

From the Outside In: Narratives of Creative Arts Practitioners Working in the Criminal Justice System

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Abstract: The penal voluntary sector is highly variegated in its roles, practices and functions, though research to date has largely excluded the experiences of frontline practitioners. We argue that engaging with the narratives of practitioners can provide fuller appreciation of the potential of the sector's work. Though life story and narrative have been recognised as important in offender desistance (Maruna 2001), the narrative identities of creative arts practitioners, who are important 'change agents' (Albertson 2015), are typically absent. This is despite evidence to suggest that a practitioner's life history can be a significant and positive influence in the rehabilitation of offenders (Harris 2017). Using narratological analysis (Bal 2009), this study examined the narratives of 19 creative practitioners in prisons in England and Wales. Of particular interest were the formative experiences of arts practitioners in their journey to prison work. The findings suggest that arts practitioners identify with an 'outsider' status and may be motivated by an ethic of mutual aid. In the current climate of third sector involvement in the delivery of criminal justice interventions, such a capacity may be both a strength and a weakness for arts organisations working in this field.

Keywords: alterity; arts interventions; narrative criminology; penal voluntary sector; prisons

Introduction

Marketisation and the Ethos of the Voluntary Sector

The penal landscape has changed considerably in recent decades with increasing numbers of voluntary sector organisations delivering interventions and services alongside public and private sector organisations (Gojkovic, Mills and Meek 2011; Wyld and Noble 2017). Dubbed the penal voluntary sector in the UK (Carey and Walker 2002; Corcoran 2011;

Tomczak 2014, 2017a, 2017b), volunteers and philanthropists have had an established presence in modern penal systems. The creation of a mixed economy of criminal justice in England and Wales over the course of the last three decades has significantly boosted the involvement of the penal voluntary sector (see Maguire 2012, pp.484–5).

Marketisation has raised concerns about conflicts of interest and departure from established ethics, values and practice in the voluntary sector (Benson and Hedge 2009; Maguire 2012; Mills, Meek and Gojkovic 2011). Research by Corcoran *et al.* (2018) suggests that the sector increasingly ‘either outwardly complies with, or, in a minority of cases, actively embraces, competitive marketized models’ in a manner that can cause conflict with their founding ethos and values (p.188). Tomczak’s (2017a, pp.155,164) study of voluntary sector involvement in payment-by-results (PbR) schemes and post-custodial supervision concludes that these organisations had a role in expansion of regulatory and carceral State power. The sector’s strategic importance in the neoliberal programme of penal reform in England and Wales has subjected it to ‘penal drift’ (Corcoran 2011) alongside more control and discipline by the State (Corcoran *et al.* 2018; Tomczak 2017a). However, despite being imbricated in increasingly complex configurations of resourcing in a largely unplanned and competitive mixed market of penal provision, voluntary sector organisations have not entirely abandoned established practice and values (Tomczak 2017a, p.166) nor become ‘biddable agents’ of neoliberal policy and marketisation (Tomczak 2014, p.482). This appears to reflect a long-standing duality in the voluntary sector, identified by Kendall and Knapp (1996), Salaman (2012, p.3), and Tomczak (2017a): it acts as a ‘reactionary force’ legitimising the status quo and as a ‘channel for dissent’ (Kendall and Knapp 1996, pp.59–60). Service provision coexists with: advocacy and campaigning (Hucklesby and Corcoran 2016, p.2); philanthropy and ‘middle class patronage’ (Kendall and Knapp 1996, p.51) with an ethos of mutual aid (Smith, Rochester and Hedley 1995); individual empowerment with social control (Tomczak 2017a, p.153). Marketisation pushes this dualism further – more formal, detached and depersonalised ‘case-processing’ practice displaces the customary, informal and involved ways in which staff interacted with service users (Corcoran *et al.* 2018, p.193; Maguire 2012, p.491).

Much of the literature on this changing landscape focuses on structural organisation and strategic goals, with some exceptions (see Salole 2016; Tomczak 2017b). There is a scarcity of data which articulate the complexities of the grass-roots operations of a sector which comprises several thousand diverse organisations: varied in size, scope, roles, functions, ambitions, service users, and relationships to the commissioning processes and supply chains of the penal market (Tomczak 2014, pp.473–4, 479–80, 2017b, pp.76–80, 172, 175; Wyld and Noble 2017). Research is needed to increase understanding of the motivations, practices of frontline workers, and ‘below the radar activities’ (Soteri-Proctor and Alcock 2012) which are poorly understood (Tomczak and Albertson 2016).

Creative Arts Practice in the Penal Voluntary Sector

There are over 900 creative arts practitioners in England and Wales delivering creative arts interventions within a criminal justice context (National Criminal Justice Arts Alliance no date), working in charitable and State-funded organisations, and as self-employed freelancers. They form a hybrid group in the penal voluntary sector. They may be precariously employed and meagrely remunerated due to marginalisation and poor funding of some creative arts interventions (O’Keefe and Albertson 2016, p.497). A developing body of research into creative arts interventions in penal contexts demonstrates the positive impacts these can have on participants’ skills, attitudes and learning, typically focused on evaluation of outcomes (see Ackerman 1992; Albertson 2015; Anderson 2015; Bilby, Caulfield and Ridley 2013; Burrowes *et al.* 2013; Caulfield 2011, 2015; Caulfield, Wilkinson and Wilson 2016; Cheliotis and Jordanoska 2016; Cursley and Maruna 2015; Di Viggiani, Macintosh and Lang 2010; Gussak and Cohen-Liebman 2001; Henley 2015, Miller and Rowe 2009; Miner-Romanoff 2016; O’Keefe and Albertson 2016; Sams 2014; Smitherman and Thompson 2002; Tett *et al.* 2012). The focus on evaluation of outcomes, often focused on questions around evidence broadly set by funders and policymakers, has left little room for exploring what practitioners *do* in arts interventions and how they do it (Anderson 2015). Moreover, there is limited research into the personal and professional journeys of practitioners into this type of work and how far the competing trajectories of the voluntary sector (philanthropy/mutual aid; resistance/compliance) motivate practitioners in their frontline work.

The research presented in this article focuses on practitioners’ journeys. In light of the ways in which evidence-based policy has led practitioners to shape their narratives to particular requirements, this study sought to give practitioners autonomy in how they told their story by taking a narratological approach. A narrative-based approach to research has increased understanding of the identities, subjectivities, agency and lived experience of people in penal environments (Garcia-Hallett 2015; Radcliffe and Hunt 2016) and the role of narrative in desistance from offending (Albertson 2015; Maruna 2001; Presser 2009, 2010; Vaughan 2007). The current study emphasises the usefulness of this approach for understanding the experiences of practitioners. A creative data collection method and narratological analysis has been used to draw out the experiences of practitioners and their journey into this line of work, articulated in their own words and from their own perspective in the form of an elicitation of their individual life story.

Methods

This research involved the design of an innovative data collection tool (storyboard method), and an innovative narratological approach to the analysis of those storyboards. A summary overview of the methods is provided below. A detailed discussion of the approach and methods will be

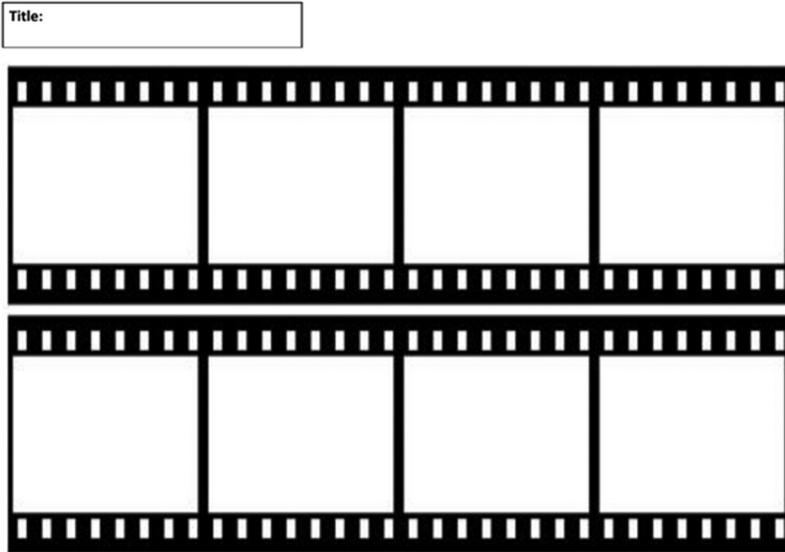


FIGURE 1
Storyboard Template

found in the PhD thesis of the first author, expected to be available in 2021.

Data Collection

No matter how open-ended an interview schedule, the underlying assumptions of the researcher will be implicit in the design (Caufield and Hill 2018). A key motivation for employing a creative data collection tool was to move the current study away from this type of shaping. This research employed an eight-frame storyboarding technique, to elicit life history narratives from drawn and written responses. In workshops lasting approximately three hours, participants were asked to write or draw their own story of how they came to be in prison, in no more than eight frames. The final frame of the storyboard had to be the participant starting work in prison; the rest of the frames were for them to narrate as they chose. No further guidance was given about what was expected in terms of content or structure (see *Figure 1*).

Participants

A fixed purposive sampling approach (Bryman 2012, p.418) was used to recruit participants, aided by the Writers in Prison Network (WIPN), National Association of Writers in Education (NAWE), and the National Criminal Justice Arts Alliance (NCJAA). The criteria for inclusion/exclusion were that participants must have facilitated creative writing workshops in prisons and have worked in prisons for a minimum of one year. Nineteen

TABLE 1
Research Stages

Data collection	Storyboards
Data Analysis Stage One	Images and text distilled into 'raw storyboards' Object Analysis Content Analysis
Data Analysis Stage Two	Storyboards transposed into individual sentences Process Analysis

writers participated in the research. They had up to 20 years of individual experience working in prisons and ranged in age from 32 to 70 years. Of the 19 writers, eleven were currently working in prisons: one full-time, and ten working freelance for a few hours a week or month.

Data Analysis

Having generated data that were as unimpeded as possible by the expectations of the researcher, it was particularly important that the analysis also foregrounded practitioners' stories. This involved a series of interrelated stages within the research process (see *Table 1*). Bal's (2009) narratological analysis artificially divides the narrative into three layers: the fabula; the story; and the text. The text is the material artifact, the book, the film, the piece of art, in this case the eight-frame storyboard; the story is the layer that is concerned with the particular way in which a series of events is told, focusing on aspects such as the sequencing of events, characters, and points of view. Finally, the fabula is 'a series of logically and chronologically related events that are caused or experienced by actors' (Bal 1997, p.5). The fabula was chosen as the focus for data analysis. In effect, it represents an attempt to elicit the bare lines of the practitioner's experience as it is related in narrative form via a description of the plot. This process rests on, in so far as it is possible, resisting an interpretation of the storyboards, sticking, instead, to straight description. The analysis produced an 'event summary', which was intended to pare down each narrative to the clear lines of the plot. These summaries were analysed using a form of content analysis as a means to ascertain the elements that each participant identified as important in their autobiographical story, and any patterns generated between narratives. The analysis followed Huckin's (2004, pp.16–19) procedure. Next, the storyboards were coded through a process analysis (inspired by Bal 1997; Fludernik 2000), and, the narrative, conversational and instructional sentences compiled into a single 'event summary' (examples of which are presented in the findings section of this article). The intention being to reduce the storyboard down to only the bare lines of the fabula, that is, the sequence of events constituting the plot of each individual story. Together the content and process analysis aimed to identify which events were significant across the storyboards and articulate how they were sequenced.

Findings

The arts as a corrupting or distracting force have a long history in the development of Western cultural practices (Belfiore and Bennett 2008, pp.40–53) and along with it, the notion of the writer, or artist, more generally as an outlaw, outsider or rebel (Rader 1958). Of the 19 practitioners in the current study, 16 appeared to identify with some form of outsider status. The analysis identified other core elements from the data, including a detailed exploration of the use of personal pronouns to create distance between narrative and narrator/author, which is presented in the thesis of the first author. For the purposes of this article, however, we focus on the most significant theme from the data: outsider status. Outsider status and experience has been conceptualised in the analysis as alterity, ‘the state of being other or different’ (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 2013, p.11). Through the narratives articulated on the storyboards, participants encounter a sense of their ‘otherness’. Working from the fabula, six categories of alterity were identified (see *Table 2*).

Each category had been experienced by at least three practitioners. Seven storyboards contained one form of outsider experience, three contained two forms, and six practitioners had experienced three types of alterity. While some of the categories are concerned with ‘active’ forms of rebellion (anti-authority/protest; reject status quo) others describe passive experiences of othering/otherness (negative experience of the criminal justice system (CJS); mental health). The category of ‘art itself’ may be either actively or passively experienced depending on the way in which the activity is pursued, while ‘identification with/help the “other”’, does not easily fit into the active/passive distinction. Each of the six categories is discussed in turn below.

Art Itself

The first category, ‘Art itself’, relates to the association of creative identities with rebellion (Belfiore and Bennett 2008) and/or alienation (Rader 1958) and is evident in eight storyboards. This category emerges in these storyboards in a number of ways. For Eric, it is a series of frames that toggle between the hedonistic rebellion of ‘wild times’, ‘creative chaos’, and ‘drinking’, to ‘unemployment’, isolation, and homelessness (Eric, frames 3, 5, 6). Ben’s storyboard also suggests the decadence of a creative lifestyle:

WIN A PRIZE! MAKE MONEY!
PISS IT ALL AWAY. (Ben, frames 3, 4)

Four storyboards explicitly contrast ‘trying to be sensible and have a professional career’ (Henry, frame 1) with ‘creativity’ (Janet, frame 7). This is sometimes framed in economic terms, ‘I always wanted to write . . . but I also needed to earn a living’ (Steve, frame 2), while Joe’s storyboard implies the status aspect of a ‘career in respectability’ (Joe, frame 6). Bob, by contrast, highlights the notion of ‘passion’ as a driving force, which implies he is at the behest of an external impetus. Rory also arrives at a point in his creative journey where ‘There’s no going back. There’s nothing else left!’

TABLE 2
Six Categories of Alterity

Art itself	Anti-authority/ protest	Reject status quo	Early institutional experiences	Identification with/help the 'other'	Mental health
Eight participants: Bob, Eric, Steve, Henry, Ben, Rory, Joe, Janet	Five participants: Jean, Janet, Susan, Joanne, Tracey	Four participants: Jessica, Dave, Henry, Joe	Three participants: Samantha, Dave, Steve	Five participants: Joanne, Jessica, Janet, Steve, Dave	Six participants: Eric, Jessica Rebecca, Joanne, Henry, Susan

(Rory, frame 6). Nine of the eleven remaining storyboards contain objects and processes relating to the arts. However, in these storyboards the arts are presented as unproblematic, simply another part of the fabula rather than an experience of othering/otherness. A final two storyboards do not contain reference to the arts at all. It is beyond the remit or rationale of this article to speculate on these absences, though there is a rich line of inquiry to be pursued. Eight of the storyboards do, however, demonstrate the experience of alterity connected to these practitioners' attempts to pursue their ambitions in the creative arts.

While the presence of art is less remarkable than its omission in the context of these storyboards, the range of arts practice is more diverse than expected. All participants were recruited on the understanding that they had extensive experience of delivering creative writing workshops in prisons. However, one practitioner focuses solely on music, another is a trained visual artist, and a third describes a background in drama facilitation. Even in storyboards that display a focus on writing, only seven of these engage exclusively with the written form. For Dave, Barbara, and Steve, drama features alongside their literary activities. Rory finds that studying art and performances is much more satisfying than his original attempts to study for a degree in English (Rory, frames 2, 3). Henry worked in fine art management before succeeding as a full-time screenwriter, and Susan makes allusions to films and art before becoming a 'WRITING WRITE WRITE WRITER IN RESIDENCE' (Susan, frame 8). Jean, too, shares an image that includes painting, film, literature, and music. There are ten storyboards in total that evidence multidisciplinary arts practice.

Anti-authority/Protest

In total, there are five storyboards where fabula content is suggestive of anti-authoritarianism or protest. Two of these storyboards deal with individual acts of defiance: Joanne's extreme resistance to formative education and employment which left her feeling 'ANGER, BOREDOM . . . ANGER! FRUSTRATION!' (Joanne, frames 2, 3); and Tracey's statement that she dislikes 'Rules, restrictions, conformity!!!' (Tracey, frame 6). Jean, Susan, and Janet's storyboards all contain clear indications of organised political action and consciousness. Both Jean and Susan's storyboards contain images of protest banners on issues such as anti-war/peace (for example, Vietnam, End War), anti-Thatcher rhetoric of the 1980s (Coal not Dole), and a range of humanitarian causes (for example, End Apartheid, Save Biafra, Shelter) (see *Figure 2*). Meanwhile, Janet's storyboard details an inventory of activist-related terminology ('giving others a voice – a way to express social conscience/access – Freed up to be more politicized' (Janet, frames 6, 7)).

Analysis of the storyboards highlights that there are ten storyboards that reference multidisciplinary arts practice (see discussion above, in 'Art Itself' section), and that each of these display, to differing degrees, engagement with the anti-authoritarianism sentiments of the community arts. At its weakest, this may be a casual association derived from facilitating creative



FIGURE 2
Protest Banners

writing activities in the community setting of a prison, which has been seen as one avenue for community arts practice (Johnston 2004). At the other extreme, participation in organised political action exists independently of the practitioners' creative practice, and while this may exert an influence on their creative aspirations, this is not clear from the fabula of the storyboards. The clearest indication of a direct link between creative arts and activism is found in Janet's storyboard in a matrix of activism, socialism, facilitation and teaching that follows being 'freed up to be more politicized' (Janet, frame 6). Finally, the less organised, more individualistic kind of anti-authoritarianism found in the storyboards of Joanne and Tracey appears to be more of a reaction to outside forces than a revolutionary attempt to overthrow them. The five storyboards contained in the second category of alterity, however, all display another aspect of the practitioners' sense of being on the outside of society.

Reject Status Quo

Four storyboards appear to reject the status quo from within it rather than from a position of alterity. Each of these practitioners (Joe, Dave, Jessica, Henry) display what might be considered an 'insider status'. Henry was 'articled to a criminal lawyer' (Henry, frame 2), Dave and Jessica both worked as probation officers, and Joe had 'a career in respectability' (Joe, frame 6) and yet they all wilfully reject the normative values of 'respectable' employment in order to pursue and place themselves on the outside of the system.

Furthermore, in three cases this concerns a system dedicated to bringing outsiders who have offended against the legal code back 'inside' using disciplinary methods, suggesting some degree of rejection of the principles or practices of the CJS. Jessica no longer wants to be 'at the beck and call of the Courts and Home Office' (Jessica, frame 4), Dave describes how his 'Job of Dreams' in youth justice involves spending 'all day on a computer with little time for young offenders' (Dave, frame 4) noting wryly that it's 'what managers value' (Dave, frame 4). Henry appears to spend the least time working in the CJS. However, much later in the storyboard a memory of 'having to tell a wife her husband is going to prison' (Henry, frame 7) is juxtapositioned with the decision to apply for a prison writing residency, implying that the former motivates the latter. Again, these storyboards display another dimension of practitioners' various experiences of being apart from the mainstream, of being outsiders.

All of these four storyboards use employment as a symbol of the status quo. However, practitioners' relationships to employment are instructive across the whole spread of storyboards and references to work and jobs occur 53 times across the 19 fabulas. Rader (1958) traces the artists' outsider status back to Hegel's (1977) notion of alienation and argues that the Italian Renaissance and the emergence of capitalism began a process whereby the artist became increasingly separated and detached from the rest of society (cf. Kaufman 2015). 'Alienation' is an abstruse concept (Safraz 1997, p.45) with no single general definition (Schacht 2015) and while a Marxist perspective on the concept is by no means invulnerable to critique, such a focus on material conditions seems highly pertinent to the experiences of these practitioners. Marx's (1992, pp.326–30) identification of four facets of alienation: of worker from product; of worker from the act of production; of worker from their human essence; and of worker from other workers, are present in various forms in the fabula. At its most obvious, this kind of economically generated alienation is seen in Joe's storyboard:

Broke – flat, stony and regularly – between jobs that were one by bloody one breaking me to bits – bit by bit. (Joe, frame 5)

Rory, too, spends an amount of time prior to achieving financial viability for his creative endeavours, engaged in the kinds of employment that are most clearly associated with Marx's description of enforced, dehumanising labour in which the worker has no control over either process or product:

I work digging ditches. (Rory, frame 5)

Alternatively, when the storyboards detail employment in the arts it is often not described in terms of work at all. Nor is it ever described as a career. There are two mentions of the word 'career', both pertaining to jobs in non-creative sectors; Joe's 'career in respectability' and Henry writes about an attempt at a 'professional career "to fall back on"' (Henry, frame 1). Seven storyboards make reference to the central protagonist's creative facilitation role in prison but do not describe these activities as work. An additional two storyboards relate this role to work, but only in the context

of the application or interview process. Eric writes about the ‘job interview’ (Eric, frame 8) and Kate describes ‘applying for the job’ (Kate, frame 3). The suggestion here is that these practitioners may view their engagement with the arts as a kind of ‘nonalienated labour’, similar to Mishler’s (1999, p.xiv) rather romantic notion of the craft artists in his study of US arts practitioners. As Mishler’s (1999) empirical research goes on to discover, the lived experience of his practitioners is somewhat less utopian and they were:

keenly aware of the constraints of ‘how the world is made’, and tried to find ways to continue with their work within that reality. (p.161)

A key dimension of these constraints, Mishler found, was economic insecurity, where practitioners were ‘just getting by’ (p.161). This is consistent with the financial precarity found in the storyboards. In total, seven storyboards contain references to a lack of money. In addition to Joe and Rory’s manual labour, discussed above, Henry’s storyboard describes having no money despite being a successful writer (Henry, frame 6), Susan is ‘skint, skint, skint’ (Susan, frame 7), the protagonist in Barbara’s storyboard has no car despite living in Los Angeles (where travel without a car is extremely challenging: Barbara, frame 5). Before working in prison Tracey was ‘running around four jobs’ (Tracey, frame 5). At the other extreme, Eric spent a period of time without employment (Eric, frame 2). Ben’s storyboard suggests an amount of wealth earned from his literary career, but juxtaposes this with a decline in fortunes, albeit self-imposed. An amount of pragmatism is also demonstrated by Ben and Rory in their decisions to work in prison. Ben’s storyboard suggests that work in prison was precipitated by a need for money, while Rory agrees to go into a prison because ‘It’s work’ (Rory, frame 7).

Overall, the storyboards contain an amount of nuance concerning the practitioners’ relationships to employment. There are examples of all-out rejection of mainstream career paths (Joe, Jessica, Dave), as well as instances that appear to illustrate classic experiences of alienation through economic coercion. Economic considerations also seem to inform two practitioners’ decisions to facilitate prison arts. However, a further seven do not make associations between their creative facilitation roles and work, which may indicate a view that is closer to Mishler’s (1999) concept of ‘nonalienated labour’ (although this is not without its financial precarity). A Marxist perspective is highly pertinent to a discussion of employment and adds an economic dimension to the political and creatively informed categories of alterity discussed previously.

Early Institutional Experiences: The Education System and the Criminal Justice System

The fourth category of alterity captures findings on early negative experiences of the CJS and experiences of the education system. There are three storyboards detailing encounters with the CJS. While this does not constitute a high frequency of incidents, in conjunction with other findings it

begins to build a picture of oppositional actions and reactions to authority, both in terms of active protest and passive experience. Dave's storyboard notes a 'Run in with police on the estate' (Dave, frame 1), while Steve states 'more than one teacher thought I would end up in prison ...' (Steve, frame 1). Samantha, has a different experience of British law enforcement, when, while on a trip to Donegal during the period of internment, she witnesses her 'dad pulled out (of the car) and marched away' (Samantha, frame 5) by soldiers. Taking into consideration Becker's (1963[1997]) seminal work on labelling theory, it is arguable that such formative encounters may contribute to these practitioners' perceptions of themselves as outsiders.

A more usual reference point for formative experience concerns educational encounters. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the storyboards contain a total of 67 objects pertaining to education. However, beyond this headline figure there are some less-expected findings. Only five of the storyboards make any reference to school, which appears to be a low number for an experience which all the practitioners were, presumably, exposed to over the course of their early lives. Why so many practitioners chose to leave this part of their autobiography unnarrated can only be speculated upon, and is, therefore, incompatible with the rationale of the current analysis. It may, however, be a rich line of enquiry that would benefit from further investigation. Of the five storyboards that address school experiences, only Rory's storyboard features an unequivocally positive event in which the young protagonist's literary ambitions are encouraged by a teacher. Meanwhile Joanne is left 'bored' and 'angry' by school, Janet is labelled a 'dirty gypo', Joe 'broke out of school as often as opportunity handed me the crowbar' and Steve – as previously mentioned – was labelled as a potential prisoner. Finally, while Eric does not include school in his narrative, he contrasts 'no more school days' with the 'discovery' and 'enlightenment' of the next phase of his life at art college, which is labelled 'The Start' (Eric, frame 1).

Of the remaining 14 storyboards, five are concerned with post-16 education. Three of the storyboards referencing school experience also contain discussion of adult education. There is a slightly higher rate of positive experiences in these references and fewer negative ones. Both Joanne and Janet, who report negative experiences of school, display greater commitment to, and enthusiasm for, their return to education as mature students. Conversely, Rory, whose storyboard contains positive sentiments about school, has a more mixed experience of undergraduate education. An attempt at an English degree leaves him baffled, 'no, what's that all about?' (Rory, frame 2) and it is not until he begins to study art and performances that he is able to engage. Practitioners who write exclusively about post-16 education have a higher rate of positive experience. Dave does not just go to study a degree he, 'escapes to university life' (Dave, frame 2) and Henry loves university, although he is less inspired by his degree subject which he hates (Henry, frame 1). Eric, as previously indicated, sees art school as a period of 'discovery' and 'enlightenment'. Only Jessica is neutral about her university experience. Susan's storyboard is the sole one

to suggest a negative experience of academia, which she represents as a building with bars on the windows (Susan, frame 3).

The findings in terms of educational encounters appear too varied to draw any clear conclusions with regard to practitioners' experience of alterity. Certainly for some of the practitioners (Eric, Dave, Janet) it appears that university may have offered something of a transformative experience, though this may be less concerned with a reconciliation of these students with establishment mores and more a reinforcement of their identities as creative practitioners. All of the practitioners who went on to further study, with the exception of Henry (Law) and Susan (whose subject is not stated), appear to have done so in arts subjects, and, in particular, creative writing. As Rory writes: 'it was always to do with language' (Rory, frame 3). It may be that the opportunity to engage for a protracted period of time in creative practice served to deepen these practitioners' perceptions of themselves as artists, and with this their attendant identifications with an outsider status.

Identification with/Help the 'Other'

The fifth category of alterity proposed is that of identification with and/or help for the 'other'. This notion of 'helping the other' is complex and at a superficial level may appear to be aligned with more conventional notions of philanthropic endeavour, which have a long history in penal institutions (Martin *et al.* 2016, p.26). Indeed, Jessica's storyboard has a suggestion of this kind of benevolence where the more advantaged in society offer succour to the unfortunate:

Born sympathetic to the underdog and with a fascination for a life other than the one I grew up in. (Jessica, frame 1)

This ethos reflects the roots of British civil society organisations which 'are located in charity distributed by the elite and middle classes to the poor (Taylor 2004; Kendall and Knapp 1996)' (Helminen 2016, p.75). This kind of patronage assumes an affinity between the practitioner and mainstream society and a desire to reproduce its values; the charitable patron is an insider bestowing alms upon the socially marginalised and needy. However, as has been posited, the storyboards detail a number of ways in which practitioners themselves align with the outsider experience. Wispe (1986) defines sympathy as a 'heightened awareness of the suffering of another person as something to be alleviated' (p.318). However, rather than such ameliorative intentions, it may be that the practitioners in these storyboards identify, rather than sympathise, with the prisoners' underdog or outsider status. This suggestion is displayed in the storyboards of Steve and Dave – discussed in category four, above – where they have their own experiences of being seen as at risk of offending. Similarly, in Janet's storyboard, which references a background in a travelling community, makes it more likely that she would be on the receiving end of charitable endeavour. All three of these storyboards contain evidence that these practitioners invested in helping the prisoners they work with. Dave 'Spends time with cases in his own time' (Dave, frame 5), while Steve applies his 'aptitude for

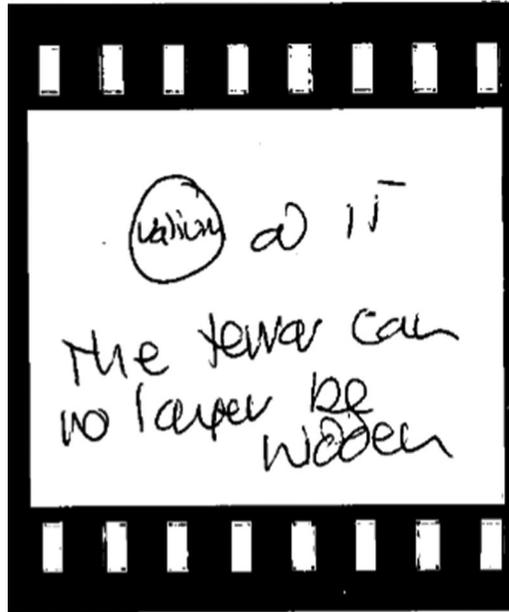


FIGURE 3
Valium at 15

enabling others to be creative' (Steve, frame 4) to prisoners. Janet 'branches out' in order to bring her increasing politicisation to her work in criminal justice. Joanne's motivations for working with prisoners are less politically motivated, and she appears to make an empathic connection between her own experience of feeling trapped and the situation of prisoners. There is a sense in which one outsider experience meets with another. Even in the case of Jessica's storyboard, which begins with the idea of the underdog as an entity that is separate from her, in the development of the storyboard she experiences a crisis that leads to a rejection of the expectations of mainstream society. It is suggested, therefore, that practitioners' other experiences of alterity enable them to identify with the different, yet similar, outsider status of the prisoners with whom they work.

Mental Health

This is also the case with regard to the sixth and final category of alterity, that of mental health issues. There is a high prevalence of mental ill health in prisoner populations (cf. Caulfield 2016) and mental health issues appear in six out of 19 storyboards. Specifically, Susan's storyboard discloses experience of 'madness, anxiety, loss'. Joanne is diagnosed with Body Dysmorphic Disorder to which she ascribes a history of dysfunction. Rebecca describes a terror that could no longer be hidden and results in 'valium at 15' (see *Figure 3*).

Jessica and Henry's storyboards each name objects that indicate a lack of mental well-being, which Jessica describes as 'midlife crisis', and Henry writes of feeling like he is two people (with reference to his failing marriage). While Eric's narrative does not include specific objects that explicitly indicate mental health issues, it does include the words isolated, *casa-less* (he uses the Spanish word for homeless), vulnerable, regretful, abandoned. This, in addition to references pertaining to drinking and smoking addictions, suggests a lack of mental well-being. These experiences demonstrate a sixth way in which practitioners may experience alterity, although this is qualitatively different from the active categories where practitioners demarcate themselves as outsiders.

Summary Discussion

Previously there has been limited research into the personal and professional journeys of practitioners working in the penal voluntary sector. A key finding from this current research is that the narratives of creative arts practitioners in penal contexts reveal voices of resistance – echoing earlier work by Jacobi and Stanford (2014), Johnston (2004), Peaker and Vincent (1990), and Williams (2003). A common element of these narratives of resistance is outsider-ness or other-ness, conceptualised here as alterity. This supports the notion of the writer or artist more generally as an outlaw, outsider, or rebel, and potentially the idea of the arts as a corrupting or distracting force (Belfiore and Bennett 2008, pp.40–53). Rader (1958) discusses a more existential version of the artist-outsider as 'the type f man [*sic*] that feels estranged from the world and his own deeper self' (p.306). Shiner (2001), meanwhile, highlights the fractious nature of the artistic community itself and the resistances that have sprung up in order to challenge the restrictive and elitist conceptualisations and practices of 'fine art'.

Outsider identities similarly proliferate in prisoner populations. For example, Maruna (2001, pp.57–69) identifies three key sets of characteristics, which he refers to as the 'three strikes': criminogenic traits; criminogenic backgrounds; and criminogenic environments. The second and third of these describe the experience of growing up in economically disadvantaged circumstances and associated issues, such as unemployment, abuse, early involvement in crime, and addiction (Maruna 2001, pp.59–65). Maruna's first strike, 'criminogenic traits', suggests an overlap between his group with lived experience of the CJS and the practitioner groups discussed here. This set of characteristics is based on the Big Five Index (John and Srivastava 1999), intended to measure the five basic dispositional traits that constitute personality (Maruna 2001, pp.57–8). Maruna (2001, p.58) finds the spread of his sample differs 'significantly from adult norms', with the combined sample scoring higher on two of these measures, agreeableness and conscientiousness. These traits are most often articulated by participants in Maruna's study in their descriptions of themselves as 'anti-authority' or nonconformist . . . 'They are the men and women who rebel against the grinding routine of life . . . (Rubin 1967). Even participants

who had completely given up crime still thought of themselves as adventurous, rebellious and independent' (Maruna 2001, pp.58-9).

These characteristics or traits appear to resonate with the active categories of alterity outlined in the storyboards presented in this current study. However, the proposition is not straightforward. Certainly, the claim is not that prisoners and practitioners have identical or, in some cases, even similar experiences, but that there are some underlying commonalities, which might lead to a sense of shared identification. The data presented here suggest, for some practitioners, an anti-authoritarian attitude and rejection of the status quo. The kinds of pursuits in which the practitioners engage also appear to manifest the traits of adventurousness, rebellion, and independence, highlighted in Maruna's study. Indeed, Maruna (2001) suggests that his sample may share these personality traits with artists (p.59). A similar case was made by Harris (2017), who uses a psychosocial approach to explore the meanings and subjectivities created in relationships between professionals and young service users, presenting a case study of a relationship where through verbal and non-verbal communication, a young man picks up on a youth work professional's similar experiences to his own troubled and traumatic sense of recognition, despite the youth worker's limited disclosure of his past (Harris 2017, pp.525-6, 529).

The potential resonances in outsider status or sense of alterity shared between prisoners and practitioners illustrates a different form of endeavour existing below the radar in, and among, the work of the penal voluntary sector in England and Wales. This presents a challenge to more widely accepted notions of 'a distinctive "voluntary sector" ethos of compassion and rehabilitative approach' (Tomczak and Albertson 2016, pp.65-6). Indeed, other-ness and outsider-ness may serve as the starting point of encounters between service user and practitioner acting as a common point of reference and source of shared identification. Mining narratives to access practitioner identities is likely to be important to understand what practitioners contribute to the complex chemistry of relationships with service users. We would like to see this as a focus for future research. Though it is beyond the scope of this discussion to examine these relationships, a repeated finding of research into penal programmes is their importance for outcomes of interventions and sentences (Barry 2000; Burnett 2004; Burnett and McNeill 2005; Harris 2017; Leibrich 1994; McIvor 2004; Miller and Rowe 2009; Rex 1999; Rowe and Soppitt 2014; Tomczak and Albertson 2016; Walker 2010).

The insights from this current research offer the potential to further develop the peer mentoring literature and to challenge knowledge about the operation of power in the third sector (which will be more fully explored in the PhD thesis of the first author). Certainly, this study illustrates a different form of charity existing in, and between, the boundaries of the penal voluntary sector in England and Wales, and potentially internationally. The research also raises new questions about what such blurring of the boundaries between practitioners and prisoners might reveal about the potential for far-reaching social change, and simultaneously, the perceived risks for prisons and the order within them.

The autobiographical stories contained here move us away from the public facing statements of practitioners and the discourses of marketisation to a much more nuanced understanding of their stories and the similarities they may share with the lived experience of prisoner populations, which is not apparent in the existing literature. The findings emphasise the usefulness of narrative research – and, in particular, the innovative methods developed for this study – in eliciting the experiences of practitioners. Future research should seek to combine data voicing the experience of service users and practitioners to better understand what practitioners contribute to relationships with service users and their wider influence on the shape of the sector.

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