The embedded researcher: Experiencing life in a Probation Approved Premises

Dr Carla Reeves

Subject Leader in Criminology and Policing

University of Huddersfield

c.reeves@hud.ac.uk

Abstract

Primary themes in reflexive accounts of fieldwork have arisen around accessing fieldwork sites, negotiating gatekeepers, the balance between insider and outsider positionality, and the covert and overt nature of the researcher status and research focus. Despite this, such reflexive accounts prioritise the emotional and practical challenges for the researcher and the research, and what is more neglected is deepening this to consider how the knowledge, understanding and interpretation of the research topic is shaped and informed by the personal embodied sensory experiences of the researcher in the field.

In this chapter I explore how I subjectively experienced doing ethnographic research in a Probation Approved Premises with residents who had been convicted of a sexual offence, considering how I became sensorially embedded within the physicality and inter-personal relationships of the research site. As a result, I had emotional reactions to the sense of place that meant I was able to not only understand my participants' accounts or behaviours in the abstract (as an onlooker), but also empathically: as one who feels some of the same impacts of place and space as they do. This sharing and analysing of the holistic sensory experience of place was able to bridge some of the social and psychological distances between us, allowing me to gain a deeper understanding of life for residents and staff as a consequence of analysing the *physical and emotional feel of the place.*

Keywords: Resident, probation approved premises, hostel, ethnography, embodied, emplaced

Chapter

Introduction: The importance of sensory analytical reflection

Primary themes in reflexive accounts of fieldwork have arisen around accessing fieldwork sites, negotiating gatekeepers, the balance between insider and outsider positionality, and the covert and overt nature of the researcher status and research focus (*c.f.* Crossley, Arthur and McNess, 2016; Delamont, 2016; Liong, 2015; Lyle, 2018; Reeves, 2010; Worley, Barura Worley and Wood, 2016). Within these accounts there is often an implicit recognition that researchers are enmeshed within the place and inter-personal relationships of the research site; a recognition that is gathering pace, particularly by social geographers and anthropologists, but also by ethnographers in other fields, including criminology and

penology (*c.f.* Bloch, 2016; Bucerius and Urbanik, 2018; Crewe and Ievins, 2015; Hoolachan, 2015). Despite this, reflexivity in fieldwork remains under-published, and those that are largely prioritise considerations of the emotional, ethical and practical challenges faced by the researcher and the research, as well as impacts on the. These types of account, whilst often very useful and informative, tend to isolate the researcher and consider them as separate to the research site and/or people, even whilst acknowledging the possible impacts they may have simply because they are present.

This presence of the researcher in the site or community hints at the importance of the researcher just 'being', and all the attendant meaning that someone being present in a place has: their social and personal connections to others; their relationship to institutional rules, regulations and values; their hearing of the noises of the place, smelling the scents, and seeing the sights. In short; how researchers experience the 'feeling' and 'knowing' of the place. As Mason and Davies (2009) argue, these tangible and intangible sensory experiences shape the researcher's understanding of the place and community being studied. Pink (2008) describes this deep form of reflexive analysis in terms of the embodied experience of doing place-making through ethnographic research. Thus, it is not only important, but essential to consider the embodied experience of researchers in the field to fully appreciate the totality of the data captured. As Hurdley and Dicks state:

> What participants say and do needs to be interpreted alongside the material and sensorial *settings* in which they say and do it, and which play an active role in the shaping of emergent situations and encounters. [Emphasis in the original.] (Hurdley and Dicks, 2011, p. 278).

In reflecting on my sensory experience of doing ethnographic research in a probation approved hostel within this chapter, it is highlighted that recognising, acknowledging and analysing researchers as being embodied within the research site or community is highly valuable to the quality and depth of the data analysis and interpretations. This appreciation of embodiment in the place of the fieldwork site specifically, and the interactions there within, can be referred to as researcher emplacement (Pink, 2008): in essence, not only an appreciation of researcher *being* or *presence,* but an understanding of our *being in place*. With place understood in a Lefebvrean sense as more than a structural physical space in which things are located or happen, but rather loaded in values, meaning and significance which are shaped by, and in turn shape, the daily social relations and interactions occurring in that place. To understand place, therefore, a researcher needs to understand how a place is socially produced through the 'appropriation' of space and the meanings and rhythms of use within daily life (Stanek, 2011).

Thus, being able to appreciate the sense of place for participants, requires us, as researchers, to fully consider our own sensory experiences of being in that place, including the physical spatial nature of the place, understandings of history and tradition, emotional attachments, social group belongings and identities. As Meiring states in his study of the 'smell of justice' related to space and place:

> So how does justice smell, and specifically spatial justice? I am not quite sure, but I do sense that it is not only about the smelling of justice, but also the tasting of it, the

> feelings of it, the speaking of it, the hearing of it, the whole bodily experiencing of justice in a certain place. (Meiring, 2016, p. 6).

Places, thus, become sensory experiential spaces, which people (researchers and participants) co-create over time through interactive place-making (Pink, 2008), and which we feel a sense of relationship to, because those spaces come to have meaning and identity in themselves – becoming *places* (*c.f.* Avey, Aviolio, Crossley and Luthans, 2009; Devine-Wright, 2009; Dixon and Durrheim, 2000; Reeves, 2016).

Exploring the sensory criminal justice experience: The research study

Of particular concern for the analysis of myself as an embodied researcher, is how these sensory experiences come together to form a holistic emotional experience of the place, and how this can assist in better appreciating the meanings and lives of people in the setting under study (Longhurst, Ho and Johnston, 2008). To illustrate my argument, in this chapter I explore how I subjectively experienced doing ethnographic fieldwork in a Probation Approved Premises (referred to informally as a probation hostel) over twenty-one months, setting my experiences in the context of previous sensory reflections on ethnographies.

Located in a primarily rural region of England and Wales, the hostel formed a single case study exploring the lived experiences of people convicted of sexual offences from their entrance into the hostel after release from prison, to their subsequent exit into the community. In this fieldwork site I engaged in participant observation and semi-formalised interviews with mainly adult male residents convicted of a sexual offence and staff. Access included the staff offices, resident living and recreational areas, and outdoor spaces[1]. In these fieldwork reflections I consider how I became embedded within the physicality and sensorality of the research site; feeling some of the same impacts of the constraints of the architecture and inter-personal power relations on my sense of being that the residents and staff also revealed. As a result, I had emotional reactions to the sense of place that meant I was able to not only understand my participants' accounts or behaviours in the abstract (as an onlooker), but also empathically: as one who feels some of the same impacts of place and space as they do. I know that saying I was able to empathically relate (albeit only partially) to the experience of people convicted of a sexual offence is very contentions (writing as a female with no convictions), but this sharing of the experience of place was able to bridge some of those distances between us, allowing for a deeper understanding of life for them, which enabled me to talk about this with them in ways that reflected a shared experience, despite our vastly different social positions, status and envisioned futures. Thus, sensory reflective analysis sensitised me to the emotional realities of hostel life and working that I would otherwise have understood in a much more superficial way. In the following discussions I consider my experiences as an embedded researcher in terms of the physical building and the social

---

[1] Please note, quotes are from contemporaneous fieldnotes of observations and interviews, but I have removed names and identifying features to protect the anonymity of participants.

interactions within the hostel under study, bringing out the understanding and appreciations that such a sensory analytical approach afforded me.

The Physicality of the Hostel: **The sensory experience of space**

At first approach the architecture and setting of the hostel was that of a large Victorian home with pleasant gardens, standing alone on the semi-rural outskirts of a small cathedral city. On one side next to a middle-class suburban village on the other, an industrial retail estate; both of which hostel residents were banned from entering without approved employment. It took around 20-30 minutes to walk to the edge of the city shopping centre, but there was also a direct bus route, passing by a housing estate notorious for both high crime rates and high populations of people with convictions (again, residents were banned from entering this estate). This geographic location as a sort of isolated space, enclosed by areas that were not permitted, just allowing for access routes away and bypassing these no-go spaces, resulted in a strong sense of insular separation and dislocation from not only the local community, but broader society more generally. This was emphasised by the limited cross-section of the population that residents routinely came across unless entering the shopping area, as life in the hostel afforded access to a limited range of other adults only. As in prison, the deprivations of carceral life continued to some extent through the limited access and engagement with services, goods, and social relationships (Sykes, 1958). Life in the hostel was, thus, insular time lived separately and differently than that outside, with different rhythms and interactions. This reflected the hostel's penal institutional status as both carceral, and community, intended as it was, as a staging post in moving people from imprisonment into community resettlement. This within, but without physical liminality of the hostel setting therefore symbolised it's carceral setting as being closely situated to, but also completely cut off from the local communities.

The hostel building itself was set back and side-on from the road in fenced, wrap-around mature gardens with car parking area, small pond and green-houses, and a computer room that was kept locked outside of class times. The hostel had one main front door into the foyer area, both overseen by the staff office which overlooked the car park and entrance into the hostel grounds. The only other egress was via patio doors from one of the resident lounges into the garden, but these were locked and unlocked by staff and did not have unobserved or unobstructed access to the road away from the hostel. The grounds were not only fenced, but bordered by tall tightly-planted coniferous trees. The enclosed nature of the gardens, as well as the monitored, restricted access controlled by staff, reinforced the hostel as penal, but also as secluded, isolated and insular; separated from normal, outside life. On first entrance, this closed feel, which mirrored the internal regulatory regime, did not necessarily engender a sense of being trapped within its confines, but could also be regarded as peaceful, quiet and, for some, protective.

> "When I first went into town […] it was hard. […] There was so many people, walking in all directions. You get used to walking in one direction; following people in front of you. I just stopped by the clock in the middle of town and wanted to cry. I felt all panicky. I was scared." (Resident in interview.)

Interestingly, this inward, insularity was also felt by staff, although of course they could leave the hostel at the end of their shift. Nevertheless, it shaped and coloured their view of working life:

> There is one member of staff that I do not like working with, I know others don't too.
> *CR: Is that just the same as in other jobs though?*
> I think that it is worse here because you are in such a closed environment.
> (Staff member in interview.)

I found this inward-looking feel strangely at odds with the aim of the hostel as ostensibly forward and outward-looking; supporting people newly released from prison towards resettlement in the community.

The initial external impression of the building as an isolated, but nevertheless, ordinary residential house was challenged only by limited outward signs of difference, such as the number of cars in the car parking area and rather unobtrusive official sign by the gated entrance. However, on walking into the foyer, this homely impression was overturned by the interior architecture and décor. This was immediately recognisable as institutional due to the colour schemes (magnolia and a pale green reminiscent of council buildings and hospitals across the country), faint smell of cleaning fluid, the fire doors and official signage, and general shabby condition of the place coupled with the lack of personal furnishings and accoutrements.

Inside, the hostel was over two floors. The upper floor accommodated the residents' rooms and personal washing facilities. The lower floor was the living floor where residents were required to spend the day when in the hostel, and where staff had offices and administrative space. The staff offices were locked from residents except for confidential meetings. These offices comprised: the main general staff administration office which overlooked the entrance foyer, car park and pond, this office also included the hatch through which residents requested things; the probation office in which confidential and quiet work could be undertaken during the day; the staff bedroom and facilities for the 'sleeping' overnight shift that assisted the 'waking' overnight shift; the medication room, where the medicines cabinet and files were kept, and medications issued twice daily; and the kitchen. The resident areas included: foyer space, games room, dining room, laundry room, the 'smoking' lounge and 'non-smoking' lounge (though since the Health Act 2006 implemented the smoking ban in 2007 it was no longer permitted to smoke in the hostel at all). The non-smoking lounge was also a staff meeting room and the dual purpose of this room was immediately evident when comparing the sensory differences between the two lounges. The smoking lounge was dishevelled even when tidy as a result of the tired and worn furniture. Chairs were orientated towards the TV and it was always dark as windows were kept closed, and the curtains drawn to simultaneously accord what privacy could be attained, as well as maximising the space for use as a makeshift cinema. Despite the ban on smoking, this was routinely breeched and evidence was discernible in the faint smells, burn marks on some surfaces, and impromptu ashtrays fashioned from saucers and cups: smoking of any substance not generally being a priority for staff. Residents compared it unfavourably with the non-smoking lounge, which was alone in being a resident-accessible area that was bright and airy, having many windows, refreshed and newer paintwork and furniture. The main smells here were air-freshener and

the scents of the garden from open windows. Older residents were more likely to use the latter space and the TV was less of a central feature, being used more as a space for conversation. The worn feel was prevalent throughout the hostel in resident areas and considered indicative of resident social status within the hostel:

> "Examples of this are the toilets which are not kept in a good condition, they are always dirty and often do not have toilet roll in them." (Resident in interview.)

However, unbeknownst to residents, it was the same throughout the staff areas that were not used routinely for visitors too.

As may be understood from this description, the architectural structure of the lower floor was rather confusing and complex for such a small space, serving to disorientate those unfamiliar with the hostel and so create unease in the first instance, dominated as it was by the corridors that led around and through the lower floor. As Hurdley's (2010a) ethnography of corridors in an institution (in that case, a University) exemplifies: corridors can have multiple uses and meanings, being ways to connect or disconnect other spaces, boundaries against or to openings, as well as being places in themselves. As she and Armstrong (2018) noted, corridors are part of the controlling design of the place in which movement is curtailed and organised. In the hostel they were closed, contained spaces which, due to the high number of turns and doors blocking the way, had little natural light, or actual room within them. People did not linger in corridors; they were not places for chance meetings and conversations, nor to read notices or signs, but rather conduits to traverse to get to the next place. As Armstrong (2018) further explores, corridors simultaneously exemplify the mobility of the place, as well as the nature of the hostel as a place of waiting (for the next room, for a staff member, to be relocated in the community). However, as in her conceptual consideration of corridors in the context of the doing of disciplinary power, corridors can be understand as highly controlled places, not only in terms of movement of people (permitting movement around the spaces in particular ways and structures), but also in respect to how that movement occurs, using examples of painted walkway lines and visibility screens. Nevertheless, she also recognises that corridors may be understood and experienced as outside of the social norms of the place: a sort of spatial outlaw. In the hostel this sense of corridors being closed, private spaces, often outside of the behavioural controls exerted via the disciplinary 'gaze' (Foucault, 1977), and so spaces where residents and staff may be violently accosted unseen by others meant that they were not spaces in which to delay. The place-meaning of corridors in this broader hostel context was, thus, that they were potentially dangerous, relatively unobserved areas in which residents could take advantage of this relative freedom from view to engage in aggressive or otherwise criminal behaviour, if the opportunity arose; a particular concern for staff or vulnerable residents fearing the aggression of other residents. This apparent freedom of the place was, therefore, in tension with the sense of possible danger that resulted in people using the corridors as conduits only. That the corridors were so enclosed and winding through the hostel spaces further added to this sense that the place was not 'free' but constraining, controlling and repressive: a physical representation of the feeling of the place that generally prevailed throughout the hostel.

On entry, I had expected initial formative sensory cues to the institutional penal nature of the place, but was not prepared for how unavoidable this sense was, and the extent to which this context could not be forgotten or hidden, and remained explicit throughout my time in the hostel. It felt like a place of work, even for those not working there, especially as these physical environmental cues combined with the temporal rhythm of the working day and week, in which most staff came into work based around the normal 9-5, Monday to Friday patterns (with the exception of the evening and weekend more limited staff cover). This enabled me to appreciate how residents were constantly reminded that they were in an official institution of correction and (to some extent) punishment. This appreciation of the institutional feel of the place allowed me to better understand how residents felt being accommodated in the hostel. Despite the efforts to ensure residents had access to activities and leisure pursuits, residents did not relax into the hostel – it never became 'home' or homely, even for those that were there for longer than my data collection period.

This was symbolically reinforced each morning when residents were woken at 7am to undertake their chores and all the communal areas were cleaned and tidied: wiping away the evidence of individualism and personality daily. Falk, Wijk, Lars-Olaf, and Falk's (2012) exploration of how to create a sense of home in residential care somewhat parallels the need for the hostel to create (and be) a home for the residents, albeit involuntarily and (normally) temporarily, whilst also being part of a broader organisational and institutional structure. In trying to create a place of home (encapsulating the cultural and emotional attachments and meaning attendant within the word 'home'), Falk et al. discovered residents needed to 'nest': they needed to be able to personalise their environment so that it both reflected, and reinforced their individual self-identity, as well as engage in an agentic daily routine. In undertaking enforced, defined daily chores in living areas which returned them to clean, sanitised rooms, without evidence of the individuals using them daily, this expression of self-identity and attachment was, thus, also removed. Of course, the sense of place was not removed: the meaning that place had within the broader context of hostel life and residents' social groupings; but the *individual* residents were not reflected in those spaces or places.

However, attachment to the residential care home in Falk et al's (2012) work was mostly a result of the use of the private space rather than the communal, in that, not only did residents have their own personal accoutrements (photographs, pictures, ornaments and so on) in their rooms, but also were able to choose how to arrange these and look after them. In the hostel, this was just not possible. Few hostel residents had a private space (most shared a room) and those that did could not lock them to protect belongings:

> Wants all residents to have single rooms (he shares with one other person).
> This is so that he can protect his belongings (has had some stuff stolen in the
> past), and so that he can have some privacy. Says that he has no privacy in
> the hostel at all, "when you are upset you want to be able to be on your
> own" – can't do that here. (Notes from resident in interview.)

Even fewer residents were permitted, owned or could afford personal belongings beyond the necessities of clothes, personal hygiene items, limited technological and leisure equipment (if they could, they had a mobile phone and game station to stave off boredom). Most residents lost their possessions through their imprisonment, with the remainder placing items in storage

or with family, if they kept any at all. Thus, personal items just were not present in the hostel. Furthermore, this sense of the bedroom as belonging to that of the person residing in it was disrupted through the frequent and unannounced room searches that staff undertook, demonstrating in a physical way the institutional ownership of that space. Sometimes this was framed in respect to tensions between resident and staff social divisions and respect for rights:

> "Privacy is not respected because staff (including female staff) will walk into residents' rooms (even if locked) without knocking - can be asleep or getting dressed. They will walk through the showers without warning and the toilets do not have locks on them." (Resident in interview.)

This meant that rooms mostly had the stark, sterile feel of cell. Consequently, the symbolism of the room also echoed that of the prison cell, with which the residents were, of course, familiar: that of waiting....waiting to move on from the hostel and re-commence normal life in the community (Armstrong, 2018).

The Production of Place: The sensory experience of social interactions

The hostel was also a place in which the sense that the unexpected should be expected was never far from the fore. This seemed to mainly result from the turnover of residents. Although some, especially older residents convicted of sexual offences, tended to stay in the hostel for long periods of time (over a year), others, often younger residents, were more likely to be moved on within a few months or even weeks. These moments of resident compositional change, were moments of disruption in the otherwise mundane and routine 'sameness' of daily life in the hostel. As Armstrong (2018) notes regarding prison life, whilst there is flux and activity constantly within the hostel as residents and staff leave and enter during the pattern of the working day and week (in relation to curfew and office hours, rehabilitative programmes or employment, as well as residents moving on and in to the hostel), nevertheless, the repetitive and unvarying rhythms of this activity result in a static and unchanging feel to hostel life. This is exacerbated by the waiting that Armstrong explains characterises much of carceral life. This waiting was a significant source of resident dissatisfaction as many had imagined leaving prison to actually feel like a release, only to be moved immediately into another form of penal institutional living with its own challenges:

> "People just don't realise how hard it can be coming out. [...] They don't prepare you for any of it. Not how you will feel. On the first day you are just so happy to be out, you are euphoric and you don't notice anything around you, it's after that." (Resident in interview.)

Hostel living, however, lacks a clear and defined end (or even a defined process through which to work to achieve that end):

> He is angry and resentful that he is still here [some months later] although he was told he should move on in a couple of weeks. (Notes from resident in interview.)

Despite this, new residents were rarely regarded as a welcome break in the routine. Rather, they could upset the established group dynamics and heighten tensions between resident networks as they renegotiated new social divisions and got a 'feel' for the new resident, their place in the hostel, attitude and behaviour towards others. New residents could disrupt fragile balances between resident social groupings, be they built on alliances or carefully studied avoidances, and potentially could lead to physical assaults. For example, one new resident who claimed to have been convicted of attempted murder (actually threats to kill) made those residents convicted of sexual offences " 'apprehensive and uneasy', and at least one [resident], is spending more time in his room." (fieldnotes, 6-03). Although, as noted, residents' rooms were not always the safe spaces that, outside of such penal institutions, people normally experience:

> Shares a room – at first with [resident name]– did not like this, and it has now been changed, hated sharing because he did not trust [resident name] – says he would not go to sleep until he had. (Notes from resident in interview.)

Staff also felt this sense of apprehension generally pervading the hostel environment:

> "This place is like a time-bomb, a sleeping time-bomb. You never know what's going to happen next". (Staff member, fieldnotes 7-04.)

As a visitor with access to staff spaces I felt I had an easy refuge, enabling me to feel comfortable and confident within the hostel, but also I was aware that there were no panic buttons in the communal areas, nor did I, like staff, have a personal panic alarm. Consequently, I was better able to appreciate how some staff felt about their work with residents as situated within the context of the hostel, and appreciate the significance of their efforts to either stay safe or exert their dominance or control over residents. For the most part, informal and interpersonal strategies of control were based on routine interactions in spaces where staff and residents were required to interact, such as at the administrative office hatch, medication distribution, and the kitchen during meal times. They included, for example, making residents wait for half an hour before responding to requests, whether they were busy or not.

> "There was a couple of times there though that they [staff] were a bit controlling with giving the medication, they'd make them wait. And they'd [residents] be getting agitated saying they need it; they need it. [staff said] 'well, we're fucking busy' you know. And that, I used to think, how much of that is control again, and how much is genuinely being rushed of your feet? It doesn't take you a minute, does it, to give a drug, sign for it, whatever." (Staff member in interview.)

These exercises of power and powerlessness were often enacted by staff utilising the architecture to emphasise and exert penal structures in place. For example, normally residents would make a request (for an appointment, for more milk, for equipment from the games cupboard) through knocking at the administrative office hatch, an officer on duty going and opening the window hatch and hearing the request and then responding. However, I routinely noted that when this happened many staff heard the request and said they would respond in a

while, shut the window on the resident and sat down and recommenced their conversation with fellow staff. On asking why they did this even when they were not busy, they said it was to make sure the resident knew who was in control. This evidently shaped relations between residents and staff, who saw this as symbolising their position within the penal, disciplinary structures of the hostel, with residents' position as lacking in agency or control in comparison to staff authority:

> "[staff] are not bad – it's just that when you ask for help they tell you to wait, but when they want something doing it has to be done straight away." (Resident in interview.)

Similarly, appointments tended to be scheduled at the convenience of staff, which impacted in how residents could use both their time and space by leaving the hostel outside of curfew hours (normally 12 midday to 7 pm). This non-curfew time was conceptualised as the residents' time, when they could be free from the hostel confines and, thus, the penal restrictions upon them:

> "Many other hostels let people out earlier [from curfew hours]. Then we have to have appointments with people and they are arranged at their [hostel staff] convenience, which is always after 12 in our own time. And if we don't turn up we get a warning. We have to get back for meetings that are in the middle of the afternoon, or sometimes we don't know when they are coming and have to stay in to wait for them. We had more freedom in prison." (Resident in interview.)

This ability to shut out the resident, deny access and enforce waiting on them reflected the structural power positions inherent within the status of the staff. Enforced waiting is here a symbolic function of both punishment through the legitimate use of authority by staff and the penal purpose of the hostel. However, this powerplay through enforced waiting was also exerted by residents against staff, though this time regarded as illegitimate. For example, each meal and medication time was a half hour window when residents came to receive food or medications. Most would attend within the first 10 minutes, but there were a few residents that deliberately always attended in the last few minutes of the window of time, requiring staff to remain in that room, waiting to serve them for that period of time. Staff found this extremely frustrating and were angry about this agency being removed from them, however briefly, leading to some staff responding in kind:

> He relates how [name of a resident] used to control little things in the hostel so that he was gaining power in small ways over the staff. When meds are given out the staff member puts the correct medication for each person into a small cup which is emptied into the hand of the resident. Normally people would hold put their hand cupped ready to take the pills but [resident] holds out his hand straight so that the staff member cannot just empty the cup into his hand. After a couple of seconds or so he cups it, but in this way he is controlling the behaviour of the staff for that time, even if it is in a minor way. [Name of staff member] says that it took the staff 'ages' to see what was going on and after then they tried to make sure that they were aware of what he was doing and took back control by holding back his medication until after he had signed the book and then going to pour his meds into his hand whether it was cupped or not. He had to react to the staff then. (Fieldnotes 9-04.)

Thus, at least for some residents and staff, a battleground of minute powerplays shaped the social interactions between them. Residents regarded these as petty displays of power, serving to highlight their low status, but I could appreciate for staff that, although not clearly verbalised, these were strategies that helped them maintain their sense of social status and authority. Of course, on an individual basis residents and staff sometimes had positive and constructive working relationships, but the 'them and us' social group divisions were clear and maintained through such interactions, as well as the architectural power structures, in which staff had keys and private spaces, and residents did not.

As a result of reflecting on the importance of how having such access may change how a person may use and experience the place of the hostel, after approximately six months of fieldwork I chose to forgo my staff keys to try and ensure residents did not perceive me as closer to a staff identity and status. Consequently I started to become much more aware of how residents felt living in the communal environment of the hostel, and particularly their sense of not being able to escape from the feeling of being watched, assessed and judged. This led one resident to exasperatedly comment that "being at the hostel is like living in a goldfish bowl." (fieldnotes 5-04). Again, *being present* in the hostel and using the full range of my sensory experience to interpret observations meant that I could appreciate the meaning and impact this constant sense of being under surveillance had on the lives of the residents. In this instance, as Goffman (1991) explains, places which are comparatively 'free' from the gaze of the institutions (staff and CCTV) were highly valued places towards which residents gravitated to enable themselves to feel distanced from the institution of the hostel (Cohen and Taylor, 1992). Due to the resident composition in which older residents convicted of sexual offences against children dominated numerically and were long-term residents, they were able to carve out territories and occupy free spaces in the hostel, and defend them through their sheer presence and repelling stigma as known sexual abusers. In the hostel, free spaces were mainly focussed around the polytunnels, being at the back of the garden, out of view of the main staff offices, not covered by CCTV, and hidden from view when inside them (and sheltered from the elements which frequently kept others out of the garden). Thus, being in the polytunnels had meaning for the inhabitants beyond the functionality of shelter and seedlings, but as liminal places which were somehow in-between the penal structures and constraints of the hostel and the (almost mythical) freedom of the 'outside' community. This meaning of place and routine appropriation by this stigmatised resident group, irrespective of whether they liked gardening or not, consequently, changed the use of the space[2] and rippled through the hostel in terms of impacting on the rehabilitative journeys of other residents, and the spaces they used and occupied in the hostel:

> [Resident with convictions for physical violence] talking about liking gardening in prison. I asked [do you want to] keep it up in here: "no not here, I'd have to go down the bottom of the garden with the sex offenders". (Fieldnotes 5-04.)

Being able to have a sensory appreciation of how such places are experienced helped me better understand the nature of life and the importance of residents' choices about where and how they lived their life in the hostel. What I found more challenging, however, was that despite experiencing the hostel as an oppressive and controlling penal environment, some

---

[2] For more discussion on grouping and the use of space in the hostel see Reeves (2013b) and Reeves (2016).

residents nevertheless preferred hostel life to what they perceived as the alternative: living alone in the community under the stigmatising shadow of their convictions. Again, considering how the place felt and was experienced helped me better appreciate this. These residents tended to be older with convictions for sexual offences against children. They were the most likely to have age-related health issues, lost contact with peers and family as a result of their offending and lengthy prison sentences. They were also the most likely to be isolated in the community as they were past retirement age and therefore had no push to education, employment or training: they faced a future of hiding their past and living alone. In the hostel however, this was different. Their offences were broadly (if not specifically) known by staff and residents alike, and because of the nature of Probation Approved Premises work, hostel life formed a type of supported living for these residents.

Despite their frustrations and dissatisfactions with the formal structures and rules of the hostel and their license conditions, many of these residents expressed their desire to stay in the hostel due to the protections it offered them. This was also observable in watching their daily habits and use of hostel space; they were the least likely to choose to leave the hostel during the day (outside of curfew hours; often citing that they were "scared of being attacked" (fieldnotes 8-04)), the least likely to be pushing staff on working towards a release date, and the least likely to be coming to staff to request things. They were the most evidently embedded within the hostel; observable through their established routines and apparent contentment with the rhythms and restrictions of hostel living. They largely did not seek to test these boundaries, staying well within the hostel rules, such as not using the full curfew time permissible, rarely being discovered with contraband (such as drugs, alcohol, or offence-related prohibited materials). These residents appeared to continue life in the hostel, much as they had left it in prison: quietly, compliantly and without explicit resistance to the regulatory, temporal and spatial structures of penal life. This meant that many of the residents in this category became well grounded in the hostel place, but this 'rootedness' was a cause for staff concern:

> "He feels very settled here now. Too settled, he's not looking to move himself now; he's stopped trying." (Staff member, in interview.)

It also caused tensions between staff and residents on occasion, as evidenced by staff anger and resentment towards one older resident who informally led on the gardening and took self-responsibility for maintaining the grounds. For many months he gained praise for this work, but his behaviour eventually became regarded as inappropriate for a resident, being too proprietary, resulting in other residents reporting "that when they first came to the hostel they thought that [the resident] was a staff member because he treats the garden as his own." (field notes 9-04). Eventually, when he started growing seedlings and giving them away, staff became resentful that he should feel he had the right to do this without their permission: "he thinks he's quasi-staff now."(RSO staff member, fieldnotes 8-04). Thus, these social interactions verbalise and make observable what the internal architecture and furnishings symbolise: the power structures in place, and the social position and status of the residents subjected to the institutional control.

Leaving the Hostel: Sensory experiences of time in place

In undertaking the process of leaving the hostel, I tried to talk to all remaining staff and residents who were involved in the fieldwork to explain this process, and how I could be reached if they had any questions or wanted to see the results of the research. It was at this point, in particular, that I realised whilst many residents were indifferent to my presence (or lack of it), some residents did not truly understand my role, or the research, despite my efforts to explain, and had viewed me not only as a researcher, but as something of a friend. They were confused (and a little hurt at times) that finishing fieldwork meant I would not (and could not as I did not have permission) visit them. Their position as a node within a penal network dominated by professional social relationships dependant on their conviction status was thrown into stark relief. The true isolation and loneliness of many residents was evident, despite their apparent unending routines of appointments, programmes and social interactions within the hostel. Similar to the dual experience of being resident in a hostel as both movement (the constant doing of chores, meetings, staff shift changes and so on), and as static (waiting for change, a risk assessment, a visit, to leave), so many residents' social experiences were both filled with connections, and simultaneously empty of meaningful personal relationships. Seeing behind these penal-based distanciated relationships further highlighted why so many of the older residents with sexual offence convictions were fearful of leaving the hostel, and consequently leaving these social structures and relationships[3] they were dependant on, whilst still resenting as enforced. Thus, for me, leaving became an emotional and ethical process more than practical one, and one which I tried to take as much care to explain as I could and, within the relatively short time frame of a month, decreased my presence to ease out of residents' lives[4].

For many residents this sense of the static was compounded by the indefinite nature of their residence requirement, as well as the lack of clear progression and exit routes. This sense of not progressing, but also not knowing when things may change, and uncertainty over how to affect it, relates to what Crewe (2011), when discussing prison life, called 'tightness'. Tightness generates feelings of anxiety and concern, and relate to the power relations in the hostel (in that residents had little or no formal power and decision-making potential around their release). Different individuals had to overcome different barriers to not only work towards demonstrating their reduction in riskiness, but also establish a safe and secure place to go in the community. For many of the residents with sexual offence convictions even when a release looked possible, it was overturned when a risk assessment of accommodation was undertaken (and rejected); often multiple times. As so many residents were older, this was exacerbated by their health and support needs. On occasion, even end of license did not result in release with two residents during my time in the hostel having to sign voluntary agreements to stay as there was no where appropriate for them to go in the community[5].

---

[3] It must be remembered that social relationships between residents were not permitted after leaving the hostel, and were regarded as indicative of risk of reoffending, and in some cases may breach licence conditions.
[4] For more on leaving the research site, see Reeves (2010).
[5] Please note, that although residents with sexual offence convictions may have come to the end of their licence in the community period, they were still subject to the sex offender register and as such, their residence in the community was still subject to risk assessment and approval.

Concluding thoughts

It was after leaving the hostel that I really had time to reflect and appreciate how the embodied and embedded experience of doing research enabled me to better understand the experience of the place and community I was studying. Had I this appreciation for the sensory (and made the time to more explicitly draw out and analyse the sensory experience of place) as the fieldwork was progressing, perhaps new insights may have been uncovered and informed my observations, and subsequent findings. Nevertheless, as I became enmeshed in data analysis considering my sensory experience, I further came to appreciate how my full embeddedness, utilising the totality of my senses in the hostel, facilitated my critical reflection on how and why I interpreted the data in particular ways (which evolved through and after the fieldwork phase of the study). For example, I chose a primary theoretical framework which meshed Foucauldian power discourses with Goffman's exploration of inter-personal resistance. This choice was a direct consequence of not only what I was hearing and seeing from observing and talking to residents and staff within the institution, but also a consequence of the *physical feel of the place*: a feeling that is the culmination of the totality of sensory experience of consciously *being* in the place. This highlights how, by using the body as a research tool (as Longhurst et al., 2008, put it), we are enabled to appreciate how place and participants are intertwined and relate to each other: in short, how people live their lives in a place.

In this example of analysing the sensory experience of researching a particular type of criminal justice institution, namely the probation hostel, we are able to better address the main aim of the research being undertaken: to explore what life is like for those with sexual offence convictions moving through hostel residence from prison release to re-entering the community. Without such analysis the experience can only partially be understood, this allows for a fuller and more rounded appreciation of their emplaced experiences of daily life. The appreciation of how both the apparent mutually exclusive experiential dichotomies of staticness and change, isolation and social connection, are nevertheless simultaneously powerful lived realities for residents (particularly those convicted of sexual offences), could not have been uncovered or understood. Nor could the understanding of how the physicality of the hostel structure leads to emotional responses based on a sense of institutionalised closeness, tightness and watchfulness, as well as vulnerability, that pushes both residents and staff into particular behaviours and patterns of being within that place. Thus, to understand life and how it is lived in the hostel, as with any place, it is necessary to consider how people use their senses, and make sense of the place.

These are not issues understood by most, if any, people when considering place or space, abstracted as it is from the forefront of conscious experience, and so could not be discussed in interview. Nor are they observable phenomena that can be truly appreciated via the fundamentals of the various forms of participant observation, as commonly regarded as central to the ethnographic tradition. But add to the mix a sensory analysis of the place and how, as a situated person experiencing the hostel through not only talking to, and watching the people in that place, an additional layer of understanding may be appreciated.

References

Aléx, L. & Hammarström, A. (2008). Shift in Power During an Interview Situation: Methodological Reflections Inspired by Foucault and Bourdieu. Nursing Enquiry. 15 (2),169-176.

Al-Yateem, N. (2012). The Effect of Interview Recording on Quality of Data Obtained: A Methodological Reflection. *Nurse Researcher.* 19 (4), 31-35

Armstrong, S. (2018). The cell and the corridor: Imprisonment as waiting, and waiting as mobile.' *Time and Society.* 27 (2), 133-154.

Avey, J.B., Avolio, B.J., Crossley, C.D. & Luthans, F. (2009). Psychological ownership: theoretical extensions, measurement and relation to work outcomes. *Journal of Organizational Behavior. 30*, 173-191.

Bucerius, S.M. & Urbanik, M. (2018). When Crime is a "Young Man's Game" and the Ethnographer is a Woman: Gendered Researcher Experiences in Two Different Contexts. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography.* 48 (4), 451-481.

Bloch, S. (2016). Place-Based Elicitation: Interviewing Graffitti Writers and the Scene of the Crime. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*. 47 (2), 171-198.

Cohen, S. & Taylor, L. (1992) *Escape Attempts: the theory and practice of resistance to everyday life* 2nd ed. London: Routledge.

Crewe, B. (2011). Depth, Weight and Tightness: Revisiting the Pains of Imprisonment. *Punishment and Society.* 1 (5), 509-529.

Crewe, B. & Ievins, A. (2015). Closeness, Distance and Honesty in Prison Ethnography. In DH. Drake, R. Earle & J. Sloan [eds.] *The Palgrave Handbook of Prison Ethnography.* Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan (pp. 124-142).

Crossley, M., Arthur, L. & McNess, E. [eds] (2016). *Revisiting Insider-Outsider Research in Comparative and International Education.* Oxford, UK: Symposium Books.

Dearnley, C. (2005). A Reflection on the Use of Semi-Structured Interviews. *Nurse Researcher.*13 (1), 19-28.

Delamont, S. (2016). *Fieldwork in Educational Settings: Methods, Pitfalls and Perspectives 3rd edition.* London, U: Routledge.

Devine-Wright, P. (2009). 'Rethinking NIMBYism: the role of place attachment and place identity in explaining place-protective action. *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology.* 19, 426-441.

Dixon, J. & Durrheim, K. (2000). Displacing place-identity: A discursive approach to locating self and other. *British Journal of Social Psychology. 39*, 27-44.

Falk, H., Wijk, H., Lars-Olaf, P. & Falk, K. (2012). A sense of home in residential care. *Theoretical Studies.* 27 (4), 999-1009.

Foucault, M. (1977). *Discipline and Punish: The birth of the prison.* London: Penguin.

Goffman, E. (1991) *Asylums: Essays in the social situation of mental patients and other inmates*, London: Penguin.

Hoolachon, J.E. (2015). Ethnography and Homelessness Research. *International Journal of Housing Policy.* 16 (1), 31-49.

Hurdley, R. (2010a). The Power of Corridors: Connecting Doors, Mobilising Materials, Plotting Openness. *The Sociological Review.* 58 (1), 45-64.

Hurdley, R. (2010b). In the Picture of Off the Wall? Ethical Regulation, Research Habitus, and Unpeopled Ethnography. *Qualitative Enquiry.* 16 (6), 517-528.

Hurdley, R. & Dicks, B. (2011). In-between Practice: Working in the 'Thirdspace' of Sensory and Multimodal Methodology. *Qualitative Research.* 11 (3), 277-292.

Liong, M. (2015). In the Shadow of Deception: Ethical Dilemma, Positionality, and Reflexivity in Ethnographic Fieldwork *Qualitative Research Journal.* 15 (1), 61-73.

Longhurst, R., Ho, E. & Johnston, L. (2008). Using 'the Body' as an 'Instrument of Research': Kimch'i and Pavlova. *Area.* 40 (2), 208-217.

Lyle, E. [ed.] (2018) *The Negotiated Self: Employing Reflexive Inquiry to Explore Teacher Identity.* US: Brill.

Mason, J. & Davies, K. (2009). Coming to our Senses: A Critical Approach to Sensory Methodology. *Qualitative Research.* 9 (5), 587-603.

Pink, S. (2008). An Urban Tour: The Sensory Sociality of Ethnographic Place-Making. *Ethnography.* 9 (2), 175-196.

Reeves, C. (2016). The Meaning of Place and Space in a Probation Approved Premises. *Howard Journal of Crime and Justice.* 55 (1-2), 151-167.

Reeves, C. (2013a). How Multi-Agency are Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Committees? *Probation Journal .* 60 (1), 40-55.

Reeves, C. (2013b). "The Others": Sex Offenders' Social Identities in Probation Approved Premises. *Howard Journal of Criminal Justice.* 52 (4), 383-398.

Reeves, C. (2010). A Difficult Negotiation: Fieldwork Relations with Gatekeepers. *Qualitative Research.* 10 (3), 315-331.

Stanek, L. (2011). *Henri Lefebvre on Space: Architecture, Urban Research and the Production of Theory.* London: University of Minnesota Press.

Sutton, J. (2011). *An Ethnographic Account of Doing Survey Research in Prison: Descriptions, Reflections and Suggestions from the Field.* Qualitative Sociology Review. VII (2), 45-63

Sykes, G. (1958). *The Society of Captives: A study of a maximum security prison.* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Worley, R.M, Barura Worley, V. & Wood, B.A. (2016). There were Ethical Dilemmas All Day Long!: Harrowing Tales of Ethnographic Researchers in Criminology and Criminal

Justice. *Criminal Justice Studies: A Critical Journal of Crime, Law and Society.* 29 (4), 289-308.