences. The apparent flattening of hierarchy and absence of hegemony in this thesis – two concepts routinely problematised in prison masculinities research – suggests that

the field would also benefit from more studies that are exploratory and do not assume or centre these concepts.

There are also several potential policy implications from this research. First, the prison work experiences described by this study provide (further) evidence of the impact decades of public-sector funding cuts have had on both physical resources and conditions, and on staff numbers, expertise and experience in prisons in England and Wales. When conditions deteriorate and relationships become more strained, distress increases (Liebling with Arnold 2004; Liebling and Ludlow 2016), and this study has demonstrated that, in such contexts, prisoners are increasingly likely to use (and in some cases depend on) 'purposeful activity' to cope with and survive the experience of imprisonment. To improve the experiences and outcomes of prison work, education and training, the wider experience of imprisonment must first be invested in.

In a context where young men felt able to think about future employment, they would benefit from activities that provided advice and guidance about applying for work, writing CVs, preparing for interview, and about their rights and what they should expect from employers. Such opportunities would minimise some of the risks and negative outcomes that participants had previously experienced in the labour market and provide the skills and confidence for them to seek a wider range of work from more diverse sources. There is some evidence that such provisions are increasingly available, following the introduction of Prison Employment Leads in 92 prisons across England and Wales, but it is too early to assess the impact of these new provisions, or whether they are sufficiently supported and qualified to deliver them.

To deliver *meaningful* opportunities, prisons need to be empowered to provide work, education and training that men will engage in regardless of their incarceration. These should reflect the experiences and aspirations of men in the establishment as much as possible and facilitate much greater diversity in provisions between establishments and over time. This thesis has provided insight into the elements that are needed to enable meaningful work: experienced and consistent staff, reliable sessions, feeling of physical and psychological safety in workplaces, relevance to personal experienced and ambitions. I recognise that delivering these elements is challenging, if not impossible in prisons in England and Wales today for the reasons discussed above, and therefore believe that serious consideration should be given to whether 'rehabilitation' endures as an official aim – of prison work specifically, and imprisonment more broadly. This thesis has shown that the promotion of prison work as 'rehabilitative', despite its

being an underfunded and understaffed ‘imaginary penality’, creates and exacerbates frustration and disillusion not only with ‘purposeful activity’, but the prison more widely, with tangible and potentially serious consequences for both staff and prisoners.

Appendix I – Interview Schedule

Growing up

- What's your earliest memory?
- Tell me about growing up – where and with who etc.?
- What was your life like as a child?
- How did you find school?
    - What were your favourite subjects?
- What were you like as a child? How would people have described you/how would you direct an actor in the story of your life?
- When you were growing up, were you aware of people around you working?
- What work did the people around you do? (E.g. your parents/siblings/neighbours/friends)
    - How did you feel about this work?
    - How do you think they felt about this work?
    - Do you know why they did that type of work in particular/why do you think they did it?
- Were you aware of a certain type of work being dominant in your local area?
    - Did people mostly do the same sorts of things or was there a lot of local variety in work?
- Did you have an idea of what you wanted to be when you grew up?
    - Why do you think you wanted to do that?

Working history

- What work had you done before coming to prison?
    - Work can be paid employment but it can also be any productive activity/any occupation, could be studying, volunteering or earning money in ways other than paid employment
    - Why did you (not) work?
- [If worked before]
    - How and why did you get into [each job]?
        - How did you feel about that work?
        - What did you like about it?
        - Do you think you were good at it?
        - Were you 'successful'?
- What did it provide you? Emotionally, financially, otherwise What has been your favourite type of work?
- Thinking about ways you've earned money…
    - How important was work (each job/occupation) to how you thought about yourself?
    - How did your work impact on your life?
- Describe a typical day in your life before you came to prison (on this sentence).

Prison work

- What (work) do you do in prison at the moment? / Why are you not in an activity in prison?
- [If in activity…]
    - How did you get this course/job etc.?
    - Why do you do this form of work?
    - How do you feel about this work? What are its pros and cons?
- What is the best type of work you/one can do in this prison right now?
- What is the worst type of work in the prison right now?
- Is there any work you would like to do in this prison that you haven't done? Why haven't you done it?
- Do certain types of men do certain jobs?
    - Why do you think this is the case?
- Do certain jobs make people more/less powerful or give them status?
- How do you become a red band?
    - Is it easy? Fair? Desirable?
- How are you allocated work here?
    - Do you think it's fair?
- What work have you done in prison in the past? In this and/or other prisons.
    - Why did you do those forms of work?
- If you were in charge of the prison, and could bring in any courses or jobs, what would you introduce?

Future work

- What would you like to do after prison?
- Will any of the work or courses you've done in prison help you when you're released?
- Are there any jobs or types of work that you think are 'men's work' or 'women's work'?
- Are there any jobs you would, or would not, want your (future) son or daughter to do?
- Thinking about changes to the types of jobs available in England in the last 50 years, there used to be more jobs in factories, mines and production etc., and now there are more jobs in offices and services. How do you feel about these different types of jobs/these changes?

Masculinity

- Did you have any role models growing up? Who and why?
- Do you have any role models/anyone you look up to now?
- What makes someone manly?
- What makes someone a good man?
- How would you describe yourself? Give me three words to describe yourself.
- How you friends/family describe you?
- What motivates you?
- How would you define success?
- Are you or have you been successful? Do you think you will be in the future?
- What are you most proud of in your life so far?

Appendix II – Consent Form

UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE
Institute of Criminology

Martha Morey
Institute of Criminology, Sidgwick Avenue, CB3 9DA

Project title: Work and identity among male prisoners

Researcher: Martha Morey – University of Cambridge

Please tick the boxes **if you agree** with the following statements:

	YES
1. I have read and understood the Participant Information Sheet for this research (or have had it read out to me and have understood it) and I have had the chance to ask questions about it	☐
2. I know that I am participating voluntarily and that I do not have to answer any questions if I do not want to	☐
3. I understand that I can withdraw from the research at anytime, without giving any reasons, until 1st June 2017	☐
4. I agree to take part in the study and understand this means being interviewed by the researcher and that my data will be stored securely in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998 for up to ten years	☐

Please tick either the **YES or NO** boxes for the following statements:

	YES	NO
1. I agree to my interview being recorded and understand this means a paid transcriber, held to the same rules of confidentiality and anonymity, may listen to my interview	☐	☐
2. I agree to let the researcher use quotes from my interview as long as it is done in a way that means I cannot be identified	☐	☐

Participant name: _____

Date: _____

Signature: _____

Researcher name: Martha Morey

Date: _____

Signature: _____

Appendix III – Information Sheet

UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE
Institute of Criminology

Martha Morey
Institute of Criminology, Sidgwick Avenue, CB3 9DA

Work and identity among male prisoners
Martha Morey

Who am I?
I am a research student from the Institute of Criminology at the University of Cambridge. I do not work for the Prison Service and they have not funded or commissioned this study.

Why am I doing this study?
I am interested in finding out more about how prisoners experience work inside and what they feel about it. I am also interested in your experiences of work before prison (your own, family members, friends) and what you hope to do when you are released. I think that the study will help other researchers, as well as the Prison Service, understand more about what makes work in prison good or bad.

What will participation involve?
Participation will involve one interview where I will ask you to tell me about your experiences with work prior to prison, what work you have done during your sentence and what you hope to do when you are released. I will also ask you about your experiences growing up in terms of what work those around you have done, be it formal employment, caring at home or anything else. This might include your family, friends and people in your community. Other questions will ask you about your opinions about different types of work generally. You can refuse to answer any questions without explaining why.

Do I have to take part in the study?
No, taking part in the study is completely voluntary and choosing to not take part will not disadvantage you in any way.

Are there any risks involved in taking part in the study?
In the interview I will ask you to tell me about some aspects of your background and about your experiences before prison as well as inside. Some questions may ask you to think about things you have not previously thought about, or choose not to think about. For some people, this might trigger some unhappy or upsetting thoughts. However, you do not have to answer any questions that you do not want to. Also, at the end of the interview you will be able to discuss anything you have found difficult. If the interview is distressing, you can ask for it to stop at any time, and I will advise you on who in the prison you can talk to about your feelings.

Are there any benefits in taking part in the study?
I am not able to pay you for taking part in the study, but if you agree to participate and are interviewed at a time when you would usually be working or in education, you will not lose any pay. Taking part in the study will not affect your privilege level or any decision about your parole or release.

You may feel that talking about your experiences is useful or helpful to you. People who have taken part in similar studies have often welcomed the chance to speak to someone neutral who is willing to listen to them. You will also be contributing to my understanding of work and prison work in particular.

Will the interview be confidential?
The information you share in the interview will normally be kept completely confidentially. However, I will be obliged to pass on to a member of prison staff any information regarding:

- Anything you say that implies a threat to yourself or to others (inside or outside of prison)
- Any breach of prison rules that can be adjudicated against
- A specific threat to prison security
- Any serious offences you admit to that you have not yet been convicted for

In all other circumstances, everything you tell me will remain completely confidential. I will store the information securely, for up to ten years. I will be the only person to have access your interview.

Will I be anonymous?
If you agree to quotes from your interview being used, this will be done in a way which means you cannot be identified. I will give you a different name and change details about your life which would 'give away' who you are.

How do I agree to take part in the study?
If you would like to take part, I will ask you to complete a consent form confirming that you understand what the study involves, that you have had a chance to ask any questions and whether you are happy for the interview to be recorded.

What if I change my mind and no longer want to be in the study?
You can stop the interview at any point and you will not have to explain why. You can also insist that some or all of your interview is excluded from the study after we have finished it. You can do this at any point up until 1st June 2017 when I will begin writing the research findings. If you make any of these decisions, I will destroy your interview recording and any associated material. If you wish to make this decision you would not be disadvantaged in

any way and nothing will be held against you. To make any of these requests, contact [name] in the [department] Department.

What shall I do if participating in the study causes me anxiety?
If after the interview you feel that some of the things you have discussed have made you feel anxious or distressed, you can access support in various ways:

- Speak to a member of staff or ask me to contact a member of staff who you would like to talk to
- Contact a peer support worker, such as a Listener, or I will contact on your behalf another prisoner in your establishment to let them know you would like their support
- Contact the Samaritans, whose number will be printed on posters in your wing

What will happen to the results of the study?
Your interview will contribute to my PhD thesis. In the future the findings may also be used in publications about the issues I am interested in, which will mainly be academic articles or books. I will also discuss my findings with my supervisor and other academic students, and potentially at conferences with other

academics. An overview of the study will be made available to the National Offender Management Service (NOMS).

Can I get more information about the study or complain about an aspect of it?
The study has been reviewed by the Ethics Committee of the Institute of Criminology, University of Cambridge. If you would like more information or have any questions or complaints about the research, please feel free to ask me directly. If you wish to pursue a question or complaint in this way, you should contact [name] in the [department] Department who will deal with the issue themself or pass it on to me, where relevant.

Thank you for taking the time to read this information. If you have any further questions at any stage of the research please do not hesitate to ask me.

Martha Morey

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