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Exploring the concept of ‘the Third Place’ in prison

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This was not a solo adventure.

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Abstract

Using Ray Oldenburg's 'third place' as a sensitizing concept, I explore prisoners' experiences of space and place in their social interactions. Third places are "public places that host the regular, voluntary, informal, and happily anticipated gatherings of individuals" (Oldenburg, 1999, p.16) and are distinct from a person's first (home) and second place (work). Third places can arguably offer wide-ranging benefits to people who spend time in prisons - such as emotional support, structure and meaning, a sense of community, and social capital. This research was undertaken at HMP & YOI Parc in Bridgend, Wales. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 12 adult, male prisoners across three separate wings: a main wing, a Family Intervention Unit, and a Drug Rehabilitation Unit. I also undertook observation across the prison. The findings highlight the centrality of spatial control in enabling or limiting access to third places for prisoners. Prisoners living on specialist units, with higher status IEP, and able to benefit from prison officer discretion had more geographical freedom and spatial control. In turn, this allowed them access to better quality third places, higher up the 'hierarchy of place'. Time spent in third places allowed prisoners to have more positive experiences of their first and second places. Place appropriation provided the richest third place experience for the men, by fostering ownership and investment in a third place. This research highlights the value of third places and challenges a narrow definition of 'purposeful activity' that excludes some third places. Although small-scale, the research contributes to a deeper understanding of the role of place in a prisoner-centred regime.

Chapter 1: Introduction and Background

This research centres on the concept of ‘third places’, whether they exist within prisons, what they look like, and how they work. Chapter one begins with some explanation of the concepts used and an explanation of why this is an important subject. Chapter two provides a review of existing research on the application of the concept of third places. Chapter three describes the methods used in this research. Chapter four outlines key themes which emerged from the interviews and observation that took place. Finally, chapter five concludes with a summary of the research findings, its limitations and implications.

What are ‘third places’?

This research is built upon the premise that there is deep, broad value in the frequent social interaction between different people. These “encounter(s) in urban spaces” (Low, 2022, p.5) can reduce loneliness and associated early mortality (Holt-Lundstad et al, 2015), reduce anxiety and stress (Xiao et al, 2020), and create social capital that helps to reduce crime rates (Buonanno et al, 2012). Indeed, social interaction is so critically important that “A person’s sense of self is forged in a social context and is maintained through interaction with others” (O’Donnell, 2014, p.64). These interactions can occur in a variety of places and settings within daily life and, naturally, require the opportunity for people to be able to interact in order for them to take place. Without the use of technology (the role of technology and its relationship with the third place is discussed later) the interaction of people requires a shared physical space in which the interaction can occur.

Sociologist Ray Oldenburg (1999) makes the case that third places, as a type of shared physical space, hold a particular value for social interaction to take place in above all others. Third places are “public places that host the regular, voluntary, informal, and happily anticipated gatherings of individuals” (Oldenburg, 1999, p.16). Oldenburg describes these third places as

distinct from one's home (the first place) and from one's place of work (the second place) and argues the importance of the third place both for the wellbeing of the individual and for the benefit of the broader community (Oldenburg, 1999). These are places that people go to 'hang out', sometimes without any pretence but often under the guise of or facilitated by shared activity. Oldenburg provides examples of potential third places such as hair salons, cafés, and pubs and further, offers a set of characteristics of a third place. The first is 'neutral ground'. This is the idea that a third place should be a shared space, where there is no overwhelming obligation to be there. The second is that third places should be a 'leveller'. This means that that a third place should allow people to meet as equals and social standing outside of the third place should be irrelevant. The third is 'conversation is the main activity'. This characteristic is self-explanatory, however, it does not mean that conversation is the only activity that takes place. The fourth is 'accessibility and accommodation'. Third places should be easy for everybody to access and be welcoming to all. The fifth is 'the regulars'. A third place should have a core of people that spend time there regularly, they set the culture, and provide an inviting atmosphere to newcomers. The sixth is 'a low profile'. This characteristic describes a 'down to earth' authenticity for the space. The seventh is 'a playful mood'. Conversations may involve reciprocal teasing that is playful, humorous, and not intended to cause harm. The eighth is 'a home away from home'. In describing this characteristic, Oldenburg uses Seamon's (1979) five defining traits: rootedness, feelings of possession, spiritual rejuvenation, feelings of being at ease, and warmth. Together, these characteristics describe a very specific type of place. This research uses Oldenburg's idea and description of a third place as a sensitizing concept to better understand the role of space in social interaction in prison.

Why do they matter?

The benefits of third places are well documented and include emotional support, structure and meaning, community, and social capital (Cheang, 2002; Rosenbaum, 2006;

Klinenberg, 2018). Some of the benefits of the third place apply to the individual such as inclusiveness (Jeffres et al., 2009), however there are also broader benefits to the community the third place exists within, such as increased “safety and security through open and visible interaction” (Soukup, 2006, p.423). We might argue that the benefits that third places can provide are likely to be even more important to people in prison than those in the community. Many of the benefits and attributes of a third place described above, might be difficult to find in a prison where the environment can feel oppressive (Crewe, 2011), and be emotionally demanding (Crewe et al, 2017). The existence of third places in prisons that also occur in the community can help make prison life better resemble life upon release. This continuity can help support smoother transitions from custody and reduce reoffending (Koffeld-Hamidane et al, 2023). The idea of continuity upon release from prison may appear incompatible with a prison that is viewed as a ‘total institution’ (Goffman, 1961) it becomes less so, however, when prison is viewed as a ‘porous institution’ (Ellis, 2021) which is open to communication and influence with the outside world.

Third places in prisons

Although there might be a greater need for the benefits a third place can provide in prisons, the barriers to creating third places within prisons might also be greater. Not all third places are as straight forward as the examples provided by Oldenburg, prisons are a case in point. For a prisoner, a prison is a first place (as they live there), a second place (if they have a job) and a third place (if such a place exists within a prison). Prisoners’ experiences of place therefore are less distinct than elsewhere because of their confinement in a total institution; as Goffman put it “all aspects of life are conducted in the same place” (1961, p.17). The result may leave prisoners without third places, at worst, and with overlapping and blurred third places, at best. In addition to this challenge, each of Oldenburg’s characteristics of a third place may also be difficult to achieve within a prison context. For example, being able to come and go freely, one of

Oldenburg's characteristics, will inevitably be hard to achieve under the structure of a prison regime. Thus, third places in prisons could be viewed as both highly valuable and difficult to obtain.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Ray Oldenburg provides eight characteristics of a third place and describes the many benefits they have on the individuals who have third place experiences. Oldenburg also describes personal benefits such as novelty, perspective, and “friends by the set” (Oldenburg, 1999 p.60). It is easy to see why each of these might particularly benefit people in prison. Boredom in prison is so “intimately woven into the fabric of prison life” (Steinmetz et al, 2017 p.350) that an opportunity to experience novel stimulation in a third place might be a welcome one. Imprisonment by its very nature limits the number of people a prisoner is able to spend time with, increasing the chance that people in prison can have insufficient access to social interaction. Oldenburg describes the lack of social interaction as a person being “starved of association” (Oldenburg, 1999, p.49), and describes detrimental consequences such as developing irrational fears, gaining a narrower world view, and developing a loner profile. Oldenburg described having friends ‘by the set’ as having distinct friendship groups associated with a particular activity or location (Oldenburg, 1999). Due to the geographical restrictions of imprisonment, there are less opportunities to develop these types of friendships. The benefits of having these groups include increased resilience (if one group is lost, the others remain, if one person is lost the group remains), distinct opportunities to achieve social status, and opportunity for less intense friendships (Oldenburg, 1999). Taken together, this demonstrates that the benefits Oldenburg describes are not only more important for people in prison but also more challenging to achieve.

Oldenburg’s (1999) characteristics for third places add up to something very specific. This degree of specificity might make the existence of a ‘textbook’ Oldenburg third place a rare thing. Meeting every characteristic might create a ‘perfectly pure’ third place, however, many third places do not meet all of Oldenburg’s characteristics and might therefore be described as ‘less pure’. This issue of less pure third place is not readily addressed by Oldenburg in his book *The Great Good Place* (1999), the impact of the absence or presence of each characteristic is not

discussed. A further complicating element to these characteristics is that they are not binary; there are degrees as to how far they can be met. This complicates how they can be used as a set of characteristics to assess a candidate third place, i.e., it is unclear how we measure 'a home away from home' or how homely a third place needs to feel in order to be effective. Meeting these characteristics is not a one-off event either, rather it is reminiscent of the view that social organisation is never done, it is a continual process that fluctuates and requires upkeep. Layder describes this as a place and order that is "constantly in process" (Layder, 2005, p.70). Third places therefore have fluid rather than rigid and permanently fixed characteristics as they are required to be constantly negotiated (Layder, 2005). The discussion of the fluidity of characteristic is notably left unaddressed by Oldenburg.

To better understand third places, it is helpful to consider what third places are not. In the context of place and space, 'non-places' (Augé, 1995) and 'liminal spaces' (Shortt, 2015) can be seen as the antithesis of third places. Liminal spaces in this context are "transitory dwelling places" (Shortt, 2015, p.633) rather than the alternative definition of rites of passages such as bar mitzvahs, weddings, and funerals (Turner, 1969). A non-place is described as an anonymous place, a place that does not cultivate meaningful connections, is transactional in nature and is a place where interactions are fleeting (Augé, 1995). Examples of these places include petrol stations and shopping centres. Liminal spaces can be defined as a space in-between, on the boundary, that has no obvious owner (Shortt, 2015). Examples of these places include airports, corridors, and even prisons. There are a number of benefits of these places (beyond their immediate practical use) such as cultural exchange, opportunity for emotional state shifting, and freedom from strict order of more dominant spaces (Augé, 1995; McAlpine & Piszczek, 2023; Smilie, 2022). Although not always celebrated, these spaces do offer benefits, "if one can create a path through them, they can affect positive change" (Jewkes, 2005, p.382). Despite these benefits, these places could not

be further from Oldenburg's idea of a home from home, with regulars, and feelings of belonging (Oldenburg, 1999).

Merged and distinct places

Building upon the work of Oldenburg, Putnam (2000) makes a distinction between the formal and informal social interactions we make. The examples cited by Putnam within these categories challenge the characteristics of a third place, particularly their need to be distinct from first and second places. For example, Putnam describes having friends over for dinner as an informal social interaction that appears to meet many of Oldenburg's characteristics but occurs in the first place. Similarly, a formal social interaction described by Putnam are those between colleagues, again these interactions may meet many of Oldenburg's characteristics for a third place but occur in the second place. Oldenburg's examples of third places might be considered pure in the sense that they not only fully meet his characteristics but are also distinct from first and second places. The idea that a third place might not be required to be separate from first and second places in order to be effective is an encouraging one for prisons given the challenge of indistinct first, second and third places that they face that makes the blurring of place inevitable. This idea questions the relationship between activity and environment and the role of each in third places.

Putnam also provides examples of third places that meet some but not all of Oldenburg's characteristics despite being distinct from first and second places. An example of this is places of worship (Putnam, 2000). Temples, churches, mosques, and other spaces for religious participation are distinct from first and second places but may not meet other characteristics such as a playful mood, and conversation as the main activity. Additionally, chain coffee shops, in some cases may be unable to meet Oldenburg's eighth characteristic of being a home away from home due to the lack of rootedness and the existence of 'weaker ties' (Simon, 2009). Despite this, many people will

experience them as a third place and coffee chains are often even marketed in that way intentionally (White, 2004). The existence of these less pure third places prompts questions about the importance of each characteristic in the efficacy of a third place and the nature of imperfect third places.

The role of technology

Since the invention of the internet, a small body of research has developed on the subject of the internet and online spaces as a third place (Calhoun, 1998; Davis, 2010; Steinkuehler & Williams, 2006). This research evidences that these spaces can provide a beneficial third place, albeit imperfect and impure in comparison to Oldenburg's characteristics of a third place, due to their lack of physical space (Vaux and Langlais, 2021). Within the context of a prison, the ability to use third places that do not require physical space could help transcend the geographical limits of imprisonment. Although online third places can achieve some (but not always all) of the same benefits as physical places it appears they require slightly different characteristics for success than those offered by Oldenburg (Moore et al, 2009). Comparatively few studies have been conducted that focus on online spaces using the paradigm of the third place, however, an increasing amount of research has focussed on online social interaction more generally. Social interaction online is now so prevalent it has fundamentally changed how humans communicate (Mustafa and Hamzah, 2011). This adoption of technology presents an opportunity for prisons, however, security restrictions around internet use might stifle future opportunities in this space. Technological advances that are offline might present the most promising prospect such as noise-cancelling headphones used as part of the Incentives and Earned Privilege Scheme (IEP) (Hemsworth, 2016) and the use of in-cell technology such as the ability to undertake video calls with family freely from a prison cell (Robberechts & Beyens, 2020).

Escapism

A third place in any context can be a place to escape to and an opportunity to go to a familiar environment. Prison is an environment where space contamination is the norm because “(spatial) boundaries are weak” (Sibley & van Hoven, 2009, p.198), this blurring could plausibly further increase an individual’s desire to control the spaces they are able to. Schmidt and Jefferson (2021) describe the practice of ‘draga’ where prisoners would use clothing hung over their heads to cover their faces. The prisoners, with limited control over their physical environments, use draga to control their immediate personal space and create some sense of privacy. This practice is a far cry from the pubs and cafes Oldenburg offers in his descriptions of third places, however, draga is a rudimentary form of place-making that when coupled with the use of imagination offers something ‘other’ in the same way that other more conventional third space do. In such stark environments, where prisoner agency is very limited, imagined spaces such as these are important within the geography of a prison (Sibley & van Hoven, 2009).

As previously discussed, there is an argument that both less pure third places and online third spaces are legitimate even though they do not meet all of Oldenburg’s characteristics for a third place. By broadening the definition of a third place, forms of escapism may also be considered as third places. This change in understanding opens the doors to a variety of candidate activities as third places such as meditation, reading and singing. Due to the oppressive nature of prison life (Crewe, 2011) opportunities for escapism can be seen as highly valuable. Coupled with the aforementioned boredom of prison life (Steinmetz et al, 2017) this can only increase an individual’s desire to achieve ‘novelty’ (Newcombe, 2016). Some of the less sophisticated examples of escapism can be conducted in any location, due to this they meet less of Oldenburg’s characteristics for a third place but are more accessible to those wishing to use them. More sophisticated examples of escapism, however, may require a specific environment, culture or physical place in order to occur.

Placemaking and appropriation

Placemaking is a term used in city planning and urban design that focusses on the design of public spaces. Much has been written on the importance of placemaking, the role of public spaces, and the benefits of community focused participatory design (Whyte, 1980; Low, 2023; Jacobs, 2000). Inevitably, some of this place making has created potential third places. There are examples of third places that have been created directly by planners and architects such as public gyms and recreation facilities (Smith, 2011) and there are also examples where governments have enabled others to create third places such as street markets (Low, 2023). A third way of creating third places through place making is place appropriation. Place appropriation is a “mechanism by which space is transformed into place [...] the processes by which people claim ownership of, actively use, and ultimately create meaning in and become attached to the physical environment” (Pierce et al, 2003, p.60-61). Appropriation in this context involves the transferring or assumption of control by those using the space from those that made it. This ‘transferring’ of control can be planned into its design or can occur as a more hostile act that takes place in spite of the designers original intent. These privately cultivated spaces could provide a degree of escapism and psychological relief from the wider world of the prison, “Indeed, having autonomy over even the smallest aspects of the environment could help prisoners get through their sentence” (Laws & Crewe, 2016, p.536). The transfer of spatial control is required for appropriation to take place but is also an end in itself; this is something described by Oscar Newman when writing about one of his key principles of ‘Defensible Spaces’ where residents have “visible assertion of their territorial and prerogatives” (Newman, 1973, p.96). This ‘visible assertion’ is a mechanism for appropriation but also helps to achieve a broader stability that can cultivate pro-social behaviour (Newman, 1973). Within the context of a prison, prisoners might appropriate and derive their own third place if the prison establishment does not appropriately derive one for them. This idea of third places derived from appropriation is not unfamiliar to Oldenburg who writes about ‘Main Street’, a high street used as a third place by the local citizens in a way that is extraordinary to its original

purpose. It would be easy to argue that third places established in this way would more readily lend themselves to meeting Oldenburg's characteristics and becoming effective third places. Oldenburg's characteristics of authenticity, regulars, and feelings of possession are all qualities that appear to be more congruent with places controlled by the people that use them. This idea of making versus taking (Turner, 1969) may also influence how roles within third places are developed. Place as a structure can be a sociological constraint (Durkheim, 1982) but also an enabler. This idea is further supported by Giddens' (1984) description of 'Structuration Theory'. Giddens describes structure as both 'rules and resources'. This suggests that place appropriation can change an environment's ability to limit or facilitate how different social roles occur. Third places might not only just be brought about through the mechanism of place appropriation. Instead, third places might require a degree of appropriation in order to achieve Oldenburg's characteristics, namely neutral ground, and feelings of possession so that "space is transformed into place" (Rioux et al, 2017, p.60). This transfer of control that allows a place to be appropriated might be challenging in a prison because of its characteristics as a total institution and commensurate proclivity for centralised control (Wallace, 1971). Appropriation can be considered an ongoing, continuous activity rather than a one-off act of conquering a space. In describing 'intermediate zones' (that have much in common with third places) Crewe et al (2014) write "intermediate zones required cultivation in order to be less prison-like" (Crewe et al, 2014, p.69). This speaks to a sort of 'spatial entropy', where space that is not actively fostered will return to the broader dominant culture. Third places can be thought of having a 'low entropy', and unless maintained will become disordered until they are in spatial equilibrium with the surrounding space. This idea is supported by the previously discussed view by Layder, that social organisation is "constantly in process" (Layder, 2005, p.70).

Role of officers

As previously discussed, place appropriation requires an actor or a group of actors to take or be given control of a space in order to change it (Pierce et al, 2003). In some cases, this might be within the rules of that environment, in other cases it may not be. Appropriation that takes place outside of the rules can be described as a form of 'deviance' (Becker, 1963), as it is an act that breaks the social rules of that time (it should be noted that Becker goes on to argue that whether an act can be defined as deviant depends on the reaction of others to the act). Deviant place appropriation in a prison context may require a particular facilitating role from others and is unlikely to be successful if only the act of an individual. Other prisoners could be required to follow the leader of the appropriation (Becker, 1963) or it might also require officers to ignore or endorse behaviour that breaks the rules. In a written account of his time in prison, Ken Smith describes the barriers to getting this sort of permission from staff in prison, "With about eight men interested in 'writing' [...] we organized a weekly Monday-evening workshop on the wing, it was difficult to get permission for" (Smith & Wait, 1989, p.127). This demonstrates that certain types of place appropriation requires prison officer discretion, "It was through the use of discretion that staff structured [...] prisoner's activities [...] to maintain order and (some level of) compliance" (Liebling and Price, 2001, p.134). This describes a transactional element to the discretionary decision, the officer achieves good order in return for a favourable discretionary decision for the prisoner. Decisions such as these being made through the discretion of officers are likely to increase inconsistency. As Gelsthorpe and Padfield write "Discretion is one of the most contentious concepts in criminal justice [...] because it is so important yet so difficult to define" (Gelsthorpe & Padfield, 2003, p.1). If defining discretion is difficult, establishing consistent use of discretion must be even harder.

Third places in prison

There have been many books written that describe prison life and the challenges prisoners face (for example, Smith & Wait, 1989; Toch, 1992; X, 1964) and even more focussed accounts of individual elements, such as football teams within prison (a potential third place) (Grundy, 2020). Though it may be more challenging for a pure third place to exist within a prison, there are other notable candidate third places aside from football. In his autobiography Erwin James talks positively about his cell, relative to other parts of the prison, “My cell was my only refuge” (James, 2016, p.53). Similarly in his autobiography Malcolm X talks positively about solitary confinement, relative to other parts of the prison, when reflecting on breaking the rules, “I preferred the solitary that this behaviour brought me” (X, 1964, p.246). These accounts might signal a type of escapism only achieved when alone in a prison. Alternative prison accounts offer places of worship, libraries, and eating together as opportunities for escapism, (Spalek & El-Hassan, 2007; Garner, 2020; Valentine & Longstaff, 1998). These ‘free spaces’ (Goffman, 1961) can even have differing ‘temporal rules’ (Laws, 2022) allowing time to be perceived as passing at different rates.

Oldenburg (1999) describes a type of purposelessness that he attributes to activity that takes place in third places; the notion of just ‘hanging out’. This idea fits with the criteria of ‘conversation as the main activity’, ‘a playful mood’ and ‘people being able to come and go as they please’; none of which conjure the idea of industriousness or productivity. Third places may have inherent legitimate or ostensible purpose in their own right, such as a barbershop or a book shop. When these places are viewed as third places, these purposes become vehicles for social interaction that allow these places to become more than just a barbershop or book shop (Oldenburg, 1999) and turn them into third places. The purposelessness Oldenburg describes is not synonymous with valuelessness, however. ‘Purposeful activity’ is a key tenet of HMPPS (His Majesty’s Prison and Probation Service) for people in prison in England and Wales. HMIP (His

Majesty's Prison Inspectorate) measure it as part of their inspections (HMIP, 2021) and it is a priority in the HMPPS Prison Strategy White Paper (Ministry of Justice, 2021). Purposeful activity can include education, programmes of intervention and visitations amongst many others. Improving our understanding of purposeful activity of any kind, in this case 'activity of the third place', can only support HMPPS in its efforts to increase its volume and quality. These activities, however, are limited by the facilities available, the prison regime itself, and the geography of the prison.

Carceral geography

Prison is an "environment where (spatial) boundaries are weak" (Sibley & van Hoven, 2009, p.198), this coupled with fluidity of rule enforcement caused by prison officer discretion (Liebling and Price, 2003) makes for a challenging environment to navigate. Crewe et al (2014) describe the 'emotional zones' that offer a respite from the social and emotional expectations of the dominant prison culture. These places allow prisoners to "mix beyond their normal cliques" (Crewe et al, 2014, p.69) and benefit from the qualities of third places described by Oldenburg such as lack of hierarchy (a leveller) and friends by the set (Oldenburg, 1999). Crewe et al (2014) remark however, that people in those spaces "relapsed into more stratified arrangements almost as soon as they left them" (Crewe et al, 2014, p.69). This demonstrates that although spatial boundaries are weak (Sibley & van Hoven, 2009) prisoners are tacitly aware of the permissible behaviour of each place. This zonal depiction of prison space by Crewe et al (2014) challenges the more simplistic idea of 'frontstage and backstage' (Goffman, 1961) and helps us to understand that prisons are not just physical spaces in which social interactions occur, but rather complex, moving, vehicles for interaction, involving physical space, human emotion, mental perceptions as well as social practices (Soja, 1998; Lefebvre, 1974). Milhaud & Moran (2013), also challenge the oversimplification of public and private space and describe a façade associated with time spent in public spaces. The oversimplification described here risks demonising all public spaces in prison

and considering them equal. Third places are often public spaces and even if they require a façade from the people that spend time there, they have many benefits already discussed in this paper. Third places have much in common with other spaces described in carceral geography: free spaces, intermediate zones and niches (Goffman, 1961; Crewe et al, 2014; Toch, 1992). Each of these places can be considered public, yet Laws writes “It was in these places that prisoners were likely to show their most authentic selves” (Laws, 2022, p.129). This further demonstrates that not all public spaces can be considered equal, and façades may not be required unilaterally in public spaces.

Prison architectural design dictates much of the physical environment of a prison. Control of space is inherent in the design approach, as a designed and built space must at some point be given up to those who spend time in it and control it, as it moves from ‘conceived space’ to ‘lived space’ across Lefebvre’s ‘spatial trialectics’ (Lefebvre, 1974; Soja, 1998). This creates a challenge for designers of space of whether to attempt to design completed third places or stop further upstream in the place making process, and instead design space that is ripe for appropriation. Lack of co-design during these processes risks the idea of abandoned space being realised, where space is relinquished but not adopted in a managed way. Abandoning space in this manner risks increasing local competition to control that space, resulting in increased conflict and disorder (Crowley et al, 2004).

Previous research on the application of the concept

A substantial amount has been researched and written in order to understand the concept of the third place in the community since the work of Oldenburg in 1999. This work has been conducted through a variety of perspectives including sociological, urban planning and consumerism (Putnam, 2000; Low, 2023; Simon, 2009). There is no evidence of prison-based research that applies the paradigm of the third place. However, building upon Goffman’s seminal

work on total institutions (Goffman, 1961), an article entitled 'The emotional geography of prison life' (Crewe et al., 2014) provides insight into the spatial dimension of prison experience. Although it does not focus specifically on third places within a prison, it sets the foundations for this research by its acknowledgement of the importance of space and its impact on emotional state. In this paper Crewe et al write "There is scope for a much more detailed spatial analysis of prison culture" (Crewe et al., 2014. p.17). This research does not intend to entirely meet the gap that is identified here; however, it does intend to develop the understanding of prison culture through a spatial analysis of third places in a prison using Oldenburg's third place as a sensitizing concept.

Chapter 3: Methods

Research questions

This research focusses on the role of place in prison social interaction, using Ray Oldenburg's (1999) concept of 'third places' as a sensitizing concept. This research set out to answer three key questions:

- Do third places exist in prison?
- What are their strengths and limitations?
- How do people in prison feel in these third places?

The research addresses these questions through analysis of data gathered through twelve interviews with men in prison and observation made at HMP & YOI Parc in Bridgend Wales. This chapter details the research process that was followed to answer these questions. The chapter begins with how the prison site was chosen and how access was granted. Following this, I describe for each research method used how the participants were selected, how the research materials were designed, the ethical considerations that were made, and the process that was followed. Finally, I provide a description of the data analysis process I followed and reflect upon the limitations of the research approach.

Site selection and access

I had planned to complete this research at HMP Prescoed, a public sector operated, category D, men's open prison in south Wales. This choice was based on the idea that an open prison might have more potential third places across the establishment due to a more relaxed regime and therefore it might provide richer examples for the interviews to focus on, and richer environments to observe. In order to access the site, I needed operational support, approval from the Ministry of Justice National Research Committee (NRC), and ethics and risk approval from the University of Cambridge. In April 2023 I gained operational permission and access, from the Governing Governor at HMP Prescoed, the Prison Group Director for Wales, and the Executive

Director for HMPPS Wales. In late May I applied for approval from the NRC which was approved in early June. In June I applied for ethics approval and risk approval from the University of Cambridge which was approved in July. At this point I had all the permission and access required to conduct the research. Following this approval, the Governor at HMP Prescoed put me in contact with the Head of Security, who subsequently put me in contact with a Custody Manager at the prison. Over a period of two weeks, I spoke regularly to the Custody Manager about the research whilst they attempted to make the necessary arrangements within the prison. The Custody Manager reported that they were finding it difficult to gain enough interest from the men in the prison to make the research viable. At this point, after speaking to the Head of Security I made the decision to look for an alternative site on the basis that the lack of recruitment would make the research unfeasible.

I selected HMP & YOI Parc in Bridgend, Wales as the alternative site for this research. HMP & YOI Parc is a privately operated, Category B men's prison, operated by G4S. HMP & YOI Parc operates a Youth Custody Unit (YCU) however, this was out of scope for this research. To make clear that this research does not apply to the YCU, the research site will be referred to as HMP Parc from this point on throughout this paper. HMP Parc is the third largest prison in England and Wales, has a population of circa 1,700 men (Ministry of Justice, 2023) and is a reception, training, and resettlement prison. I selected HMP Parc for its potential to have candidate third places and my ability to access the site. Due to the large size of the prison, I thought it would be more likely to have more variety of facilities and spaces, a more diverse population, and be large enough to ensure I could attract a sample population. Due to its role as a reception, training and resettlement prison I thought the prison would better represent the full spectrum of prison life and sentences. Due to the change of research site, I also needed to select somewhere I could access more easily to ensure I could complete the research within the required timescales. In my role at HMPPS, my line manager is the Senior Business Owner (SBO) for HMP Parc. This

relationship aided the process of securing permission. Following the decision to conduct the research at HMP Parc, I gained endorsement from the SBO for the prison, and the prison Director (G4S). I resubmitted my NRC application and gained approval in August. I sought and received guidance from the University of Cambridge that I did not need to resubmit my ethics or risk approvals, also in August. I was provided with a point of contact in the prison, the Head of Rehabilitation who made the arrangements in the prison. By late August, all necessary permission and access had been agreed. I conducted the research during September.

I used a combination of semi-structured interviews, and observation to collect the data for this research; all methods which have been used in similar research. The data collected from semi-structured interviews, and observation at HMP Wellingborough by Ben Crewe (Crewe, 2009) were used to inform his subsequent work 'The emotional geography of prison life' (Crewe et al, 2014). On the basis of their effective use within that work, semi structured interviews and observation were strong contenders to be the research methods. Pseudonyms have been used for all participants who took part in this study.

Method 1: Observation

Participants

I completed observation at seven distinct locations within the prison. The gym, a prison yard, education, employment (industries), and three separate wings: a main wing, a Family Intervention Unit, and a Drug Rehabilitation Unit. The participants were the prisoners present at the time of the research at those locations. The main purpose was to observe what happens in these spaces and to feel what it is like to be there. These locations were selected due to the regime in place at the time of the research; these were the places where the prisoners spent the majority of their time outside of their cells (the first place).

Design/Materials

Extemporaneous notes were taken and typed up immediately following the periods of observation to aid accurate recollection (Horvat, 2013). As an outsider in this space, I needed to be aware of the impact my presence had on the environment and the behaviour of the people within it (Landsberger, 1958). Observation was chosen as a research method as it allows for a deeper understanding of what is happening in the research field, “Creative fieldwork means using every part of oneself to experience and understand what is happening” (Patton, 2002a, p.302). During interview, participants might be unable to accurately verbally reflect their behaviour (Strauss and Corbin, 1990), observation provides a level of verification to data collected from interviews. Patton (2002a) writes that an additional risk with observational data collection is that researchers can ascribe incorrect meaning to behaviours they observe. Due to this, I used both observation and interviews as part of the research method so that interviews can provide a level of verification to data collected from observation also.

Ethical considerations

I was aware of the issues of informed consent and privacy during my periods of observation. Informed consent was not sought for the observation, however, all of the observation took place in communal space (not in cells), my presence was advertised in advance, and the prisoners were able to leave any space I was observing freely. There was no deception used in this research. I was aware of the possibility that the prisoners might feel over-observed during their time in prison, as research is not uncommon at HMP Parc. This might not only change the behaviour of the participants (Landsberger, 1958) but might also have a negative impact on them (they might feel like ‘fish in a bowl’). This issue is mitigated by gaining NRC approval as one of their considerations is the volume of research being undertaken at any single prison establishment at any given time. Appropriately scheduled research by the prison and NRC ensures

only an acceptable research demand is put on the prisoners and they are able to have enough time without research being conducted to ensure their wellbeing.

Procedure

I spent approximately one hour in each of the seven locations. Data came from direct observation rather than from conversations with any prisoners during those times. A number of prisoners approached me throughout the day, however, these conversations centred on my reason for being in the prison rather than becoming informal interviews based on the research questions themselves. The data that was collected was used as part of a thematic analysis. The field notes were typed up and coded along with the interview transcripts. This is described in greater detail later.

Method 2: Interviews

Participants

Twelve semi-structured interviews were conducted with prisoners across three separate prison wings. This number of interviews allowed for a degree of diversity in participant backgrounds and experiences without increasing the risk of unhelpful repetition and duplication. Four interviews took place on a general, or 'main' wing that was used for prisoners who were predominantly within their first year at the prison. Four interviews took place on a Drug Rehabilitation Unit, this wing was for prisoners who were receiving support for substance misuse. Four interviews took place on a wing for men in the prison who are fathers (Family Intervention Unit), and who were also on enhanced privileges (part of the prison's Incentives and Earned Privileges Scheme), this wing provided support to the prisoners to maintain familial relationships during their sentence. These wings were chosen as they are distinct and would support a more varied sample for the interviews. As some of the experience of a third place was likely to be

dictated by the type of wing or regime a prisoner was on, it was important to vary the type of wing I sampled from. A mixture of recruitment methods were used. Posters were used to promote the research which, in some cases, led to prisoners volunteering to be interviewed. Some of the prisoners were recruited by snowball sampling, in these cases the participant would recommend or go and get someone else for me to talk to immediately following their interview. In the remaining cases, the participants were recruited on the day by a senior prison officer on the wing (in most cases they had spoken about the research in advance). This is an example of convenience sampling as recruitment was determined by who was available at the time, it also relied on the judgement of the officer to select a participant. I had set out to use some exclusion criteria that ruled out prisoners who had not engaged in their sentence to increase the likelihood of rich data. Due to the sampling methods this exclusion was not possible to employ, however, each of the sampling methods was unlikely to recruit participants with nothing of value to say, and in the end the risk of having poor or short responses did not materialise.

Design/Materials

Semi-structured interviews were used in order to allow flexibility to follow up on the direction of participant's responses, but also to encourage consistency to allow for analysis. The interview schedule was bespoke and developed in order to answer the specific research questions of this research. Some questions sought to identify third places; 'Where do you spend time when you're not in your cell/pad?' and some questions aimed to understand their limitations; 'If you could change anything about these places what would it be?' (the full interview schedule is included as Appendix c). The interview questions remained consistent throughout the interviews, however, as it was a semi-structured interview format follow up questions differed depending on participant responses.

Ethical considerations

Informed consent was gained prior to each interview and an information sheet was provided to the participant and was read before each interview (included as Appendices a and b, respectively). This included information about me, the research, and how participants could withdraw their consent. The information made it clear that I worked for HMPPS but was acting in my role as a student at the University of Cambridge, this identified me as an insider researcher to the participants which was important to acknowledge. My role as an insider researcher is discussed more later.

Procedure

Each interview took between 30 and 50 minutes and the mean duration was 36 minutes. The interviews took place in a private room off each of the wings. On the Drug Rehabilitation Unit and the Family Intervention Unit, I was alone with the participant during the interview. On the general wing a prison officer was present in the room but not actively listening or involved in the conversation. This was the only space available for interviews; the officer was working on a computer across the other side of the room at the time of the interviews. It is possible that their presence affected the participant responses, however, the nature of the conversation was generally not intimate or provocative which might have helped to reduce the likelihood of this. One of the participants did use the opportunity of being in a room with a senior prison officer to make a number of requests and complaints, this was quickly dealt with by the officer and the conversation returned to the interview within a minute or two. A digital voice recorder was used to record the interview and was transcribed ready for analysis within one week of the interview.

Data analysis

A thematic analysis approach was employed to analyse the data in order to understand the attitudes, interactions, and thoughts and beliefs of the participants (Patton, 2002b). The

transcripts of the interviews and the field notes were coded and categorised into themes using thematic analysis. This was chosen as the method due to the explorative and inductive nature of the research. Thematic analysis allowed the themes of the data to emerge. I conducted the coding twice to better understand emerging themes and what the data was saying. Both semantic and latent themes were identified during the analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Following the data analysis, I produced two diagrams to help characterise and communicate the data, these are shown and discussed later. Themes described as 'dominant' in the discussion chapter are themes that were most prominent during analysis. This was either through frequency of mention or observation, how important an issue appeared to matter to a participant, or a larger theme that other, smaller themes sat under. This process of identifying dominant themes involved and relied upon researcher interpretation to identify what was most prominent in the data in both volume and importance.

Limitations and other considerations

Throughout the research I needed to consider my role as an insider researcher. There are risks and benefits attached to this part of my role (Morse, 1998) especially as participants were explicitly informed of my employment at HMPPS. During interviews, the participant's knowledge of my role at HMPPS may have impacted the information they told me or the way they behaved (Bachman & Schutt, 2018). The topic of this research was not particularly contentious however, which may have mitigated this risk. Following the unsuccessful attempt to conduct the research at HMP Prescoed, due to issues with recruitment, I was cognisant that this issue might also occur at HMP Parc. This was managed by attempting to over-recruit and anticipating a percentage of participants dropping out or becoming unavailable. During conversations with my point of contact, the Head of Rehabilitation at HMP Parc this was discussed and due to the site selection and size of the prison, we would have been able to recruit from additional wings as a contingency. Although this research is not designed to be generalisable, the findings of this research are likely

to reflect some of the experiences of prisoners at other category B prisons in England and Wales. It is reasonable to think that some of the ways in which prisoners engage with third places in HMP Parc may be common to other prisoners and prisons.

Non-random sampling approaches were used and required to ensure meaningful input, however it may have provided a less representative sample that could impact transferability of the findings. The recruitment process proved successful in attracting participants, however the methods might have created bias. The selection involved some self-selection, officer selection, snowball recruitment, and convenience sampling. Each of these methods is open to bias, for example, self-selection could lead to an overrepresentation of extroverts, officer selection could lead to an overrepresentation of compliant prisoners, snowball recruitment might limit the recruitment to certain friendship groups, and convenience sampling could exclude valuable groups that were not present at the time. These biases are mitigated by completing 12 interviews, across three different wings, over two different days, and discussing the importance of diversity with prison staff that supported the recruitment.

Throughout the interviews I gained confidence and became a better listener. This might be reflected in a better quality of data in the later interviews. Upon listening to the digital recordings whilst transcribing I was aware that I interrupted less frequently and was better able to steer the conversation in later interviews.

A number of candidate third places were mentioned by participants in the interviews that I was unable to observe, these included both Men's Shed (an activity-based peer-led support group that operates as a club and meets once per week), and prayers (chapel). Observing these places may have added valuable data to this research but it was not logistically possible due to the scheduling of the regime and availability of staff.

During the interviews there were two occasions that required some specific management from me as a researcher. During one of the interviews another prisoner walked into the room unannounced and asked who I was and began searching for something in the room. I introduced myself and explained what I was doing before asking him to leave. I was conscious of avoiding conflict and disruption in the interview, being respectful to the participant I was interviewing, and also not wanting other prisoners to think the participant was 'grassing' on them to the prison (the interviewee had already shared this as a concern of theirs). I was clear and open about the purpose of the interview, and the prisoner quickly left the room. The second occasion involved a prisoner who invited me into a private room so that I could inspect a number of scars he had on his torso. As far as I was aware, he did not know who I was or why I was on the wing at that time, but he wanted to show me evidence of an assault that he had been the victim of whilst in the prison. I politely declined, and whilst explaining who I was, he began taking his clothes off and insisting, becoming aggressive. I acknowledged the scars and said that I did not need to see anything further. I was again mindful of not causing conflict, but also making the best use of my time in the prison and keeping myself safe. After a few moments of listening to the prisoner, he appeared to have shared what we wanted to. He subsequently asked me who I was and what I was doing. He ended up agreeing to be interviewed and provided useful data to the research.

The interviews and some of the observation took place on three separate wings: a main wing, a Family Intervention Unit, and a Drug Rehabilitation Unit. Each of these wings had a distinct cohort of prisoners and a distinct culture. The main wing is a general population wing that took new arrivals to the prison. On this wing, all the prisoners shared cells (except those on life sentences) and the showering facilities were also shared. This wing was noisier and felt more chaotic than the other two. It felt like it had and was described to me as having a reduced, or even no, sense of shared community. The Drug Rehabilitation unit is a wing dedicated to prisoners on a

programme of recovery from drug addiction and misuse. This wing was a similar size to the main wing but was quieter. It was noticeably cleaner in the shared spaces. The drug service was available to the prisoners at any time through a door off the wing and there was a strong sense of community described to me. Although the physical environment was similar to the main wing, the wing had a more relaxed feeling, and a culture of support and trust was described to me. The Family Intervention Unit is a wing for prisoners who have children in the community. It is supported by a programme which aims to maintain family connections, especially between the prisoners and their children. More than half the prisoners have their own cell, the landings have solid flooring rather than standard caged flooring, there are pot plants and painted walls. The environment and culture were starkly different from the other wings. It was relaxed, quiet and much more pleasant. These differences between the wings are important to note giving the nature of the research I was undertaking.

Chapter 4: Findings and Discussion

Themes

The relationship between control, environment and behavioural response

Figure 1 provides a visualisation of the elements of spatial control that emerged during data analysis.

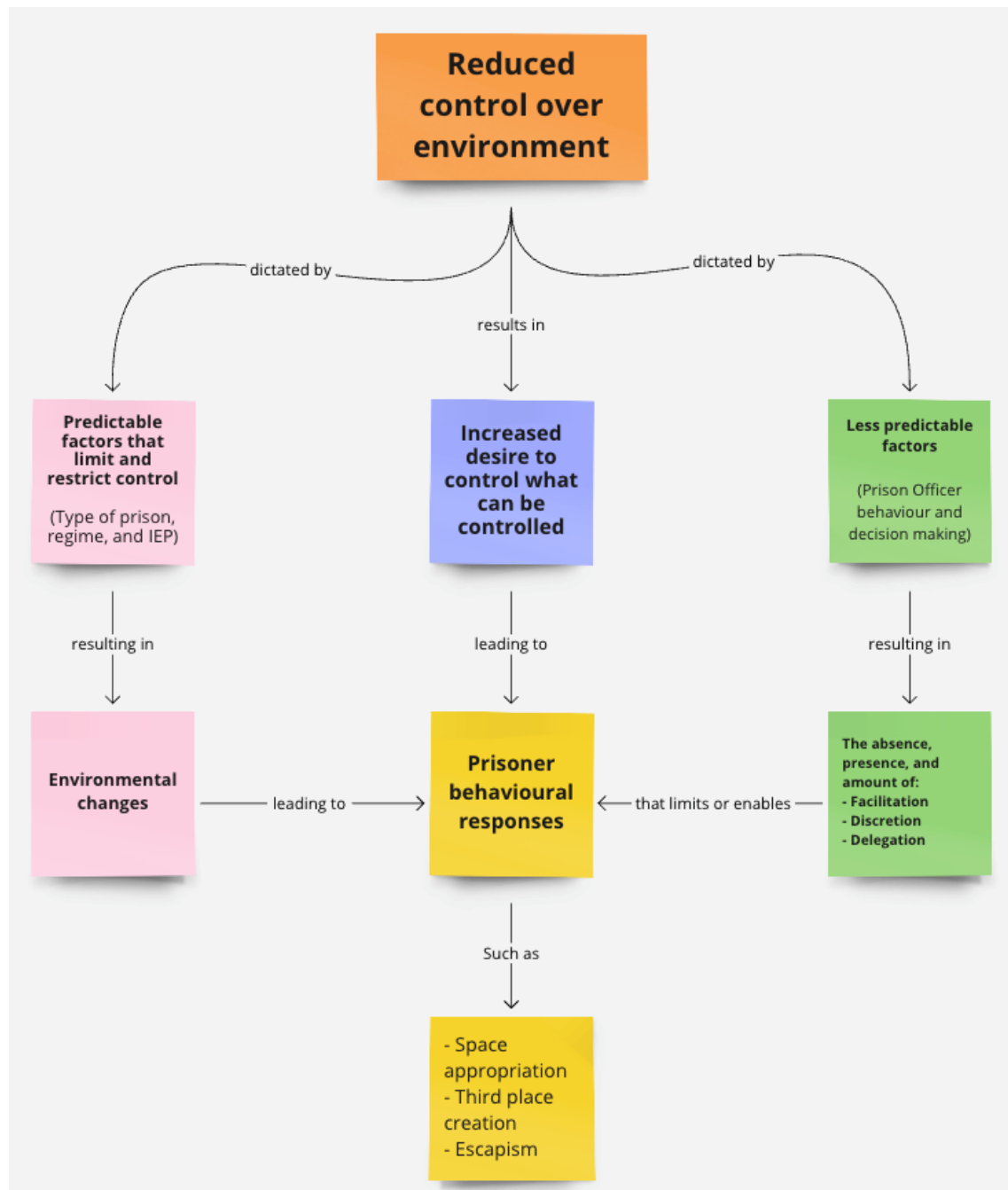


Figure 1. The relationship between control, environment and behavioural response

Each participant described having reduced control over their environment in prison compared to their time spent in the community. As shown in Figure 1, the participants described this reduced control as manifesting as an increased desire to control whatever space they could. This can be interpreted as attempts to make clearer the blurred boundaries between spaces in prison (Sibley & van Hoven, 2009). An example of this is participants tightly controlling the rules of socialising in their first place, *"Out of my cell I'll socialise, inside no thanks"* (Bradley, Family Intervention Unit). Participants described two distinct sets of factors that limited their control over their environment, as seen in Figure 1. The first set is 'predictable factors', this included limitations caused due to the type of prison they were in, the regime in place, the job they had, their Incentives and Earned Privileges (IEP) status, and the type of wing they were on. Each participant appeared to be acutely aware of where they were on the hierarchy of spatial control based on each of these factors, hence their description as 'predictable'.

"This wing (Family Intervention Unit) is like living with your mates, no trouble or anything, everyone just gets along. It's not what I expected, I've never been in trouble before and outside I wouldn't think jail would be like this [...] the main wings are a lot of bang-up and very different" (Shane, Family Intervention Unit)

A number of participants described their intention to move up this hierarchy and onto their next milestone, e.g. moving to Enhanced IEP status in 2 weeks. Each of these 'predictable factors' resulted in environmental changes for the prisoner that dictated their ability to control where and when they spent time. As shown in Figure 1, the participants described a second type of 'less predictable factor' that also impacted their ability to control their spatial environment. These factors related to the behaviour and decision-making of the prison officers they encountered. Some officers used their discretion to give more control to prisoners than the rules might ordinarily allow, however, other officers stuck rigidly to rules. An example of this was officers allowing prisoners to eat together at the tables during periods of lockdown, creating an opportunity for third-place interactions, but strictly speaking a breach of the rules. Additionally, some officers facilitated the running of clubs and groups on the wing beyond what was permitted

by the regime (this is discussed in more detail later in the chapter), *"Some officers are more lenient and understand, so let us eat on the tables (on the wing), they understand"* (James, Drug Rehabilitation Unit). This difference in approach was something all the participants were aware of, each using binary terminology to describe two distinct (good and bad) types of officers in this context.

"The old school officers, know when to talk to you and can see if you're having a bad day, their first instinct isn't to go for the physical and press the alarm, they will talk, that's what old school officers are like. Some others are just here on a power trip and they're the ones everyone worries about and they're the ones that make you angry and not want to talk, as they belittle ya [sic]" (Bradley, Family Intervention Unit)

As depicted in Figure 1, the increased desire to control space leads to a behavioural response from the prisoners. The participants described a range of responses that were then limited or enabled by a combination of both the predictable factors and less predictable factors at play in their environment. Regardless of the varying restrictions on spatial control, the desire to control their environment remained seemingly constant amongst the participants. The spatial response of the prisoners, however, seemed to directly correspond to the resulting amount of spatial restriction. Where prisoners had more control over their environment, were less geographically restricted, and had officers acting as facilitators, prisoners are more likely to use, create and adopt third places. Examples include, regularly spending time off their wing, setting up clubs (Monday Night Club, Matching – discussed in more detail later in the chapter), creating communities, and instigating games and play (cards, bingo night, pool tournaments). Where prisoners had less control over their environment, were more geographically restricted, and did not have officers acting as facilitators, prisoners were unable to use and adopt third places within the prison. Instead, behaviour focussed on escapism (reading, television, drug use) and attempts to separate and control the functions of the places they spent time in. In these instances, third places became less pure to Oldenburg's definition, as they adhered to fewer of the criteria described for a third place (Oldenburg, 1999). The control the prisoners had over their environment was described by

the participants as being on a continuum, with each prisoner planning their next milestone to achieving increased control such as moving wing or moving up from basic IEP.

Control over environment: predictable factors

A dominant theme from the research is the differing social experiences that can be had when serving a prison sentence depending on 'predictable factors' that limit and restrict spatial control. The majority of the participants described a very different experience of their time spent on remand in 'local' prisons before moving to HMP Parc. Some of these descriptions were positive and others negative in comparison to HMP Parc. There was a lack of consensus on which types of prison, or which particular prison was preferred. However, when describing their preferred prisons, each of the participants described reduced restrictions and increased spatial control as the factors that were important to them. This included more time out of their cell; *"(HMP Swansea has) less bang-up than Parc"* (Jordan – Family Intervention Unit), more time in the gym; *"you get extra time in the gym, it's an hour and a half at Cardiff, more time for social conversations, it's easy jail, good jail"* (Jack, Family Intervention Unit), and increased space for association time; *"I was at Berwyn but it's better here, bigger wings here"* (Nathan, Main Wing). Similarly, the participants described the impact of restricted regimes, sometimes caused by staffing shortages and sometimes due to the type of wing that they were living on. The Family Intervention Unit regime had more gym time, more association, and more visits than the other wings. This provided more spatial control and less geographical restriction on the prisoners on the wing. The participants each described wanting to get a job in the prison that also allowed more freedom of movement. Cleaning jobs and working in other wings as a listener were coveted by the prisoners as they allowed them to get off the wing more regularly, *"I can choose when to go and do my cleaning so I can be off wing for an hour or so and just take my time"* (Daniel, Drug Rehabilitation Unit). Other jobs in the prison were generally desired but less so if those roles did not afford additional freedoms. In these cases, the role of the prisoner's work as a second place

was used as a means to an end rather than an end in itself; the prisoners wanted to get off their wing rather than into work, work was just a vehicle for increased geographical freedom. Other participants described working as a third place in itself, especially when it allowed for social interaction. Tea packing was an example of this.

"It takes thirty men at a time, sat at the table and you're talking [...] good comradery, the lady over there [...] everyone looks up to her she treats us like our (her) [sic] kids, we love her, we has [sic] fun, but she keeps us in line, we can tease her like [sic]" (Liam, Drug Rehabilitation Unit)

During this conversation Liam's description of the role of the prison staff member supervising the work felt comparable to that of a pub landlord, facilitating some fun, commanding respect, and keeping order. Tea packing as a third place is an impure example of Oldenburg's third place (1999), as it is neither separate to the prisoner's first or second place, but described as beneficial nevertheless.

Another 'predictable factor' described by participants was the Incentives and Earned Privileges status of the men in the prison, which rewards good behaviour and order in a number of ways including increased time out of cell and more frequent visits from family. The prisoners each described their attempts to navigate this system and a number of the participants noted how many days they had until the next milestone in their progression. One of the participants was a 'Red Band'. This is the highest status offered to prisoners by the prison and involves them being able to travel around the prison unescorted and required them to wear a red armband to identify them. Red Bands, therefore, had the least geographical restriction within the prison.

The combination of these predictable factors contribute to and influence the prison environment in which the prisoners live. Each of the participants described a subset of features, influenced by the predictable factors, that affected the space they lived and how they were able to use it. The first of these is unpredictability. The participants on the main wing consistently

described the feeling of unpredictability that was not described on the other two wings. This was highlighted most strongly by the participants who had previously been on the main wing and had now moved on and were able to offer a comparison, *"It's wild on the mains, I've seen people get cut up for fifty quid"* (Jordan, Family Intervention Unit). The backdrop of a consistent possibility of violence was described as making it more likely for people to retreat to their cells on the main wings and prevented them from being able to spend time in communal spaces on the wing, therefore reducing the possibility of time spent in third places. There was a stark contrast between the description of unpredictability on the main wing and the Family Intervention Unit.

"You wouldn't get this on the mains, you don't get nothing like this down there, you get the homely vibe up yer [sic], there's drug misuse and violence but up here it's totally different, not really like you're in jail" (Shane, Family Intervention Unit)

The Drug Rehabilitation Unit was also described as having a degree of unpredictability, this mainly focussed on the behaviour of other prisoners relapsing and using drugs, *"If people have a bad day, or start using, it's easy to get sucked in and you never know what's going to happen"* (James, Drug Rehabilitation Unit). During his interview, James described a tension between not wanting to use drugs but also not wanting to be alone. He described how socialising with other prisoners who were using drugs risked his own relapse and drug use, therefore reducing the likelihood of him choosing to spend time in third places. The fear of crime appeared to also exist on the Drug Rehabilitation Unit as well as the main wings, *"There's boys in here for doing burglary, what's to say that they're not going to go into your cell"* (Daniel, Drug Rehabilitation Unit). It was unclear if the potential theft described was linked with drug use, but regardless it appeared to impact decision making on whether or not to leave their cell.

The second feature of their environment that was described was sharing space with 'the wrong people'. All of the participants described the feeling of having to live with people they wouldn't choose to. Interestingly, the issue was not with sharing itself, but rather who they had to share space with and how they behaved. Noise was a good example of this and was consistently

reported as an issue on the main wing, *"A lad on my wing had a six hundred and fifty watt speaker system, I tried to get ear defenders, but I couldn't"* (Adam, Main Wing). For many of the participants, it was important for them to be able to spend time with people like them, this was sometimes described as people their own age, with the same interests, or that have compatible personality types.

"I've always socialised with men and women, and sometimes I've preferred women as there's less of this alpha male bull crap, macho stuff doesn't bother me. I couldn't give a crap if you can beat someone up or lift two hundred kilos" (Jack, Family Intervention Unit)

The issues were all described around the type of person they had to share space with or their behaviour rather than sharing space in general. Many of the participants described enjoying sharing communal spaces, and even their cells when they were well-matched with their cell mate.

"I shared a cell with someone that did drugs, I'm an anti-drugs person, but I've also shared with normal people, I'm on my own now and sometimes it can get lonely, you know, (you) watch Wales play rugby and you want to be like 'fucks sake they're playing crap' and you've got no one to share it with" (Jack, Family Intervention Unit)

A third feature of the environment described by the participants was being on lockdown (prisoners spending more time in their cell than usual as part of a restricted regime) due to COVID-19 during the pandemic and more recently due to staffing shortages. *"When there was COVID, there was loads of bang-up it's just you and your pad mate or you on your own and you don't really see anyone. That was more difficult than now"* (Shane, Family Intervention Unit). During these periods of lockdown, the participants described having to eat in their cell, having less yard time, less time off the wing, and reduced visits. This appeared to more strongly impact those with the least control over their environment. Red Bands, cleaners, and gym orderlies each described being able to move around the prison during periods of lockdown due to their IEP status or jobs.

The fourth feature was the merging and blurring of geographical boundaries. As the prisoners were unable to control who else lived on their wing or cells, in the case of those who

were sharing, the boundaries between places were often described as unclear with no commonly agreed set of rules.

"I like to do my gym alone, keep it separate, do my thing. I'll come out on the wing and have a chat but not there [...] I know when, where and who to socialise with, if you see me on the landing, I'll socialise with everyone, I'm by myself but I'll stop and I'm happy, but I enjoy my own company [...] out of my cell, I'll socialise, inside no thanks" (Bradley, Family Intervention Unit)

Some of the participants described their reliance on being able to socialise with their cell mates, and others, like Bradley, preferred to keep to themselves. In some instances, differing approaches to cell sharing caused issues with cell mates interpreting lack of conversation as there being an issue between them, *"If you're quiet you wonder if there's a problem and then it makes a problem"* (James, Drug Rehabilitation Unit). Although there were no commonly agreed rules across the prison on this, there were rules for each cell (even if sometimes they were opposing or not communicated between the cell mates). It was clear across the interviews that self-imposed rules around place were used to combat the inherent blurred boundaries (Sibley & van Hoven, 2009).

The factors I have described in this section determine the environment of a prisoner. In the context of third places, this environment can limit or enable the availability or quality of third places available to the prisoners. I have described these factors as 'predictable' as each of the participants demonstrated an understanding of what a prisoner could expect from the presence of each of these factors, a desire to live under more preferable predictable factors, and in most cases an awareness of what they needed to do to make that more likely. Prisoners on higher IEP, prisoners not on the main wing, and prisoners on a 'full' regime were more likely to have increased geographical freedom and to be surrounded by pro-social behaviour. This resulted in increased access to off-wing third places and increased likelihood that on-wing social time was available and enjoyable. This finding is unsurprising given the characteristics of a third place provided by Ray Oldenburg (1999). Oldenburg describes the eighth characteristic as 'a home away

from home' and uses Seamon's (1979) five defining traits: 'rootedness, feelings of possession, spiritual rejuvenation, feelings of being at ease, and warmth'. Time spent on a wing where unpredictability is the norm and there is an underlying fear of crime and violence appears incompatible with this 'ease' and 'warmth'. Additionally, the prisoners with increased geographical freedom were much more likely to find a third place that is 'neutral ground' (Oldenburg's first characteristic). Their increased freedom of movement means they have no overwhelming obligation to be there, a key element of this characteristic.

This section has discussed 'predictable factors' and environmental changes, which can be seen on the left hand side of Figure 1. I will now move on to discuss the right-hand side of Figure 1; 'less predictable factors'.

Control over environment: less predictable factors

A dominant theme of this research is prison officer discretion. All participants referred to prison officers affecting their social experience and the amount of control they had over their environment. Prison officers are often involved in the decisions affecting regime and IEP (predictable factors), however, the participants describe a less predictable role that they play in determining the level of control a prisoner has on their environment. A number of the participants described instances where prison officers broke prison rules to allow prisoners more freedom.

"You have boys on basic stuck behind their doors and we (mentors) will have a word with the officers and tell them they need to get out, and nine times out of ten they'll let them come for a walk around the yard with us" (Liam, Drug Rehabilitation Unit)

Each of the participants knew of similar examples, where a prison officer had made a discretionary decision to break the rules and increase the freedom of a prisoner. The perception of the participants is that this was motivated by the prison officer wanting to keep order and wanting to treat prisoners with decency. In the case of the above example, the participant

believed that the prisoner he was advocating for was in distress and was likely to be violent or aggressive if they went unappeased. There was a general feeling amongst the participants that different prisoners were better able to influence prison officers and different prison officers were more open to applying discretion in this way. In the above example this discretion led to a temporary third place experience for the prisoner and mentor (a short walk around the yard whilst talking). Additional examples included allowing prisoners to eat together on the wing during lockdown, allowing scrabble games in shared places during lockdowns, and facilitating coffee mornings outside of the regime. Each of these examples created a third place or third place experience for the prisoners at the complete discretion of prison officers.

One of the participants on the Drug Rehabilitation Unit described an example of prison officers facilitating more formal third places using their discretion, in the form of clubs. In one instance a club for making models using glue and matchsticks (matching) was facilitated by prison officers. This was a club that ran from an unused meeting room on the wing, at a time in the regime when prisoners should be in their cells. One of the participants, a Red Band, had negotiated the use of the space, appointed himself as chairperson of the club, held a waiting list (due to its popularity) and even convinced the prison drug service to pay for the materials. This is an example of place making by this participant, who was able to get prison staff to facilitate a weekly club, that was breaking the rules, ostensibly in return for order and to maintain an effective transactional relationship (Liebling and Price, 2001) with mentors and Red Bands. Upon reflection, I would like to have interviewed some of the prison officers to better understand their motivation for facilitating this third place making. A further example is what was referred to as the 'Monday Night Club'. On the Drug Rehabilitation Unit, an intervention programme came to an end but was commandeered by some of the prisoners. Although the programme ended, the meetings were allowed to continue into what became a club, known as the Monday Night Club. The prison drug service provides biscuits and hot drinks, and the prisoners chat together, with no specific

purpose. Through their discretion, the prison officers, facilitated this third place that has been appropriated by the prisoners on the wing.

In some cases, prison officers were described not as breaking the rules themselves so much as turning a blind eye to rule-breaking by the prisoners. A number of participants across all three wings described officers allowing gambling for low value stakes to take place openly on the wing.

"We'd all put tea packs in or milks and make a little kitty and it was good craic and it died out now, but it was a drug recovery wing full of hardened criminals and you have them calling house! (bingo games) [...] it prompts conversation, lots of fun (during Scrabble games) you'd have boys, running upstairs to check the dictionary [...] the fucking conversations that happen around that! (Scrabble board)" (Daniel, Drug Rehabilitation Unit)

This type of gambling was described as taking place during games of pool, bingo, and scrabble. It was described as a pseudo-pub environment in the prison as a third place for the prisoners, *"Snooker, pool, darts it's pub sports really except without the beer"* (Shane, Family Intervention Unit). Despite these examples of discretion enabling third places, participants were acutely aware that these occurrences were less predictable and relied upon individual relationships. Unlike navigation of the predictable factors, there was a sense that prisoners with more 'seniority' such as Red Bands and mentors were more able to receive discretion. There was also a feeling from the participants that discretion happened more often on wings with more freedom to begin with. The participants on the Family Intervention Unit talked about officer discretion as the norm on this wing compared to previous wings they had been on. The less predictable factors appear to compound the predictable factors; prisoners on main wings, on basic IEP might be less likely to receive the benefits of discretion. The consequences for third places are that those who need access to them the most, have access to them the least.

Desire to control space

Some of the participants described ways in which they attempted to control the space around them, reporting an increased need to separate the spaces in their daily lives. For some participants this manifested through the use of self-imposed geographically distinct rules. These rules often included whether time spent in a shared cell should involve conversation, self-imposed routines of when to eat or exercise, and finding time alone. *"Prison is non-stop socialising, you're stuck in the same place as forty other blokes and they are the first thing you see when you wake up and the last thing at night"* (Jordan, Family Intervention Unit), here the participant was reflecting on how he kept his socialising outside of his cell, as his cell was the only place he could fully control. Although some of the participants with their own cell described occasional loneliness, especially through periods of lockdown, having their own cell during a full regime provided them with something of a home or first place that they could control and retreat to. This idea of retreating to one's cell is a feeling consistent with other previously referenced prison accounts (for example, James, 2016; X, 1964).

"I hate having a pad mate now, I hate people, people don't live up to the same standard that I live (cleanliness) [...] if they see me cleaning, they try to get involved, just leave me to it please [...] I have got a cell mate right now, I'll be honest, do we talk? I do try to avoid talking to him, his mindset isn't where mine is (maturity)" (Bradley, Family Intervention Unit)

One of the participants even described a way that prisoners created shared experiences whilst in separate cells. During the Rugby World Cup, prisoners would often watch the games from their cell as the matches took place late in the evening, *"When Wales scores, you know they've scored because the doors get kicked, it's a good way to share it all together"* (Jack, Family Intervention Unit Interview). Participants described wanting to have their own cell so that they would have a space they could control, but then being unable to control that space during periods of lockdown as they could not leave it or invite others into it. This example sums up the tension described by the participants over the use of space. Although, advancing up the hierarchy of spatial control was preferable to being at the bottom, even the most spatial control the prison allowed was still

imperfect, it created new problems and demanded difficult decisions, *"Sometimes (due to the regime) you have to choose: gym time, or a programme, or prayers. You can't do it all"* (Kyle, Family Intervention Unit). This universal problem of having to decide how time is spent was more acutely felt by the participants than it might be by those in the community. The participants described both having too much time but also not enough, they felt they had the wrong type of time.

Response to environment

Figure 1 describes two sets of factors that determine the prison social environment for a prisoner that have been discussed in the previous sections: predictable factors and less predictable factors. The resulting environment demands a response from the prisoners living within it. This section will discuss the various responses that were described and observed in the context of third places.

Importation (bringing third places into the prison)

Some of the participants described being able to successfully bring hobbies or interests with them into the prison that created third places for them. Examples included sport, games or organised religious groups. In these cases, prison was frequently compared to life in the community due to the ability to replicate certain social opportunities.

"Prison is like a microcosm of society, you know, people do meet, they do things, they hang out. There's a little corner for coffee chats, and the pool table, and chats happen there, and the gym obviously and the wing itself, obviously it's a restricted environment, very different to the outside world it still has its own (places to socialise)" (Jack, Family Intervention Unit)

This transferring in of third places was not possible for all participants. Many of the participants described barriers to accessing third places or third place experiences they were used to in the community whilst in prison, *"Can't play Warhammer - not allowed knives, can't do hockey - not*

allowed sticks" (Jack, Family Intervention Unit). Security restrictions were a common reason many of the third place experiences were unable to import into the prison with the prisoners, such as online gaming which requires internet access. Other examples were unavailable due to the limits of the prison facilities, such as swimming.

As well as importation of third places, a number of the participants talked about exporting third places with them when they leave prison. In some cases, prisoners seemed particularly aware of this need. One participant reflected on how a third place activity he had taken up in a prison during a previous prison sentence had benefited him when in the community.

"I got out of jail on my first sentence, and I was just in the house. I didn't get out and was struggling with my mental health and my father said shall we go down the club (snooker) and I've never looked back" (Jordan, Family Intervention Unit)

The idea of exportation of third place experiences adds an interesting dimension to third places in prison and for some prisoners may offer some stability during the turbulent process of resettlement.

Creation (making third places)

There were examples from the participants of third place creation. These were occasions where prisoners had amongst themselves established their own third places. Two of these have already been discussed in an earlier section, 'Monday Night Club' and 'Matching Club'. Both of these examples relied on the discretion of the prison staff to exist but were driven by prisoners. Perhaps due to them being prisoner-derived, there was a clear sense of ownership with each of them being described by participants with the language of ownership such as 'our' and 'my'. In these two examples, they were both described as meeting a need that was not being catered for by the prison. Although, the prison as an establishment did not create these third places, the prison staff had an important role in their continued existence.

Appropriation (adapting third places)

The participants each described third places that were appropriated by the prisoners. An example of this was playing snooker and pool. Although the prison had created these physical spaces, the prisoners used them and adapted them into third places for themselves, *"We arrange snooker tournaments, and all put something in and then the winner wins it all, usually me! We have a laugh"* (Jordan, Family Intervention Unit). What often set these examples of appropriated places apart from adoption was the culture and rules created by the prisoners around these places. An example of this is the informal, unspoken banning of 'inside chat' in these spaces, *"(during activities) It's 'out of jail' chat, outside talk really, what we gonna [sic] do when we get out. No 'inside chat' allowed"* (Jordan, Family Intervention Unit). Inside chat was described as any conversation focused on prison life such as staff, regime or other prisoners. Outside chat, instead, was described as conversation about family, stories from time spent in the community, and discussing future plans upon release. The 'no inside chat' rule promoted a number of Oldenburg's characteristics of a third place, most notably the second (a leveller), third (conversation as the main activity) and seventh (a playful mood).

During the observation I witnessed an example of space appropriation leading to third place experiences. I spent time in the prison industries (spaces where prisoners can work as part of in-prison employment) and in one of the work rooms where prisoners had jobs packing plastic plumbing parts, a number of the prisoners used that time to socialise. Despite it being their second place, a huddle of the prisoners at the back of the room were not working and were instead laughing, chatting and teasing each other. This was tolerated by the prison staff and was reminiscent of a moment that might occur in a place of work in the community. The idea of a second place as a third place was not uncommon within the prison and also took place during tea packing and cleaning.

Adoption (using provided third places)

The participants each described examples of when prisoners used third places within the prison that were provided by the prison. Examples included Men's Shed and using the gym, both of which allowed different wings to associate together, *"You can chat and see other people from other house blocks, we use it to see people we wouldn't normally see"* (Luke, Main Wing). In this example the participant was describing socialising as the goal and the gym as the vehicle, he and his friend would gently play badminton, more interested in the conversation than the sport. A number of the participants described a common issue with gym time being the limited duration of 45 minutes, each citing other prisons with longer gym allowances and describing them as better prisons. Although Men's Shed is a third place created by the prison, it showed signs of being appropriated by the prisoners. The participants who attended described being able to use the time and space as they wanted to, *"One man just plays songs on his guitar and takes requests, for half an hour we are just sat there in amazement"* (Jack, Family Intervention Unit). Men's Shed could be described as a 'sandbox' environment in which the prisoners were able to play together as they choose. A further example of third place adoption is prison prayers. Once a week prisoners were able to take part in organised worship and additionally attend religious classes twice a week. This created an opportunity to socialise with others across the prison, however this occurred in the margins, either side of the act of worship in the same way it might in places of worship in the community, *"(We get to) see other people from other wings, it's a way of seeing friends from other wings [...] you can chat before and after for ten to fifteen minutes but have to be quiet during the worship"* (Luke, Main Wing).

Mindset

A few of the participants described the mindset required to make the most of the third place opportunities with a prison, *"You've got to have the confidence to chat to people, if you're timid and shy it could be intimidating, boring and lonely. Staff haven't got time to come and talk to*

you, I feel sorry for people like that" (Nathan, Main Wing). This approach reflects the need to create and appropriate third places when in a prison. It seemed prisoners are less able to rely on 'ready-made' third places than people in the community, simply due to the lack of availability. There was a sense of autonomy amongst the participants that the prison would not do it for them, they had to make third places experiences happen themselves.

Escapism

A theme amongst the third place experiences described by the participants was escapism. Each of the participants described the desire and attempts to feel like they were elsewhere. These attempts included reading, education, and sport; each creating opportunity for prisoners to temporarily not feel like they are imprisoned, *"During football you can forget, but you remember again when you get back to the wing!"* (Nathan, Main Wing). During periods of lockdown, some of the participants described a more desperate form of escapism in drug use, *"I used to use drugs to escape, I've since stopped taking drugs [...] I understand it's not worth it [...] I've used a lot of drugs in the past to get me through my sentences"* (James, Drug Rehabilitation Unit). The example of drug use as a last resort to escapism reinforces the idea that prisoners might be powerfully drawn to psychological relief (Laws & Crewe, 2016).

What is common across the ways in which the participants described their response to their environment in the context of third places is the desire for access to diversity of space and place. This might be a reflection of the role of novelty in order to overcome boredom (Newcombe, 2016) or choice as an opportunity to hold control.

Hierarchy of place

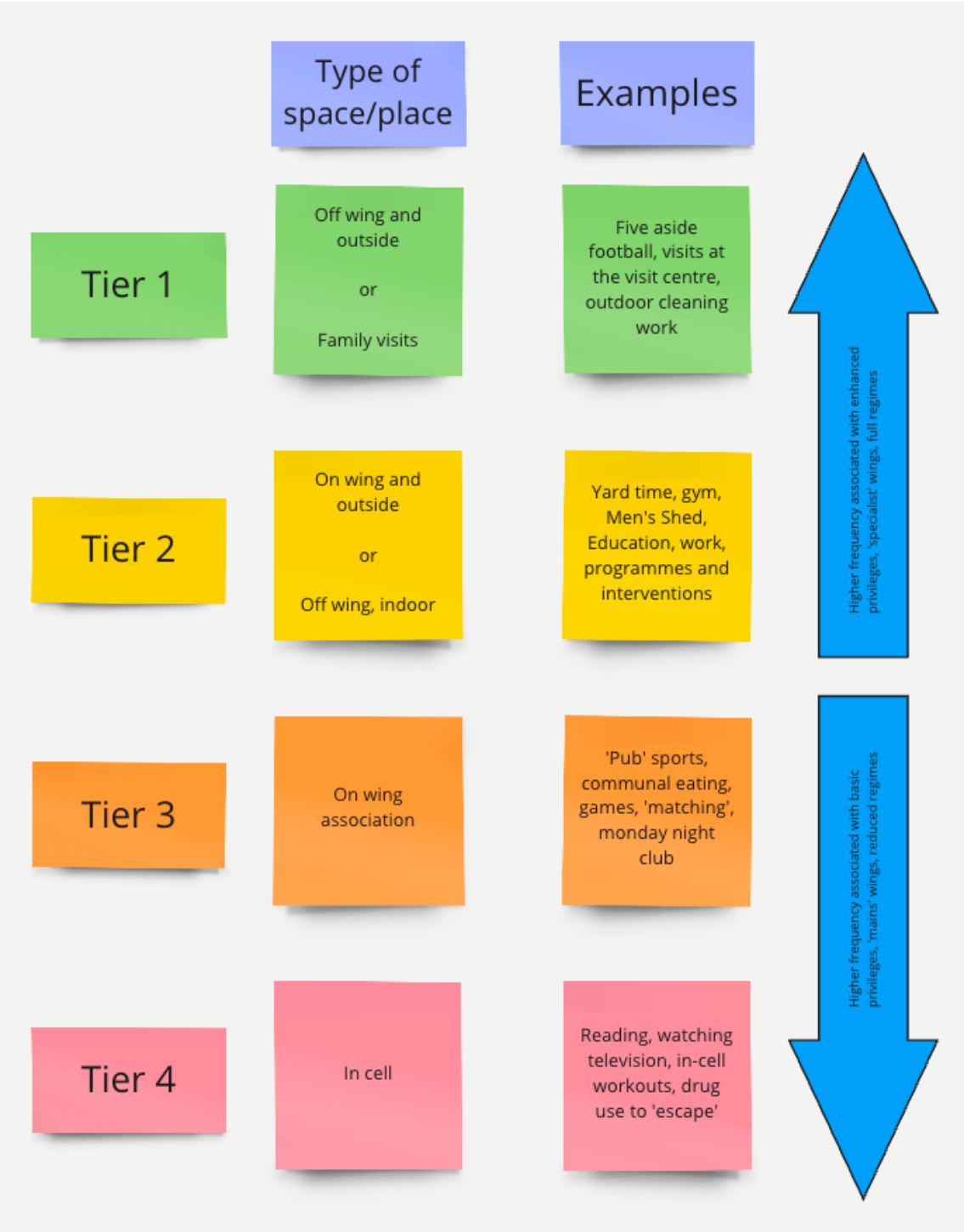


Figure 2. Hierarchy of place

The participants described a shared view on the hierarchy of places within the prison. This is depicted in Figure 2. This diagram has been produced following the data analysis, it is important

to note that the tiers have been established following an interpretation of the interviews with participants and not directly from the participants themselves. The diagram summarises the views of the participants and shows the preference for place across four tiers. The participants described a strong preference to spend time off their wing and to be outside. The preference for time spent outside was felt so strongly that on-wing yard time was described as preferable to indoor off-wing time. The places described in Figure 2 are potential third places for the men in the prison. Access to the higher tier places was made more likely for those with more preferable predictable and less predictable restricting factors (Figure 1).

Elements of this hierarchy are intuitive and unsurprising. The participants typically rated places that they had less access to more highly than the places they had frequent access to. For example, the prison cell was considered very low on the hierarchy but family visits, which were limited were thought of very highly. This might reflect a desire for novelty (Newcombe, 2016), or scarcity of access leading to feelings of reward when those places can be accessed. Time spent off wing was described as the most sought after place to spend time. This time achieved novelty and also allowed prisoners to mix with prisoners from other wings which offered a practical benefit. Time spent off the wing also reaffirmed the distinction of the participants first place from other places within the prison. Leaving the wing involves travel through liminal spaces, offering a sort of commute or transition that combats the merging of spaces in the prison and allows the prisoners to 'come home' re-enforcing the identity of the wing and cell as a first place.

A more surprising, less predictable part of the second tier in Figure 2 is the preference for outdoor time on the wing (yard time) over indoor time off wing. A number of the participants described the strong desire to be outside. This was described as the best chance for escapism and for many of the participants a time that they were best able to forget they were in prison. During the observation, I witnessed prisoners walking laps of the yard for the whole duration of

association, taking advantage of every moment. This occurred mostly in groups or pairs accompanied by animated conversation, I perceived this to be a strong example of a third place within the prison. Part of the observation took place during a particularly hot day, many of the prisoners were sunbathing and almost all were shirtless and had their t-shirts draped over their heads. This might have been to cover their eyes to protect them from the sun and improve their comfort but was reminiscent of the practice of 'draga' described by Schmidt and Jefferson (2021). The t-shirts appeared to offer a sense of privacy and also sent a 'do not disturb' signal to every other prisoner in the yard. The idea of preferring yard time to indoor off wing time is intriguing and part of the research I regret not pursuing more.

The third tier on the hierarchy is on wing out of cell time. This was described as preferable to lockdown and enjoyed by some participants more than others. Some of the participants described these places fondly, *"Even sitting on the wing by there [sic], it's the same as being in the pub innit, it's the same but different, it still goes on (socialising), just differently"* (Shane, Family Intervention Unit). Other participants however were clear that this was only enjoyable relative to any alternative way to spend their time.

The fourth tier on the hierarchy was the cell. This involved the most basic of opportunities for escapism such as reading and television. Although participants described their preferences within their cell such as having a cell mate and how much they would talk to them, each of the participants who spoke positively about their cell as a place in its own right, only did so in relation to its use among the other places they spent time. The participants talked universally negatively about the cell as a place during periods of lockdown. However, the more geographical freedom they had, and the more preferable predictable and less predictable factors they experienced, the more positively they spoke about their cell as a place. In the context of third places this suggests that when a first place is used as more than a first place (be that a second place, and or third

place) it is less able to function successfully as any one of those places. The most desperate use of place that was described by participants was the use of drugs during periods of lockdown as a form of escapism to cope with their environment. The act of using drugs in a prison cell is unlikely to meet any of the characteristics described by Oldenburg (1999). However, in a broader definition of 'third place experiences' drug use can provide some of the benefits of a third place such as novelty, escapism, and even community (if undertaken as a shared activity, not necessarily unlike going to the pub). It was clear from the participants who referenced drug use during periods of lockdown that it was a sort of last resort, something they would do to take control of their experience or escape if they could not find another way.

Access to higher tier places was more likely with more preferable predictable factors such as having higher IEP status, being off the main wings, and having jobs in the prison that granted increased geographical freedom. Many of the participants had designs on moving up these structures and were able to describe their approach and the barriers that might prevent them from being able to do so. The general preference for places further away from the participant's first place, shown in Figure 2, demonstrates a desire for separation of place, a distinction to combat the blurred boundaries inherent in the prison environment (Sibley & van Hoven, 2009). The hierarchy shows a preference for space creation, adoption, and appropriation over more shallow acts of escapism. This hierarchy could even be viewed as a list of methods of escapism ranked by most to least sophisticated.

Summary

Spatial control was the dominant theme that emerged throughout this research. All participants expressed issues around being able to control their spatial environment and the consequences of being less able or unable to control it. The degree of spatial control the participants had determined their ability to spend time in third places, and which spaces they

used as third places. Each participant described examples of third places they spent time in and a desire to spend time in these places.

The findings of this research demonstrate that third places do exist in HMP Parc. The quality and purity of these places vary, as does the prisoner's access to them. The demand for these places and desire to use them, however, remains constant. There is an inherent preference for more pure third places, despite this the prisoners use the highest tier of place available to them.

Implications

This research set out to answer three key questions. Firstly, do third places exist in prison? The research shows that they can, however, the majority of examples of third places failed to meet the characteristics described by Oldenburg (1999). Less pure examples of third places exist, in differing ways. There were a few examples of third places found in HMP Parc that directly replicate those found in the community such as the gym and Men's Shed. However, these examples were unable to achieve all of Oldenburg's criteria, as they might in the community, simply due to their being within a prison setting. More examples of less pure third places were identified by participants, some adopted, some created, and some appropriated by the prisoners. Those third places where the prisoners felt some ownership of that space were spoken about more fondly and had a richer experience because of it. Although third places could be found, access to them was inconsistent. The 'predictable factors' (Figure 1) both enabled and limited geographical freedom and therefore access to certain third places. This was compounded by the role of prison officer discretion as a 'less predictable factor', apparently more often benefitting prisoners who already had more geographical freedom. The desire to spend time in third places was not felt any less by those prisoners with less geographical freedom, their approach to access them however differed because of their increased restrictions. Where third places met fewer of

Oldenburg's criteria they were more accurately described as 'third place experiences'. I use this term throughout this paper to describe time spent socialising and escaping in a fashion consistent with time spent in third places, without the need for a dedicated, shared, or specific physical or physically distinct third place. In comparison to Oldenburg's definition of a third place, third place experiences allow for a broader range of experiences to be defined in this way. This definition opens third place experiences up to include reading, meditating, and even drug use. These are activities that achieve some of the benefits of a third place even when done in isolation without others. Although unable to achieve the social and community benefits, the benefits of escapism are felt in a real way. Improved understanding of third places in prison leads us to expand on Oldenburg's definition. A narrow definition precludes a host of beneficial activity that can take place in prison that although imperfect, are beneficial.

The second question was 'What are their limitations?'. The most obvious limitation is the impurity of many of the third places within a prison. The inability to achieve more of Oldenburg's criteria likely reduces the associated benefits of those places. Another limitation is the large number of factors that hinder or prevent a third place. Third places in prison can become unavailable due to restricted regimes, their inability to be imported, and the unpredictable nature of prison life. Third places become difficult to access and enjoy for prisoners where there is a backdrop of violence, noise, and anti-social behaviour. This research found that in order to best use third places prisoners needed a basic sense of security and safety, both physical and psychological. This was highlighted by the role of the first place in relation to third places in prison. Those with a stable first place (cell) were better able to use third places, conversely, those who were able to enjoy time in third places away from their cell were better able to enjoy time spent in their cell. This was a virtuous cycle of strengthening spatial boundaries. Additionally, prisoners with higher IEP status or on wings with increased freedom were better able to benefit

from officer discretion in facilitating third places. Those who needed third places the most appeared the least likely to get to access them.

The third question was 'How do people in prison feel in these places?'. Time spent in third places was associated with a broad number of positive emotions. Some of the activities in these places (such as matching) allowed the prisoners an opportunity to feel pride and accomplishment in their workmanship. The time spent in these places itself allowed trust and social connections to be built. There was opportunity for escapism but also to feel grounded and present. The feelings associated with third places were not easy to dissect but were described overwhelmingly positively. This was backed up by the strong desire the participants showed to spend time in those places and the effort they took to navigate the prison structures to be able to do so.

In addition to these research questions, a number of associated areas of interest were also uncovered. Spatial control emerged as the strongest theme across the research. The ability for prisoners to control their space and have geographical freedom was central to how they interacted with third places, and even more broadly, it was central to their lived experience. Another area that emerged from the research was the exporting of third places upon resettlement. The idea that a third place or third place experience could be taken with a prisoner and found in the community may have consequences for creating stability post-release and in turn reducing reoffending. The final area that emerged outside of the research questions is how third places come to exist in prisons. Some of them are created by the prison and adopted by the prisoners. Some are created by prisoners and facilitated by the prison. Some are created by prisoners despite no facilitation by the prison. Some are created by the prison and appropriated by the prisoners. This final method of third space creation appears to increase ownership by the prisoners, provide a richer experience, and improve the chance of longevity of the third place. The idea of designing prisons with spaces ripe for appropriation is an intriguing one. This type of

approach could involve co-design with prisoners from the outset. As appropriation often relies on being permitted to appropriate (prison officer discretion), designing for appropriation could go further than designing physical space and consider cultural design in concert with the physical environment.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

Drawing on Oldenburg's concept of the third place (1999) and adapting it somewhat to broaden the concept, my research has revealed a range of themes each supporting the importance of third places but also identifying differing quality of third places and varying access to them for prisoners. This conclusion summarises the key ideas from the research and then describes some of its limitations. Finally, I discuss policy and practical implications before describing further research opportunities in this area.

In prisons, spatial control and geographical freedom (within the prison) are crucial in enabling prisoners to access higher quality third places. Prisoners living on more preferable wings, (specialist units) with higher status IEP, and able to benefit from prison officer discretion had more geographical freedom and spatial control. In turn, this allowed them access to better quality third places, higher up the hierarchy of place, as shown in Figure 2. Some prisoners may even be able to find themselves in a virtuous cycle in which positive behaviour leads to improved 'predictable factors', resulting in more freedom and control, providing access to higher quality places, driving better behaviour, increasing the likelihood of discretionary decisions in their favour. Of course, the converse may also be true. During the research, there was a sense that some of the prisoners who would benefit from time spent in high quality third places the most had the least access to them. The benefits of spending time in these places were social, and emotional and also impacted the prisoners' experience of other places in their lives. Time spent in high quality third places helped the prisoners to have a more positive experience of their first place (their cell). Time spent in distinct places such as work (the second place) and third places helped to combat place merging (Sibley & van Hoven, 2009) and its associated issues. In many ways, the healthiest relationships with places echoed what might be considered a balanced life in the community, with time spent at home, work and at third places (coffee shops, libraries, pubs, sports clubs etc.). Not all candidate third places in prison are able to meet Oldenburg's characteristics of a third place and

are better described as third place experiences. Examples include activities that could take place in a shared third place but instead are undertaken alone, individually. In-cell exercise or even drug use are examples of this; when conducted in isolation, they might offer a level of escapism, but cannot benefit from many of the other social and emotional benefits of a shared, gathering of people. Prisoners in some cases are able to import their interests and hobbies that take place in third places in the community into the prison with them, offering consistency and an immediate third place in which they feel a sense of belonging. This is not always possible however, due to security concerns and limitations of the prison facilities. Third places that prisoners spend time in whilst in prison may also foster opportunity to be exported into the community upon release, offering consistency for these prisoners and an immediate third place during resettlement. The exportation of third places from prison to community is an interesting area to explore in future research. Some of the participants described their time in prison as a unique opportunity for them to socialise, and an opportunity they would not typically have time for when in the community. Third places in the community may have a role in desistance, especially for people who are unable to find employment upon release. It was clear that not all third places are equal in terms of their quality, with each of them achieving Oldenburg's characteristics (1999) to a differing degree. How a third place came to be was also important to how it was felt by the prisoners spending time there. When third places were appropriated, a sense of ownership was felt by the prisoners which added depth to their experience there and an investment that motivated them to maintain it and keep spatial entropy at bay.

The research has several limitations worthy of discussion. The recruitment method for interviewees (described in chapter 3) involved self-selection, this could mean that valuable and important groups of prisoners were not included. The consequences of this might be compounded by not undertaking observation in key relevant places in HMP Parc. Several potential third places in the prison were not visited due to the regime in place at the time of the research.

This included the prayer room and Men's Shed. Although three different types of wings were observed, the wing for vulnerable prisoners was not and neither was the Youth Custody Unit. These omissions might have limited the findings of the research. An additional limitation to note is the risk of assuming causation where it might not exist. The prison IEP system is designed to incentivise and reward prisoners for good behaviour, as discussed, this then leads to them having fewer restrictions and being able to access higher tier third places. However, it is plausible that there is a weak causal relationship between the predictable factors and access to third places and instead a simple correlation between the behaviour of prisoners more likely to have higher IEP status and the types of prisoners more likely to pursue time in third places. For example, a sociable, confident prisoner might be more likely to spend time in third places not because of their IEP status, but because they are sociable and confident. Due to the geographical restrictions put upon low IEP status prisoners or prisoners on restricted regimes, it is still likely, however, that the predictable factors have a strong role in limiting or enabling third place access.

This research is well-placed to inform some areas of policy and practice for prisons in England and Wales. The first area concerns 'Purposeful Activity', a key tenet of prison regime policy in England and Wales. HMIP measure it as part of their inspections (HMIP, 2021) and it is a priority in the HMPPS Prison Strategy White Paper (Ministry of Justice, 2021). Purposeful activity can include education, programmes of intervention, and family visits amongst others. Looking ahead, those engaged in creating purposeful activity might think more broadly about the definition of 'purposeful'. Third places are not necessarily industrious spaces and might be misinterpreted as being without purpose. This is not an argument that time spent in third places should replace education (or other currently accepted types of purposeful activity), but rather that its value should be recognised in policy. The second implication of this research builds upon the value of third places being recognised in policy; social prescribing. Given the value of time spent in third places, it could be considered as something that should be prescribed to prisoners,

especially those on lower IEP status or who are particularly vulnerable in terms of their mental health. The third implication further builds on this idea of need and relates to prison officer discretion. This research suggests that discretion in the facilitation of third places is not applied consistently. This is an area that could be further understood and addressed to ensure more equitable discretion in this area and to avoid prisoners who need access to third places the most, receiving it the least. A key challenge to the implementation of these implications is that in practice it will require the prison regime to balance safety and order with in-prison geographical freedom, no mean feat.

Following the findings of this research, further research might explore the role of exporting third places in resettlement and reducing reoffending. Research in this area could compare post-release outcomes between those who recreate the third places they experienced in prison in the community, with those who do not. Future research might also explore how the community benefits of third places (Oldenburg, 1999; Soukup, 2006) manifest in a prison environment.

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Appendices

- a) Participant Information Sheet
- b) Participant Consent Form
- c) Interview Schedule

a) Participant Information Sheet



Project title: **Exploring Third Places in Prison**

Researchers: **Iain Stevens – Masters Student at the University of Cambridge + HMPPS Employee**

PRISON-BASED PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

Who am I?

I am an employee of His Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) and a Criminology Student at the University of Cambridge. Although I work for HMPPS I am conducting this research in my role as a student as part of a Masters degree course.

Why am I doing this study?

I am interested in understanding how time is spent in communal spaces in prisons outside of work and cells/pads. These places can be described as 'Third Places' and in the community might include coffee shops, pubs, sports clubs, places of worship, barber shops and community centres. Research suggests that they have a large positive impact on people's lives. I'd like to understand how they work within prisons given that they are likely to be quite different.

What will participation involve?

Participation will involve an interview in which we will ask you questions about how you spend time outside of work and your cell/pad. Questions will ask you about previous prisons where you may have spent time and your time at HMP Parc. The questions will focus on how these places work, how they make you feel and what might be their limitations.

Do I have to take part in the study?

Your participation is completely voluntary. If you do not want to take part, you do not have to, and this will not disadvantage you in any way.

Are there any risks involved in taking part?

There are no risks associated with participation. Questions will only be asked about your experience of social spaces in prisons. This is not expected to be triggering or cause distress. However, you do not have to answer any questions you do not wish to. If you find the interview distressing, you can stop at any time. We will give you a note about the support that you can access, and we are happy to advise you on who in the prison you could talk to about your feelings.

Are there any benefits in taking part?

If you agree to take part, and you are interviewed when you would normally 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 will also be contributing to our understanding of prison life, including recommendations that we make to policy makers and to practitioners.

Will what I say be kept confidential?

The information that you share in the interview will normally be kept completely confidential. However, this does not apply to disclosures related to the following:

- A breach of prison security
- Any further offences you admit to that you have not yet been convicted for
- Any breach of prison rules that occurs during the interview
- Any disclosure that indicates a risk of harm to yourself or to others.

If any such disclosure is made, the researcher will be obliged to pass on any information related to this to a member of prison staff following the interview. In addition, if we are seriously concerned about your mental or psychological wellbeing, we will inform a relevant member of staff (e.g. offender manager, key worker or safer custody officer), without providing details of the content of your interview.

In all other circumstances, everything you say will remain confidential. The information you provide will be stored securely and destroyed once I have written the research paper. I am the only person who will have access to your interview and focus group notes and recordings.

Will my contribution remain anonymous?

If you agree to the researchers using quotes from the interviews, this will normally be done in writing (with quotes written in documents, for example) and will be done in such a way that you cannot be identified. We would also like to ask your permission to use short excerpts from your voice recording, should we want to bring to life your quotes in presentations, for example. Whether we quote you in text or use an audio recording, we will give you a different name and will change any details about your life which would 'give away' who you are. In the consent form, you can give permission to us using text quotes only, if you do not feel comfortable with us using voice recordings from your interview.

How do I agree to take part in the study?

If you agree to take part, you will be asked to complete a consent form for both the interview and the focus group, confirming that you understand what the study involves and have had a chance to discuss any questions with the researcher. For the interview, you will also be asked to state whether you are happy for it to be recorded.

What if I want to withdraw from the study?

You are free to stop the interview or focus group or decline to take part in any further interviews at any stage during the research process, without having to explain why you want to stop. You can also insist that the content of your focus group and interviews so far is excluded from the study, without having to explain why. You may make this decision at any point up until **1st October 2023**, when we will begin writing the research findings. If you make this decision, we will destroy relevant notes, recordings and any associated material. Making this decision will not be held against you or disadvantage you in any way.

Where can I go for support should participation in the research cause me anxiety or distress?

If, once you have finished the focus group or interview, you feel anxious or distressed about some of the things that you have talked about, there are a number of ways that you can access support:

- You can speak to a member of staff or ask the researcher to contact a member of staff who you would like to talk to.



- You can contact a peer support worker, such as a Listener, or we will contact on your behalf another prisoner in your establishment to let them know that you would like their support.
- You can contact the Samaritans, whose number will be printed on posters on your wing.

What will happen to the results of the study?

Your interview will contribute to a research paper I will write after I have completed the research. It is possible that this may be included in books, academic articles and articles aimed at people who work in prisons in the future. The findings will also be discussed in other academic publications written, and in discussions or presentations with members of Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service, as well as other university researchers. Again, this would be done in such a way that you could not be personally identified.

What if I want more information about the study, or want to complain about some 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 speak to us directly, or write to: HMPPS National Research Committee, 102 Petty France, London SW1H 9AJ.

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

Iain Stevens

b) Participant Consent Form

Prison-based interviews	Participant consent form
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Project title: **Exploring third places in prison**

Researchers: **Iain Stevens – Masters Student at the University of Cambridge and HMMPS Employee**

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Please tick the boxes if you agree with the following four statements.
Please note that these are essential conditions for the interview to take place.

	YES
1. I have read and understood the Participant Information Sheet for the study (or have had it read out to me and have understood it) and have had a chance to ask questions.	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. In the event that I disclose information which indicates that there is a risk of harm to me or to someone else, I understand that the interviewer will be obliged to share this information with a relevant member of staff following the interview.	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. I understand that my participation is voluntary, that I do not have to answer any of the researcher's questions if I do not wish to, and that I can withdraw at any time, without giving reasons, until 01 October 2023 .	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. I agree to take part in the study, which means being interviewed by the researcher.	<input type="checkbox"/>

Please answer YES or NO to the following two statements by ticking the appropriate box.

	YES	NO
4. I agree to our interview being recorded.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. I agree to let the researcher use <u>written</u> quotes from our interviews and conversations, as long as this is done in such a way that I cannot be identified.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Please turn over...

YES NO

6. I agree to let the researcher use **audio (voice recorded)** quotes from our interviews and conversations, as long as this is done in such a way that I cannot be identified.

7. I agree to being contacted by the research team in the future.

Name of participant:

Date:

Signature:

Name of researcher:

Date:

Signature:

Researcher contact details: Iain Stevens – is537@cam.ac.uk

c) Interview Schedule

Interview schedule

Thesis title: Exploring third places in prison

Research Questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In your experience do third places exist in prisons? • What do they look like? • What are their limitations? Positives and limitations? • How do people in prison feel in these places?
Questions to ask	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Where do you spend time when you're not in your cell/pad? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Which of these are places where you can have a good conversation with others? What is meant by 'good' conversation? • Which of these are places where you can feel the most at ease/relaxed? • Where is the best place for prisoners to 'hang out' with each other in the prison? • What's good in these places? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is your favourite part of spending time in these places? • Who else spends time in these places? • Who doesn't spend time in these places? • How does this prison compare to other prisons you've been to? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Where were the best places to hang out there? • What was different about the places in that prison? • If you could change anything about these <u>places</u> what would it be? • How would you feel if you couldn't spend time in those places? • What has changed since you started to spend time there?