Ulster University

"Can't Hack the Whack": Exploring Young Men's Gendered Discourses on Time in Prison.

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Biography: Dr Murray is a Lecturer in Criminology at Ulster University. As an early career

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included a nine-month ethnographic study in Hydebank Wood Secure College (a Young

Offenders Centre).

Word count: 9,942 words.

Title: 'Can't hack the whack': Exploring young men's gendered discourses on time in prison.

Abstract:

Although there is a growing body of literature that documents prisoners' experiences of time in

custody, and although prison is usually the experience of young men, there are few studies that

focus on young men's experiences of time in prison. Based on findings from a nine-month

ethnographic study of a young offenders' institution, this article addresses these gaps in the

literature, exploring how young men's (aged 18–24) gendered discourses on time in prison

shape their prison experience. This is explored through three principal themes: 'heavy-

whacking', the subordination of those young men who were struggling to cope with their time

in prison; 'time-hierarchy', the gendered discourses in prison that associated sentence length

with toughness; and the 'Young-Elders', a group of young men who benefitted from the gendered discourses in the prison and lived relatively free from stigmatisation on the most enhanced landings in the prison.

Key words: gender, masculinity, prison, time, young men.

Introduction

Although there is a growing body of literature that documents prisoners' experiences of time in custody (Cope, 2003; Wahidin and Tate, 2005; Wahidin, 2006; O'Donnell, 2014; Sloan, 2016; Crewe et al., 2017), and although 'prison is usually the experience of young men' (Jamieson and Grounds, 2005: 53), there are few studies that focus on young men's experiences of time in prison (Cope, 2003). Based on findings from a nine-month ethnographic study of a young offenders' institution – Hydebank Wood Secure College, Belfast (hereafter Hydebank), which houses young men aged 18–24 – this article addresses this gap in the literature, exploring young men's gendered discourses on time in prison. Within this context, 'gendered discourses' refers to the spoken language, practices and beliefs that are adopted by the young men in Hydebank and that suggest men should act in a specific, gendered manner (Sunderland, 2004).

The findings included within this paper are explored through three principal themes: first, this paper examines how some young men's inability to cope with their 'whack' of time in prison resulted in stigmatisation and bullying, with those who could not 'hack the whack' being labelled 'heavy-whackers'. Second, it considers how the gendered discourses in Hydebank associated sentence length with toughness. This contributed to the creation of a gendered hierarchy, with the young men utilising signs and signals to promote their positioning

within the hierarchy. Finally, this paper explores how certain young men (named 'Young-Elders') benefitted from the gendered discourses relating to time in Hydebank, due to being some of the longest-serving prisoners in the institution. These young men lived relatively free from stigmatisation on the most enhanced landings in the prison. The article begins with a discussion on time-punishment and the gendered nature of prison time before progressing on to the findings from the study.

Time-Punishment

Awareness surrounding the value of time has increased since the development of industrialisation. During this period, time became a tool in the structuration of power relations and a means of implementing discipline, evidenced through the introduction of timetables and ritually ordered time (Foucault, 1977; also see Medlicott, 1999; Wahidin, 2006). Time became an economic variable interconnected with labour and capital, a quantified resource measured in lengths (Wahidin, 2006); time became 'currency' (Thompson, 1967: 21).

In terms of punishment, time is inextricably linked with imprisonment, since, through the deprivation of liberty for a specified period, the state quantifies a prisoner's debt to society in the currency of time. Within prison, time is largely externally controlled: the period of imprisonment is determined by the court, eligibility for parole decided by governors and prison officials, and daily routines moderated by prison staff in their enforcement of the regime (Cope, 2003). Time becomes a disciplinary tool, a method for further punishment through the extension of sentences; or a reward for good behaviour, via early release. The principle underlying time-punishment is that linear time, travelling in one direction, ends with mortality,

which should – but does not always – impart a sense of urgency about how to best use time. Thus, an individual is punished by the removal, from their life, of time that cannot be regained (Wahidin, 2006).

Through time-discipline, prisons limit prisoners' capacity to make decisions regarding their daily lives (Foucault, 1977). Time-discipline is enacted through structured timetabling of the prisoner's movements and regular 'headcounts' (Wahidin, 2006). Time structures control how long an individual is able to spend with visitors, how long he or she can shower, associate, eat and so on. Prisoners are thus forced to live by prison time, which can affect their sense of temporal autonomy (Medlicott, 1999). The strict implementation of timetables, counting procedures and observation as disciplinary tools can be stressful and can have psychological effects on prisoners (Scraton et al., 1991).

The pains and stress associated with the highly structured nature of imprisonment are compounded by the long periods that prisoners spend in non-activity, such as time locked in cells (Cope, 2003). Developing strategies to control, pass or 'do' this period of captivity can be imperative for prison survival (Goffman, 1961; Cope, 2003; Wahidin, 2006). Prison scholars frame this concept of 'doing time' in different ways: some suggest that an individual must develop the ability to resist the institution in order to prevent the deterioration of self-identity (Cohen and Taylor, 1972); others suggest that it is important to adapt to the institution, reconstruct their prison experience into a positive one and learn to 'learn to "swim with", rather than against, the tide of their situation' (Crewe et al., 2017: 517).

Some theorists have argued that experience of time-punishment alters as individuals grow older. Shover (1985) identified that many older prisoners felt that time in prison passed much faster than when they were younger. This resulted in older prisoners placing a higher value on the remaining years of their life than they had previously, and perceiving prison more as a waste of their life than was the case with their younger counterparts (Shover, 1985). Similarly, Farber (1944) found that younger prisoners dealt better with comprehending their prison sentence, because they viewed it as a 'temporary marking of time' and were optimistic about their youth and about life post-release (Farber, 1944: 175).

O'Donnell (2014) attempts to explain the interplay between age, the pain of time passing and imprisonment. He suggests that the 'pain quotient' can be determined based on two key variables: 'time to be served' and 'time to be lived'. The pain quotient is most significant for those prisoners whose life expectancy is shorter than the time they are due to spend in prison and for whom the absence of a non-prison future must be confronted. In contrast, the pain quotient is lesser for younger prisoners, who have a short time to spend in prison and a lot of life to live upon release (O'Donnell, 2014). However, although the pain quotient may be less significant for younger prisoners on shorter sentences, because time is subjectively slower for younger prisoners, long periods of unstructured time in prison can be harder to cope with (Shover, 1985).

Masculinities in Prison

The term 'gender' refers to the socially and culturally constructed meanings associated with biological sex. The term is often used in accordance with the gender dichotomies 'femininity'

and 'masculinity', which are typically associated with 'females' and 'males', respectively (Connell, 2005). Historically, there has been an expectation for individuals to perform masculinity or femininity the 'right way', in accordance with binary heterocentric gender models (Butler, 1990). Within the wider field of gender studies, gender has been consistently referred to as something that is 'done' (West and Zimmerman, 1987; also see Messerschmidt, 1993) or 'performed' (Butler, 1990). In terms of the performance of masculinity within the male prison environment, the 'pains of imprisonment' (Sykes, 1958) and the immersion into a single-sex community (Newton, 1994) can impact on how men interact with one another, and can result in some men believing it necessary to portray a tough and dominant expression of masculinity. Conversely, showing signs of vulnerability or weakness can result in victimisation and exploitation.

Some suggest that a product of this is the emergence of a gendered order or hierarchy, with those masculinities characterised by dominance and toughness becoming idealised and those perceived to be weak or vulnerable becoming subjugated and subordinated (Sim, 1994; Sabo et al., 2001; Sloan, 2016). At the nadir of this hierarchy, regarded as 'non-men', male prison rape or sexual assault victims are characterised by two of the idealised masculinity's antitheses: 'femininity through vulnerability, and homosexuality through same sex contact' (Gear, 2007: 214). Prison rape ensures an irreversible demasculinisation of victims and removes any claims to manhood within the setting (O'Donnell, 2004; Gear, 2007).

Connell's (1987; 2005) theory of hegemonic masculinities has been utilised as a means of explaining this gendered order of masculinities within the prison context (see Sim, 1994; Sabo et al., 2001). According to Connell, the hegemonic expression of masculinity within any

context is the expression that most men idealise and measure themselves against. Within the prisoner society, this expression is one of controlled aggression; it is characterised by homophobia, rejection of traces of weakness and attributes normally associated with 'femininity', and constant competition for dominance, power and control. It is reinforced through the subordination and subjugation of less powerful – 'subordinated', 'marginalised', 'complicit' – expressions of masculinity.

However, the hegemonic masculinities framework has received considerable criticism. Among other things, it has been suggested that while the framework specifies that many men 'conform' or 'idealise' hegemonic masculinity, it is uncertain what this looks like in practice. Additionally, the framework only 'offers a vague and imprecise account of the social psychological reproduction of male identities' (Wetherell and Edley, 1999: 335; also see Donaldson, 1993; Hearn, 2004).

Furthermore, contemporary prisons literature suggests that prison masculinities, and the gender orders associated with them, are more complex than can be explained using the hegemonic masculinities framework (Beasley, 2008; Maycock, 2018; Morey and Crewe, 2018). For example, Bandyopadhyay (2006: 186) explores the ways that competing masculinities 'challenge the homogenous idea of hegemonic masculinity' through the role of 'writers' in prison. These prisoners had been in the prison for a lengthy period, had conformed to the prison regime and were relatively well educated. Their duties included keeping records, doing headcounts and distributing letters. This position allowed them to interact closely with prison staff, which they often used to their advantage, for example, accessing 'inside' information regarding the prison regime. Therefore, while they conformed to the prison regime – and were

not seen to be tough, violent or aggressive – they were respected by the majority of prisoners (Bandyopadhyay, 2006). This group of prisoners cannot be easily categorised within the framework of hegemonic masculinities, as they are widely respected, but are neither hegemonic, complicit or subordinated; furthermore, the framework also fails to provide a justifiable explanation of how these 'alternative' masculinities emerge or can be reproduced.

In consideration of these criticisms, studies within the men and masculinities field have attempted to progress beyond the hegemonic masculinities framework. Theorists such as Anderson (2009; 2012) and McCormack (2012) have suggested that contemporary masculinities have come to reflect contemporary culture and become less hierarchical, homophobic and misogynistic, and more emotionally open and expressive. Within the context of prisons, researchers have begun to examine the broader range of expressions of masculinity found within these institutions. Many of these studies attempt 'to *describe* masculinities rather than *theorise* them' (Morey and Crewe, 2018: 21). For example, Morey and Crewe (2018) discuss how prison work can shape prisoners' identities, and how homosocial bonds between prisoners differentiate from the emotionally suppressed masculinities that are traditionally portrayed in prison literature. Ricciardelli et al. (2015) found that men in prison constructed gendered identities in response to perceptions of risk and vulnerability, while Crewe (2009) illuminates the range of relationships that male prisoners construct with female prison officers, highlighting courteous, chivalrous and non-sexist behaviour. Meanwhile, Maycock (2018) examines the embodiment of prison masculinities, considering how men's bodies can be shaped by the prison context and utilised as a form of resistance to the prison regime.

Age can also be a factor in perceptions of what it means to be a man. Like gender, age is something that is expressed, and these expressions change as individuals grow older. Age can be communicated through repetitive behaviours, which can be a product of social expectations and can be embodied by clothing, hobbies, speech and social status (Laz, 2003). The expression of age can interact directly with masculinity; for example, Peristiany (1965) argues that young men place more emphasis on confrontation and achieving status through visible displays of power, whereas older men tend to be more focused on providing for their families and believe that manhood is primarily achieved through this (Peristiany, 1965). Similarly, research has suggested that young men have more restricted notions of what it means to be a man, with perceptions being more closely tied to hypermasculine values (Toch, 1998; Bengtsson, 2016). Prison services throughout the UK continue to house young men separately in Young Offender Centres (YOCs), and the limited research conducted in these institutions suggests that masculinities are more likely to be characterised by bullying, psychological intimidation and violence, with pressure from peers to perform in a hypermasculine manner (Sim, 1994; Toch, 1998; Bengtsson, 2016).

An integral aspect of masculinity performance at all ages is visibility; it is key that men are visible to the specific audience that matters to them (Connell, 1987; 2005; Sloan, 2016). Gambetta (2009) uses signalling theory to suggest that prisoners adopt certain acts to convey information about underlying qualities. For example, prisoners may commit public displays of violence, to send signals to onlookers about their prospects for future violent acts. He also suggests that other minor signs can establish violent credentials, for example, scars, which testify to past fighting experience (Gambetta, 2009). As another kind of signal, graffiti in prison is often a method for conveying to the wider audience individual information and

characteristics. Wilson (2008) suggests that much of the graffiti in prison reflects prisoners' intrinsic concerns, such as violence, power, boredom and the need for self-affirmation. However, she also found that graffiti could be used to promote prisoners' prison networks, through the disclosure of areas, friends and gangs (Wilson, 2008). In the all-male prison environment, masculinities are contested on a daily basis and there is a constant pressure to prove oneself. Through signals, such as public displays of violence, and signs, such as graffiti, men convey their masculinity to the wider audience and attempt to display their control over space and time.

Gendered Time-Punishment

It has been argued that 'men and women live in different temporal worlds' (Maines and Hardesty, 1987: 102), and that men's and women's perceptions and experiences of time are distinguishably diverse in nature. Theorists have suggested that men are more likely to perceive and experience time linearly, as opposed to cyclically (Daly, 1996). These perceptions have been linked to the iconology of time, which has historically been appropriated to a male persona (for example, 'Father Truth' and 'Father Time') (Davis, 1990). Indeed, in reference to Greek mythology, it is Chronos, the god of chronology and linear time, whose name has survived in contemporary European language; his sister, Karios, god(ess) of seasons and cyclical time, has largely been forgotten (Wahidin, 2006). Linearity has become a key tenet in capitalist economies (Odih, 1999) and connections have been made between linear time and masculinity, whereby masculine time is connected to archetypal masculine traits of achievement, status and power (Odih, 1999; Shirani and Henwood, 2011).

As 'control is a key dimension of the masculine self' (Sloan, 2016: 66) – and time-punishment results in prisoners' loss of temporal autonomy and is a measure of 'constituting, mediating and conditioning identity' (Wahidin, 2006: 3; also see Giddens, 1981; 1991) – it is unsurprising that temporal experiences of time in prison can be gendered. Medlicott (1999: 82) argues that 'time is integrally and internally bound up with our sense of identity', as internally held definitions of self-identity are formed and developed by temporal experiences. In particular, gender identity is a fundamental aspect of adolescence as 'transitions into adulthood are inescapably gendered' (Robb, 2007: 109); young people are learning, through socialisation, to become 'men' or 'women', rather than simply learning to be an adult (Robb, 2007).

The prison is a masculine institution, with its purpose, implementation of regime and programmes designed by men to punish men (Lutze, 2002) based on hypermasculine ideals (Lutze and Murphy, 1999). The conceptions of masculinity that shape the operation of prison as an institution become the same techniques that structure the nature of punishment and subsequently define the appropriate responses to non-compliance with the prison regime. These gendered discourses exist within fields of spatiality and temporality, and, as a result, they produce, transmit and reinforce particular ways of being (Foucault, 1977; Butler, 2000; Wahidin and Tate, 2005). Through the consideration of the multi-faceted nature of time and examining how time-punishment can shape prisoner identity, it is possible to consider how time becomes an integral facet in the construction of gender within the prison setting (Wahidin and Tate, 2005).

The Research Site

Fieldwork was conducted over a nine-month period between March and November 2016 in Hydebank, which houses young men aged 18–24. The Hydebank site is also used to house NI's population of women prisoners, who are held in Ash House. Throughout the fieldwork period, there were, on average, 100 young men imprisoned in Hydebank. They resided in two houses, Beech and Cedar, each of which had five landings, named B1–5 and C1–5, respectively. In line with the 'Progressive Regimes and Earned Privileges Scheme' (PREPS), each house had a different purpose: Beech held the new committals and general population; and Cedar housed vulnerable prisoners and those on the enhanced regime. In 2011, a Prison Review Team (PRT) (2011: 70) report labelled Hydebank, and the young men imprisoned within, as the 'forgotten group in the Northern Ireland (NI) prison system', and suggested that the resources made available to this group were significantly below the level available to other prisons and prisoners (PRT, 2011). The Criminal Justice Inspection NI (CJINI) (CJINI, 2013) further criticised the institution, reporting that there had been little progress since 2011 and that the premises was largely unsatisfactory for the imprisonment of young men. The CJINI (2013: v) highlighted a number of concerns with regard to the overall safety of the prisoners: many of the young men felt victimised by staff or other prisoners; there was an 'inertia in developing a robust approach to violence reduction'; and no lessons had been learnt from a series of deaths in custody[1] (CJINI, 2013).

The NI Prison Service (NIPS) attempted to address some of these issues, trialling a range of social enterprises, Working Out programmes and converting Hydebank from a YOC into a

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[1] There were a number of self-inflicted deaths in Hydebank between 2011–2013, including the deaths of Alynn Baxter (2011), Frances McKeown, Samuel Carson and Joseph Rainey (2013).

'Secure College' (Butler, 2017). The CJINI conducted an unannounced inspection of Hydebank during the fieldwork period of this research. The CJINI (2016: 5) inspection found the environment within Hydebank 'encouraging' and commended the NIPS for its desire to innovate and improve; however, it suggested that Hydebank was still some distance away from achieving its full aims. In particular, the CJINI highlighted: that more young men than previously stated that they felt unsafe within the institution; that there was an increased availability of drugs and weak efforts to limit drug supply; that there was a prevalence of bullying and intimidation; and that mental health provisions were inadequate (CJINI, 2016).

The Study

The study adopted an ethnographic methodology, incorporating methods of participant observation and semi-structured interviews (26 with young men and six with prison staff). I visited the institution three to four days per week including weekends, evenings and public holidays. The participant observation aspect of the research took place in vocational training classes and educational classes, and during recreational activities and association periods. I fully immersed myself in the environment, participating in the various classes and activities, from mopping floors to making pavlova. When the fieldwork began (March, 2016), I was 26, and shared many interests with the young men, particularly football. I also have a range of experience working with young and vulnerable individuals from a range of backgrounds in a youth-work and voluntary capacity. These factors contributed to the strong rapport that I developed with the young men throughout the fieldwork period.

During the observational period, I maintained a research journal. I carried a small notepad to take notes during the observations, and entered more detailed accounts into my journal after each period of observation. The field notes included descriptions of: the overall environment and atmosphere of the prison on the particular day; interactions between staff members and residents; residents' interactions between each other and as a group; and also interactions between staff members. I also took note of my own reactions and thoughts regarding the interactions I witnessed.

To attain the most information possible from the interviewees, I waited for several weeks before commencing the interviews and even at this stage conducted very few. Only those whom I had got to know reasonably well, and who were soon to be released, were interviewed in the early stages of the fieldwork period. The purpose of this was to build rapport and relationships with the young men during the participant observation, getting to know more about them, their lives and experiences of prison, and identifying some of the most pressing needs and experiences to talk about during the interviews.

I conducted one semi-structured interview with each of the interview participants, individually. The interviews were conversational and flexible in nature and the participants discussed: their experiences of, and attitudes towards, imprisonment; notions of manhood; what it meant to be a man in prison; and other issues that had emerged during the participant observation element of the research. The average length of the interviews was 45 minutes. All were recorded using an audio recorder and were transcribed by myself. The data was analysed thematically through the lens of critical masculinities studies.

The following three sections discuss the three main themes that emerged in relation to time in the prison. As mentioned previously, the informal discussions that took place during the participant observation were used to provide points of discussion in the interviews. For this reason, all the quotes included in the following sections are taken from the interviews, unless specified otherwise.

'Heavy-Whacking'

References to time in Hydebank were common amongst the young men, who regularly referred to their prison sentence as their 'whack': 'as in a whack of time... the big whack of time you have been given' (Aaron[2]). As described by Aaron, prison time was often referred to as something that was given to the young men, as opposed to taken away. Many of the young men looked up to those on longer sentences or were often proud of the amount of time they themselves had spent in prison. This discourse, which regarded time in prison as something that was 'given', as opposed to removed, seemed to be underpinned by bravado. The young men appeared to be proud of their sentence, and, at surface level, underplayed the negative implications that the removal of time had on their lives.

Within the Hydebank context, many of the young men idealised masculine characteristics of dominance, aggression and dismissal of emotions. In terms of their approach towards 'doing time' in prison, it was evident, in both observations and interviews, that the young men attempted to adhere to these extremes. They often portrayed masculinities that suggested

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[2] *All the names of the participants have been changed to ensure anonymity.*

they were not struggling with the rigours of spending time in prison, that it was a 'gift', 'easy' and not a problem for them. As Aaron stated:

I've been here for a long time, but I know I could easily do 20 years in prison, no sweat. It wouldn't bother me, but some people struggle with it. (Informal discussion, May)

In contrast, those individuals perceived by the wider group of young men as not coping with their time in prison were labelled 'heavy-whackers'; it was deemed that they could not 'hack the whack' of time they had been given. Young men labelled 'heavy-whackers' were often the subjects of jokes and bullying, as explained by Brendy: 'it is an insult, like, it's "you're a heavy-whacking bastard" or "you can't hack the whack"'. A set of behavioural traits characterised the 'heavy-whacker', which usually, though not always, referred to a form of behaviour during periods of lock-up:

Bang, kick, whallop [their cell door] – they just can't do their time. Eejits. People are called 'heavy-whackers' because they can't do their time, they're scared. *[And what about someone who can hack their time?]* Kick their feet back, put the TV on, watch TV, smoke a few rollies. (Charles)

As is evident from Charles' interview, there is a clear differentiation between the behaviour of those whom he felt could cope with time in prison and those who could not. Furthermore, Charles highlighted an apparent stigma associated with those who 'can't do their time': they are '*eejits*' and '*scared*'. It is evident that Charles looked down upon them because he felt they were struggling. In contrast, he conformed to the behavioural traits associated with the

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idealised expression of masculinity, characterised by the dismissal of emotion. Brendy and Dermy further elaborate on the stereotypical behaviour of 'heavy-whackers':

> Can't hack your whack – somebody who is getting a hard time, they're constantly yapping, they're talking to the screws, they're banging their door, they're banging their walls, they're blasting their music. They can't just sit down and relax. Their head's gone because they are locked behind their doors… I heavy-whacked for about a week when I came in, solid, just in my room, fucking not speaking and you're just looking at it thinking, "I've to spend 21 months behind this door". (Brendy)

> [Their] head's gone. Lying in a cell looking at the four walls and the fucking big black door, know what I mean. Haven't got a TV, stressed to the max, probably haven't got money in their phone to phone their family or haven't got visits… or are looking out to do stuff or are looking drugs and can't get it in here. Then they are starting to heavy-whack. (Dermy)

Alongside reiterating the difference between heavy-whackers – 'their head's gone because they are locked behind their doors' – and those who can 'just sit down and relax', Brendy elaborates on one of the main reasons why young men become heavy-whackers: they are conscious about the time they have lost, and over which they have no control. He explains that heavy-whacking begins when you are sitting in your room alone, not speaking, 'thinking "I've to spend 21 months behind this door"'. Dermy affirms this, stating that one is 'lying in a cell, looking at the four walls and the fucking big black door'. Time lost becomes abundantly apparent for prisoners locked in cells, be it throughout the night or during days with no employment, training or education (Cope, 2003). For the young men in Hydebank, time spent in cells was seen to be wasted and it was during these periods that they reflected on the costs

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of prison in the context of their lives, what they would be doing and what they were missing out on. As explained by Alfred:

> Feeling like shit, constantly thinking about the outside, what you would be doing if you were out, what your mates are up to. Like, a good sunny day, all my mates would be on the drink; I'll be sitting in here, shattered [extremely sad or disappointed].

As is evident in Alfred's quote, prisoners are abundantly aware of the time they are missing in the 'free world'. To cope with prison, individuals must be able to cope with this awareness without letting it destroy their self-identity (Medlicott, 1999). They must learn to take control of the situation and 'do time' (Wahidin, 2006: 7; also see Goffman, 1961). Alongside power, maintaining control has been identified as an ever-present characteristic of men's gender identity in critical masculinities studies (Odih, 1999; Hearn, 2004). In the eyes of the other young men in Hydebank, heavy-whackers were not in control: they were unable to control their inner selves or find ways to control the time in their cells by finding ways to 'do time' and forget about the 'pains of imprisonment' (Sykes, 1958). In the quotation below, Adam reiterates the connection between heavy-whacking and control of time:

> Counting down your days, cutting, not going to classes. Not going to classes is one of the biggest heavy-whacking things you can do, like – you just want to spend your time in your room and sleep. It takes longer; you are waking up every half an hour thinking, "Aw, that's four hours done" whenever it's maybe only 15 or 20 minutes.

Adam's quote highlights that the 'heavy-whacker' label was a blanket term that incorporated

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many common behaviours the young men associated with not being able to cope or control the time spent in prison. Heavy-whacking was strongly inter-connected with self-harm – referred to by Adam as 'cutting' – and mental health problems. Quotes from interviews with other young men elaborate this further:

> If somebody calls you a heavy-whacker it's a bit more serious, because fucking that's whenever someone's depressed or hurt or scared. (Gary)

> I used to heavy-whack because I was behind the door; and on the old landings, cunts used to smoke the electric all the time. Then, when you are alone, you've nothing to block it out or take your mind off whatever shit you are going through. You start hearing voices, getting annoyed, getting depressed and then cutting yourself. (Phillip)

Essentially, the young men were being stigmatised and labelled by their peers for their visible inability to cope with their time in prison. The association between the label and those who were 'depressed or hurt or scared' (Gary) and/or 'cutting' (Phillip) was also largely recognised by the staff:

> Heavy-whacker is [when] you can't do your time, especially when the door is closed… [when] somebody is always on the bell, creating trouble, setting off sprinklers. Even though it will end up with them being moved or charged or whatever, it is still [the case that] the door is open, they are getting the attention… Unfortunately, then, a lot of them turn to self-harm and go down that route then, something that they never would have done before, but then in here…
> (Prison Officer C)

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Bullying was common in Hydebank. 'Smoking the electric' was a regular occurrence and those who had been labelled heavy-whackers were the most common victims. 'Smoking the electric' was an act that involved a group of young men clandestinely entering the cells of those deemed heavy-whackers, covering one of their plugs (usually the TV plug) with shower gel, plugging it into the wall and turning the switch on. 'Smoking the electric' resulted in the electricity in the victim's cell going off for around 24 hours until the prison fixed it. On some occasions, the blown fuse could cause the electricity on the whole landing to go out. For the perpetrators, the motivation was supposedly entertainment: the victim was usually targeted for their perceived vulnerability and the perpetrators would find it amusing to listen to the victim crying or calling for staff throughout the night as they struggled without electrical devices to help pass time. On occasions when the electricity went out on the whole landing, it served as a method of certifying the perpetrator's dominant position amongst the young men, as it highlighted the contrast between how the more dominant perpetrators could cope easily with time locked in their cells without electricity while the 'heavy-whackers' struggled. The bullying and stigmatisation of 'heavy-whackers' who could not cope with their time in prison, particularly during long periods of lock-up, served to solidify the idealised expression of masculinity within the Hydebank prisoner society.

Although some young men struggled to come to terms with the time they had to spend in Hydebank throughout their sentence, many claimed only to have 'heavy-whacked' during early periods of imprisonment: 'I heavy-whacked for about a week when I came in' (Brendy). The labelling and stigmatisation regarding heavy-whacking appeared, in some respects, to be a form of peer socialisation for young men in the early part of their sentences. It was a method whereby young prisoners prevented other young men from vocalising their troubles, forcing

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them to deal with these internally. An underlying reason for this was that constant complaining and visible vulnerability served as a reminder to others of their own vulnerabilities, what they were missing on the outside and the problems they themselves were facing in prison. In essence, discouraging such displays was a form of self-protection, as reflected upon by Martin:

> You're fucking yapping to the staff, complaining about stuff, you are complaining to the other inmates, every day you have about seven new things to complain about – that's heavy-whacking. People don't want to hear it. Like, if I am sitting eating my dinner, I don't wanna hear about some wee man only in, sitting going on about all [the] stuff that he doesn't like about the place. I don't want to hear it; I will literally tell him to 'fuck up'... if you can't hack it, you get griefed; that's too bad. It seems harsh, but here it seemed harsh to me when I came in... Back then, if you [were] locked [in] at night and you were on your bell... someone would have been in your room to hit you a slap the next day... (Martin)

Essentially, the bullying, labelling and stigmatisation of heavy-whackers seemed to be a method of censorship and group socialisation, stopping the most vulnerable young men from constantly reminding other young men about the penal environment and their own vulnerabilities. In the same way that boys at a young age are taught 'not to cry' or partake in 'sissy stuff' (Kimmel, 2008: 85), young men in Hydebank were taught by their peers not to complain, to internalise and mask their vulnerabilities and not to remind the other young men of the pains of imprisonment. The following section will discuss how the gendered discourses on time in Hydebank contributed to a hierarchy amongst prisoners.

Time-Hierarchy

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As documented by Wahidin and Tate (2005; also see Wahidin, 2006) in relation to prison 'elders', increased respect for those who have been in prison longer is generally due to their experiences and knowledge regarding the setting. However, while in most circumstances[3] those young men in Hydebank who had been in the prison the longest received the most respect, the time they had spent in prison was more readily associated with the seriousness of their offence, as opposed to their experiences and knowledge of the setting. Therefore, the gendered discourses in Hydebank associated offence seriousness – and subsequent time spent in prison – with respect; these gendered discourses shaped the prisoner hierarchy. Indeed, the admiration shown by young men to those on longer sentences was reflected in the fact that, conversely, those serving longer sentences looked down upon the young men imprisoned for shorter periods:

> Those on the shorter sentences are more likely to come in and fuck about. One guy thought he was mad; he said to me he was in for six months as if it was a long stretch. I just laughed at him; I've spent longer than that on the prison bus. (Aaron, informal discussion, May)

There were various avenues for reaffirming this status or promoting it to the other young men, some of which were contributed by the institution itself. All the young men possessed identity cards detailing their name and prisoner number; these identity cards were kept on lanyards and were used for identification for workshops, education, the gym and so on. The significance was the public display of the young men's prisoner numbers, which were discussed frequently.

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[3] *This could not be said for those who were suspected of committing sexual offences or crimes against those perceived to be vulnerable, such as women, children or the elderly.*

The lower the number, the longer its possessor had been in the institution. Some of the young men were proud of this, and talked about it boastingly: 'when I leave here I'll probably be the lowest number' (Leo). The identity cards were, in this regard, a badge of honour:

It becomes, I think, nearly a sense of achievement, that you are able to manage to get through it, and I think you do have guys that have maybe achieved very little other in their lives and that is their badge of honour. That they have done their whack for six years... I think that is maybe just a hard-man image, you know: "Aw, I have done this amount of time in jail". (Gerard)

In this way, institutional practices contributed to the relations and cultural discourses surrounding time and hierarchy by giving ascending prisoner numbers to the young men, and making them visible for all young men via the lanyards. Visibility is essential to idealised masculinities because without visible displays, individuals have nothing to align themselves with or compare themselves to (Sloan, 2016). In addition, Gerard's quote also highlights how gendered discourses amongst the young men associated time spent in Hydebank with being a 'hard man'. Being 'hard' was associated with fighting and being able to handle oneself physically. The following excerpt from September's research diary further highlights the nature of the gendered discourses within the institution that associated time spent in Hydebank with being 'hard':

As we were walking towards the Cabin [Café], Aaron was walking towards us. As he was approaching, Mark nudged me and said, "See him? He's the hardest man in the prison"... I had not seen Aaron in a few weeks so we talked for a while... As we were talking, Mark pointed to Aaron's identity card on his lanyard and said, "Look at that Conor. See the way it says 6,000 in

the prisoner number? That's how you know he's done a whack. It's up at, like, 9,000-odds now [numbers changed to ensure anonymity]". (Informal discussion, September)

However, while there was a perception that Aaron was the 'hardest man in the prison' (Mark), on a number of occasions, Aaron himself mentioned to me that he had never been in a fight in the institution. This highlights the gendered connotations of prisoner number and the status attached to them: the longer you had been in Hydebank, the 'harder' you were.

Another avenue of masculine visibility in Hydebank was graffiti. Graffiti was found in most cells, association rooms and on various tables, chairs and walls. In most 'mentions'[4] the young men stated their name or nickname, the area they were from, their prisoner number, entry date, exit date and the number of times that they had been in prison. The reasoning behind this was discussed in Gary's interview:

> People will write their sentences like that, so like, if you're sentenced in 2013 and you're not getting out for like five years, you'll write from then until your release date *[Does it show a pride in the length of time you've been here?]* Fuck, yeah… if there are certain boys who have done whacks and they have their name up somewhere where it's gonna be kept, then yeah… You know, if you see somebody with, like, ten years… if you see that then there's only a couple of things that you're gonna think: either he is in for a sex offence or he is in for seriously hurting someone else.

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4 A 'mention' or 'tag' is the recording of names, and sometimes dates, through graffiti (Wilson, 2008).

As with the quotes relating to the prisoner numbers, in Gary's quote, there appeared to be an association between time spent in Hydebank and being 'hard': 'he is in for seriously hurting someone else'. Denton (2001) suggested that graffiti in prison was a form of self-declaration, and it was evident – in the way that Gambetta (2009) suggests – that young men in Hydebank used graffiti to signal to the wider group of young men their time spent in prison and, consequently, their 'toughness'.

The gendered discourses within Hydebank that associated sentence length with being 'hard', conferring status and respect, created a space for some young men on long sentences to engage positively with the institution and regime without being stigmatised by their peers. This is discussed in detail in the next section.

The 'Young-Elders'

You have to hang your hood up in here. You can't get on like a wee dick... I hung my hood up years ago; it's got cobwebs in it now. (Aaron)

In Hydebank, the most commonly idealised expression of masculinity was characterised by violence, dominance and aggression. However, there existed a number of 'alternative' expressions of masculinity, such as 'father', 'employed' and 'fiancé' – expressions that may be considered 'traditional' in the wider social context (see Evans, 2018). In many instances, these attributes belonged to the longest-serving prisoners, and while 'alternative' expressions of masculinity in prison can often be subordinated, 'largely suppressed' (Abrams et al., 2008: 22) or 'excluded' (Crewe, 2014: 397), this group of young men were largely respected within the

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prisoner society. This was partly due to the gendered discourses surrounding time, prison length and respect discussed in the previous section, but also contributed to by the ongoing high-profile cases of some of these young men – many for serious, violent crimes – which featured frequently on media sources. Bearing this in mind, and drawing upon the concept of prison elders, this group of young men might be considered 'Young-Elders'.

The Young-Elders were primarily located on the most enhanced landings in the prison, where 'good behaviour' and passing drugs tests were rewarded with privileges, such as longer association time and cooking facilities. It did not appear to be the identities portrayed by the Young-Elders – (such as father) that earned respect from the prisoner society, as many of the least compliant prisoners in the institution were fathers. Nor did it seem to be the compliant behaviour the Young-Elders exhibited, as others who did try to 'conform' were consequently stigmatised. Instead, it appeared that the gendered discourses in the prison surrounding crimes committed, sentence length and time spent in prison meant that the Young-Elders were excused from the daily masculinity assessments and contestations of gender that the other young men were subjected to. In the eyes of the other young men, the Young-Elders had progressed beyond the point of examination and their masculinity was unquestioned.

It was evident that the Young-Elders recognised this; for example, in an interview with one of the group who resided on C5 (the most enhanced landing in Hydebank), I asked whether the Young-Elders could be deemed to be 'swats' by the wider population, and thus labelled and stigmatised for their conformative behaviour in the 'College'. He responded:

At the end of the day, if you look at us as a group, we are in here for some serious shit. I mean,

if you look at this landing, we have over a hundred years between us [nine on the landing], so

they can't look at us like that. (Gerard, informal discussion, May)

Literature on male victims of prison rape suggests that rape victims are pushed below the

minimum 'masculinity threshold' to a position of irreversible demasculinisation and are

regarded as 'non-men' (O'Donnell, 2004; Gear, 2007). In a similar vein, in the eyes of the wider

group of young men in Hydebank, the Young-Elders had progressed above a 'masculinity

threshold' to a point where they no longer needed to be scrutinised through a gendered lens.

This certification of masculine respect allowed the Young-Elders to engage positively with the

institution and '"swim with", rather than against, the tide of their situation' (Crewe et al., 2017:

517), progressing through the PREPS system on to C5, the most enhanced landing in the prison.

The security of this masculine certification allowed them to adopt identities that differentiated

from the more restrictive, idealised expression in the prison. It was clear that they regarded

themselves as more mature than the wider group of young men. They recognised that the

wider group idealised a more aggressive expression of masculinity, and looked down upon

them because of it:

They think they are in jail to do their whack, that they are mad. Some of the stuff they

do, you just look at them and think you are complete eejits, wired-up like. We do some

laughing at them. (Jordan)

Within the context of wider society, the Young-Elders expressed masculinities that may be

regarded as 'traditional' (see Evans, 2018). Employment, financial stability and being able to

provide for families and loved ones upon release were significant characteristics in their identity. Indeed, a small number of the Young-Elders were fathers:

> A big thing for me is my son… He needs me more than this place, and I need him more than all this… You know, this place has become home to me and it will be strange, and probably difficult, to leave knowing that I won't be coming back. Fuck, but look what I've got to gain – I can be a dad. That's the rest of my life. (Gary)

For these young men, fatherhood was the defining feature in their identity. Thus, they desired to get out of prison, change their offending behaviour, get a job and provide stability and financial support for their children. These identities, characterised by independence and provision, were recognised as masculine by the larger group of young men, but were not sought-after traits. However, as is notable in Gary's interview, the Young-Elders frequently referred to the time they were spending in Hydebank, what they were missing and what that meant in the context of their lives. Again, in relation to being a father, Ryan discusses missing his daughter and how the length of time he has been separated from her has affected their relationship:

> With the child, it breaks your heart, like… the child is five now, so for the first two and a half years of her life I was close with her. I bonded with her and she was a wee daddy's girl. To go [from that] until now, where she barely knows who you are, like, I don't want to admit that, but I know… Sometimes you phone her and she has no interest, she is playing with her mates. That sort of thing hurts you, like; she would rather play with her mates than talk to her daddy… If I get out, I know in my head I have got the determination… I want to do something with my life, for her. (Ryan)

Similarly, Ciaran described in his interview the positive relationship he had with his fiancée. He discusses how prison made him realise her importance to him, not only in getting through his period of confinement, but also in his life going forward. It was evident that there had been a distinct change not only in his masculine self-esteem and identity, but also in his determination to better use time going forward:

> I have it all planned out, like, for when I get out. I have a job and all lined up and then I have the woman and all there, so hopefully in a year down the line I'll be able to buy my own house and then settle down and all. It has done me a favour in here. I have wised up… I will come out of here a better person too, you know; I don't take drugs and stuff… If I wasn't with her when I get back out there, I would probably go back to the same. (Ciaran)

It is evident across the interviews with the Young-Elders that the 'pain quotient' (O'Donnell, 2014: 201) was much larger for them than for the wider group of young men. These long-serving prisoners acknowledged the impact that time spent in prison was having on their lives and they were more conscious of what they were missing in the free world. O'Donnell (2014) suggests that those prisoners with large pain quotients must make significant adjustments in prison to ensure psychological survival. It appeared that for the Young-Elders, determination to use time in prison more efficiently to prepare for a more productive life upon release was a method of reducing temporal pain. A Working Out programme in Hydebank facilitated this; it provided some of the Young-Elders with the opportunity of gaining employment in the community:

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I work seven days a week in a café in town… it's what I want to do when I get out and I reckon

they will keep me on because I have been working for free for so long… I don't want to risk the

job for anything; even if customers offer me tips, I wouldn't take them. Risk all I've worked

towards for a couple of quid? No way. (Jeremy, informal discussion, April)

For the Young-Elders in Hydebank, the gendered discourses within the prison ensured that

they were positioned beyond a 'masculinity threshold', a position where it was no longer a

necessity to prove their masculinity. Occupying this position provided them with the space,

mentally and physically, to recognise the impact that spending time in prison was having on

their lives and to reflect upon what they were missing. The apparent high pain quotient felt by

the Young-Elders encouraged them to utilise the time they were spending in prison efficiently

in order to prepare themselves for release.

Conclusion

This article has explored the under-researched area of young men's gendered experiences of

time in prison. Young men continue to be the most imprisoned societal demographic (Jamieson

and Grounds, 2005), yet there is a continued academic disparity in relation to their inclusion in

empirical research, with most attention still focused on adult male prisoners. In addition, while

it may be argued that prison research has responded to Sim's (1994: 101) call to start focusing

on 'men as prisoners, rather than prisoners as men' (Sim 1994: 101), the same cannot be said

for the study of young men in prison. Previous research suggests that male YOCs are often

characterised by persistent bullying, psychological intimidation and regular physical violence

(Sim, 1994; Kury and Smartt, 2002). The presence of these violent and intimidating

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masculinities in YOCs contributes to an environment that places extreme emphasis on everyday decisions and behaviours, consequently resulting in 'lives controlled and bodies and minds sometimes broken and destroyed' (Sim, 1994: 103). The intersection of these age- and gender-related issues with time for young men in Hydebank was abundantly transparent, given that coping with their 'whack' of time and securing a form of masculine credibility was essential to prison survival.

For those young men who could cope with time in prison during periods without electricity, 'smoking the electric' had a high communicative value. It heightened their personal capabilities of coping with unstructured time in prison and displayed the self relative to others. It was notable that the young men who were required to engage in regular 'masculinity tests' were located within the intermediary section of a masculine contestation scale: with male rape victims located below the minimum threshold point, and those men no longer required to prove their masculinity located above the maximum threshold. Through the gendered discourses of the young men in Hydebank, it was evident that due to offence seriousness and time served, the Young-Elders secured their masculine status and were located beyond a masculinity threshold.

The discussion of this group of prisoners within Hydebank serves to further the discussion within the literature on young masculinities in prisons. Through the discussion of the Young-Elders, it is evident that the gender order within young men in prisons is more complex than the hegemonic framework suggests. Within the Hydebank context, it was clear that the idealised, or hegemonic, expression was not solely juxtaposed to subordinated masculinities, but instead – in terms of respect provided from the wider prisoner group – the Young-Elders rivalled it. Through the nature of the crimes they had committed and the time

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they had spent in prison their masculinity was revered. Furthermore, in relation to youth masculinities in prison, the existence of the Young-Elders highlights that alternative expressions of masculinity, which do not conform to the common hegemonic prison ideology, can be respected amongst groups of men. This provides the foundations of knowledge for challenging gendered discourses in prison that idealise the characteristics of dominance, violence and dismissal of emotion. It provides an insight into how prison regimes can create spaces for young men to inhabit expressions of alternative masculinity, relatively free from stigmatisation.

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