

Prison Drug Dealing and the Ethnographic Lens

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Abstract: Based on fieldwork conducted in a medium-security UK prison for men, this article highlights the strengths of ethnographic research methods for exploring prison drug dealing. Having detailed the way that the research project proceeded, it analyses prison drug dealing as an individually meaningful act that takes place within a broader context of cultural codes, social relations and institutional policies. It suggests that, to unpack these issues fully, and chart the terms of the internal economy which heroin dominates, a committed attendance in the prison establishment, and an approach that is broad and exploratory, is of great benefit.

Ethnographic fieldwork is often characterised as a difficult, time-consuming, intense and ethically thorny form of data collection. Such traits are highly salient in the social environment of the prison, and partly explain the relative dearth of ethnographic prison research in recent years. Yet this is a setting in which ethnographic studies are particularly valuable, and have formed the cornerstone of the field (Clemmer 1940; Sykes 1958; Jacobs 1977; Sparks, Bottoms and Hay 1996). The everyday appearance of a prison is often mundane and stable. However, beneath this façade are lives fraught with frustrations and desires, and a rich society that brims with discord and discontent, pulses with friendship and loyalties, and maintains its own subculture, economy and status hierarchies. Piercing the skin of this society is no easy task. For the researcher, as for the prisoner, this is a milieu in which suspicion is high, trust is low, and impressions are subject to rigorous scrutiny. Time is the currency of prison life (Sparks, Bottoms and Hay 1996), and it is through committing time that the 'ignorant spy' (Sparks, Bottoms and Hay 1996) can become less conspicuous, more knowledgeable and, perhaps, a temporary if marginal part of the prison community. Once this occurs and trust is earned, personal and potentially dangerous information is often given out with disarming frankness (Jewkes 2002), providing astonishing insight into otherwise hidden worlds of conflict, trade and emotion.

This article highlights the benefits of the ethnographic approach – here, a combination of 'reserved participation' (Liebling 1999) and long interviews – in relation to the exploration of prison drug dealing. There is no claim here to be providing a generalisable analysis of the social

conditions of this activity. Instead, what follows is a case study largely focused on three dealers within one institution, with all the limitations inherent in this method. The aim is to detail some aspects of how the study proceeded, and to illustrate how ethnographic research methods can enhance our understanding of prison drug dealing in two main ways. First, it is a highly illicit activity whose terms are guarded from most outside parties, such that a lengthy presence in the research site is highly advantageous. Secondly, prison drug dealing occurs within a context of social relationships, institutional practices and personal narratives which are greatly illuminated by an approach that is broad and exploratory.

As Pearson and Hobbs (2003) have noted, studies of drug supply in any milieu are comparatively rare compared to those of drug consumption. Likewise, in relation to prisons, although research studies on drug policies and drug use are plentiful (*inter alia*, Keene 1997; MacDonald 1997; Edgar and O'Donnell 1998; Swann and James 1998; Hucklesby and Wilkinson 2001; Gore, Bird and Strang 1999; Shewan and Davies 2000; Boys *et al.* 2002; Duke 2003; Ramsay 2003), those on supply chains and cultures of drug dealing are almost non-existent. Munson *et al.*'s (1973) description of drug use and trafficking in Californian prisons is a notable, though dated, exception, and a recent Home Office study has provided some significant new knowledge (Home Office 2005). In earlier work on prison subculture, the *sub rosa* economy featured prominently, and was directly related to dimensions of the prisoner world such as internal hierarchies, social order and the inmate code (Sykes 1958; Williams and Fish 1974). However, at this time, food, alcohol, cigarettes and clothing, rather than hard drugs, were the goods that comprised illicit markets. More recently, the role of the informal prison economy has been discussed in relation to debt, conflict and (dis)order (Sparks, Bottoms and Hay 1996; Edgar, O'Donnell and Martin 2003), but with little specific detail on how hard drugs determine its terms and dynamics, or how it relates to other aspects of the prison social system (though see Crewe 2005). Ethnographic research is particularly suited to bringing these relationships into relief.

Prison Ethnography and the Drugs Economy

A number of reasons have been put forward for the relative lack of ethnographic prison sociology in recent years. These include: shifts in criminology's methodological preferences towards quantitative techniques; changes in penology's substantive preferences towards issues such as sentencing trends and rising prison populations (Simon 2000; Sparks, Bottoms and Hay 1996); difficulties in securing funding and access (Wilson 2003), particularly in the USA, where the government has little interest in harnessing sociological knowledge to inform policy and where prison authorities see little to gain in making themselves transparent; and the nature of contemporary academic life, in which there is little time, and perhaps insufficient pay-off, for long-term, intensive fieldwork (Wacquant 2002, p.387).

Such concerns are easy to overstate. In fact, it is hard to identify a period when studies of this kind were actually common, and more research may be going on in prisons than many commentators realise.¹ Nonetheless, there is general consensus that we have insufficient knowledge about the ordinary world of the prison, at a time when both policies and populations are changing rapidly, and that it is through sustained fieldwork that this knowledge can best be accumulated (Sparks, Bottoms and Hay 1996; Simon 2000; Wacquant 2002; Liebling 2004). The study from which this article draws its material was devised precisely in order to try to fill in some of these knowledge gaps about the inner life of the contemporary prison. Revisiting many of the concerns of the classic prison monographs (Clemmer 1940; Sykes 1958; Mathiesen 1965; Jacobs 1977), and utilising the same method of deep immersion in a single establishment, it seeks to provide an empirically grounded analysis of the prison social world to complement recent work on late-modern penal cultures, practices and values (Garland 1997, 2002; Liebling 2004).

Funding arrangements allowed an uninterrupted and extended fieldwork phase, over a ten-month period in 2002/03, in HMP Wellingborough, a medium-security training prison for men.² Wellingborough is a medium-sized Category C establishment, with a capacity of 526 at the time of the study, including a 180-bed voluntary testing unit and one wing holding life sentence and long-term prisoners deemed suitable for medium-security conditions. There is no reason to think that the prison was atypical in any significant way, although, like all establishments, it had a particular character, ethos and history which imprinted the everyday culture. Prisoners often commented that the prison was physically quite restrictive, but was fairly 'laid-back', with staff who were 'decent' if not always proactive, and relatively little interpersonal violence between prisoners. One reason for this latter characteristic was the success of the establishment in preventing drugs from entering the prison, a policy that was given high priority by the senior management team. Despite these efforts, in the first few months of the study, staff and prisoners reported that an unusually large amount of drugs was present in the prison. It was during this time that many initial contacts were made with prisoners who had been involved in prison drug dealing.

None of the serious institutional obstacles described by Wilson (2003), in an account of doing field research in prison, were experienced (see also Cohen and Taylor 1977). It is hard to account for these differences, though Wilson's research was on a more politically-sensitive topic, and this author had the advantage of negotiating access through a colleague whose relationship with the prison service is particularly trusting. Furthermore, the establishment was partly chosen because of the enthusiasm of its governor, who held a PhD in anthropology, and was supportive from the first instance. It was clear from early discussions that he understood the nature of fieldwork and could see the intellectual and practical value of the proposed research. An office was set aside for interviewing purposes, keys were provided to allow full and unaccompanied access to all areas of the establishment, and assurances were given that management would not

interfere in the study or encourage the disclosure of confidential information, even on sensitive issues.

Before the main fieldwork phase commenced, a meeting was held with members of the prison's senior management team, a principal officer, and a representative from the Prison Officers' Association, to outline the aims of the research and solicit views on its conduct. It was felt that getting people 'onside' would not be too difficult, particularly given that we could emphasise that this was an independently sponsored project, but that there would be some suspicion about 'the motivation'. One governor warned that any cynicism should not be taken personally, and that it was in the nature of prison life that 'people will tell you what you're like and what you're doing wrong [...] there's too much at stake for people to hold back' (fieldwork notes, August 2001). It was also apparent that the fact that the colleague who had first negotiated access had recently published a book on prison officers – one which prison officers read – would reassure staff that their views were not going to be discounted.

The first three months of fieldwork consisted of unstructured observation, informal conversation and other forms of reserved participation in the everyday life of the establishment. During pilot research in another Category C establishment, it had become clear that drugs would form a major component of the study: for example, prisoners had shown me heroin, explained how it was traded, manipulated an emergency incident in order to ensure the passing of drugs in the visits room, and declared that the prison was 'run on drugs' (fieldwork notes, 2002). The flexibility of the ethnographic approach allowed me to incorporate the exploration of this issue into the main study. During its early stages, a number of conversations were held, and incidents observed, that involved drugs and began to build upon the pilot study. The following fieldwork notes, the first taken on one of the residential wings during evening association, and the second in one of the prison's workshops, documented two such occasions:

Lots of prisoners are going into one cell – and I think I hear a phone going inside. Ian keeps walking by, up and down the corridor, smiling at me knowingly [and guiltily].³ 'Busy night tonight!', says Chris [...]. He takes me to his cell, where all the action is going on, but I don't know what. Takes me into his toilet and pulls up some cord which is hanging down from the window – a 'line'. He explains that it's sent over to the wing opposite, where someone has drugs. [...] It's not clear if he is involved or if it's just that his cell is conveniently located. I am struck by the sheer ingenuity of it all and the organisation. (fieldwork notes, November 2002)

Prisoners 1 and 2 say that I should come in as a prisoner [rather than a researcher], and that 'you'd come to us before we'd come to you', for phonecards etc. Prisoner 2 would do double-bubble [i.e. lend me goods at a 100% interest rate], but says if you don't pay back in week one, the next week he's gonna take all your canteen as well. Says 'I don't feel sorry for no-one, except my kids and myself'. How would I be useful to them, I ask [based on earlier comments]. Prisoner 3 nods towards the female officer and says 'as a lever'. Prisoner 2 laughs and says [to Prisoner 3] 'we share the same mindset'. (I don't understand [what they mean]). (fieldwork notes, December 2002)

As indicated here though, the knowledge provided by these events about the prison's drug culture and markets was rudimentary and somewhat unclear. Not least, at this stage, with insufficient understanding of a variety of other aspects of prisoner society, it was not possible to locate events in any broader framework. The values and practices being exposed were, in effect, disembedded from their social contexts and from the meanings attributed to them by the actors involved. It was only through the conduct of interviews, and an inductive process of knowledge accumulation, that these issues and meanings were made apparent (see Crewe and Maruna 2006).

The excerpts above also highlight how some commonly cited issues in field research were experienced in this project. First then, a number of potential ethical dilemmas arose in relation to the information being presented about drug supply and consumption. The prison's senior management team seemed to recognise tacitly that agreeing to host the research meant accepting that, for the sake of the project, I could not necessarily disclose information that their security department might consider valuable.⁴ The perspective of uniformed staff was less clear, but very few questions were asked about my findings, even after incidents where it must have been apparent to officers that I had witnessed illicit activity. On one occasion, an officer was sufficiently confident that she had apprehended two prisoners smoking heroin that she recommended them for drug tests on the following day. Despite my presence on the spur at the time of the officer's arrival – as the prisoners desperately attempted to camouflage their activity – I was not quizzed on what had occurred. One probable reason for this was that drug supply was a much higher priority issue for the prison authorities than drug consumption, and officers recognised that I would not hold the kind of evidence required to prove someone's involvement in supply networks.

A second issue was the importance of establishing clear role boundaries with prisoners. As the second quotation suggested, and as I subsequently discovered through interviews, prisoners supplying drugs in serious quantities often did so through the skilled corruption of staff, strategically fostering empathy in order to encourage at first minor, and then more serious, breaches of rules about doing favours for prisoners (see below). In this respect, it was imperative to define and stick to certain principles of operation. No payment was offered to interviewees, a rule that some prisoners challenged repeatedly, one asserting that 'no-one does anything for nothing in prison'; and all pleas to bring in 'just a bit of tobacco' or 'make just one phone call' were refused. The imposition of such rules can appear somewhat heartless. However, they are not only prudent, in that they stop the researcher being overwhelmed by requests, prevent requests from becoming demands ('you did it for him, what's wrong with me . . .?!'), and inhibit attempts by individual prisoners to ratchet up minor requests into ones that are more problematic. They also promote an atmosphere in which interviews are perceived as personal exchanges rather than transactions. Prisoners often commented that the two hours they had spent in the interview office, discussing their histories, views and

perceptions, was their most intimate conversation since being incarcerated – a reflection which, in itself, revealed a great deal about the suppressed emotional climate of prison life.

Rock (1979, p.201) has highlighted the potentially ‘predatory character’ of fieldwork: the danger that ‘friendship can become transformed into capital, personal revelation into data, and conflict into illumination’. ‘Sheer “naturalness”’ is crucial to the success of the ethnographer (p.198), but it is difficult to achieve when researching people from whom one is socially distanced, and in the awareness that the goals of the research project may not be the same as those of the research participants.⁵ If the researcher is candid about being interested and involved, but also acknowledges his or her alien position, the feigning of naivety or intimacy should not be required.⁶ Yet issues arise where the handling of a complex set of loyalties to interviewees, other prisoners and staff, and the research project itself, becomes difficult. To fully report the logistics of prison drug dealing may, in some way, contribute to its reduction. Whilst, for the sake of prison officials, vulnerable prisoners, and prison culture as a whole, such measures might be welcomed, it is something of an irony that the prisoners on whom they may impact negatively are those who have provided the very information whose reporting contributes to their imposition. Even when interviewees have provided such information under conditions of informed consent, they might not have done had they anticipated the possible consequences. This problem is difficult to address: interviewers rarely know what they are about to hear, how sensitive or dangerous it might be, and what use it might go to; and outlining all potential implications is likely to bore interviewees, and arouse suspicion where none need exist. Equally, attempts to make participants aware of the terms of the research may be dismissed. The dealers who I interviewed were confident that they could circumvent attempts to prevent their trade – ‘no-one can’t do me over, so I ain’t really bothered’, declared Ashley, when explained the principles of confidentiality – and appeared to enjoy the battle with the system that their activities represented. Nonetheless, in such instances, the researcher cannot simply disavow responsibility for what happens to the research findings, or for the anonymity or safety of his or her sources.

The interviews with drug dealers built upon information gathered in this initial fieldwork period, and were greatly aided by relationships established through informal exchanges. Conversations had already taken place with all three main sources for this article – who will be referred to pseudonymously as ‘Paul’, ‘Ashley’, and ‘Martin’, serving sentences of between two and five years – and this undoubtedly helped establish the kind of trust and credibility that encouraged them to talk in such depth about their participation in the prison’s drugs economy. Prior to the interviews, two had already hinted strongly that they were involved in the prison’s trade networks, and it seems likely that these hints were designed to gauge the level of confidentiality that they might expect during further conversations. Ethnographers are likely to be ‘tested’ in various ways – and conventionally like to detail such incidents in their writings – but it is

probable that, when research subjects are checking trustworthiness and integrity, they often do so in ways that are never made explicit. Likewise, a researcher who has been present in the research field over a sustained period, and witnessed illicit acts or been told delicate information, is likely to benefit simply from those incidents and facts not coming back to haunt anyone.⁷

Staff were aware of one source being a significant dealer within the prison, suspecting him of being one of the chief orchestrators of drug supplies into the prison. The two other prisoners had been identified by staff as 'powerful' prisoners, and one was suspected of bullying, but there was no official indication that either was, or had been, a drug dealer inside the establishment.

The Individual and Prison Drug Dealing

The sociological enterprise involves a search for patterns and generalities. However, detailed, small-scale, exploratory work is crucial in helping to delineate where general patterns do or do not hold, and in marking out the terrain of enquiry for more focused research. Individual cases also reveal how structural factors and social discourses are brought into play at the subjective level: that is, how social patterns are reproduced through choices that are often experienced as free and unconstrained (Willis 1977; Bourdieu 1984). Life history interviews serve a further purpose, in that they show how identities, values and motivations are shaped within and across a variety of social contexts. Part of the rationale for using life histories within a study of prison social life is to explore how life experiences are expressed under conditions of incarceration. It is not just external cultures and criminal orientations that are imported into the prison world (Irwin and Cressey 1962; Jacobs 1977), but also biographical narratives and motivations.

Although only one of the three interviewees was convicted of a drug-related offence, all had dealt drugs outside prison. There were practical consequences here, in that each had built up contacts and experience that aided their prison trading (see below). Motivating factors that recurred in their life histories were also significant, though they took different forms. For Paul, a black prisoner in his early 30s, making money had been a consistent ambition since childhood. Life was: 'all about money [...] without money you can't really do a lot, can you? Even in prison, it's all about money. You just live on less'. He reported that he had 'lived a good life' and enjoyed the money he had made dealing drugs outside prison, and presented his involvement in the prison drugs economy as the best way to maintain a lifestyle of relative comfort and status:

Most of the things you need to get by you can afford, but it's like in life, it's nice to have a bit more than you need. I might only smoke half an ounce a week, but it's nice to have that ounce just in case. It's like phone cards: you can maybe survive on two but it would be better with eight or ten. It's your aims isn't it, it's how much you want, how much you are willing to settle for, isn't it. A lot of people get by and then

there's people that don't get by and end up borrowing and I've always rather been the person that lends than be a borrower.

Ashley, a black prisoner in his late 30s, dealt drugs outside prison as one part of a violent criminal career. Describing the development of this career, he cited his thirst for money, the respect it helped to bring him within his community, and its role in first helping him to establish independence from his mother, to whom he pledged adoration and whom he now strived to support. Indeed, Ashley's life story was one in which the theme of protecting and looking after his extended family featured with consistency and intensity. In a conversation in a prison workshop, he complained about the difficulty of sustaining this identity while incarcerated, claiming that he needed at least ten phonecards per week to stay in good contact with his children, and insisting that he could uphold this role whilst in prison: 'whatever my kids want, they'll get. It might take a week, but they'll get it'. As the interview revealed, it was through drug dealing that he was able to ensure this and maintain the high lifestyle and peer-group status that he had established prior to his sentence. Like Paul, then, Ashley emphasised a desire to live beyond the means sanctioned by the prison:

I don't like to just survive. Just surviving is having what the officers say you can have. You can have two or three phone cards, you're allowed an ounce of burn. You know, I don't like to survive, I like to have plenty. If they say I can have five phone cards, I like to have ten. If they say I can have an ounce of burn, I like to have two ounces. The meals that they give me – I've got a guy in the kitchen who's bringing me three times as much food that I can't even eat it all. [I] just get to know a lad, and pay him off either in smack, or cannabis – you know, take that and just get me a, b, c, d. [. . .] You've got to make the jail become your home.

As also indicated here, the comforts that drug dealing could secure were experienced as all the more pleasurable because they were in breach of official rules. Both Paul and Ashley described drug dealing not only as a way of relieving boredom and providing mental stimulation, but also as part of a contest against the prison authorities. Ashley claimed to:

Get my victories by selling drugs. [. . .] When a screw comes into my pad and sees my pad overflowing with food and tobacco and just everything, that's good enough for me. [. . .] I like to come into their world and make money underneath their noses. They couldn't come into my world. They wouldn't survive two seconds in my world.

Paul's perspective was less straightforwardly oppositional:

In this prison I know the security well, and they know me.

What do you mean – you talk to them?

Yeah, why not? They're all right. I would say the best officers I get on with in this prison are the security because they're straight.

So tell me about the dealings that you've had with them

Well they [used to] come to search me to try and find things [. . .] quite regularly. They would always say 'what are you up to today Paul? What drugs have you got?' [. . .] I'd say 'everything, what do you want?' (laughs). They'd say 'we'll get you' – I'd say 'yeah, keep on trying'. [. . .] They've caught drugs on other people and they

know it's mine. They say 'oh we got your stash today'. I'd say 'I don't know what you're talking about' but they know and I know. They caught Griffiths, yeah, with sixty two phone cards, twelve packets of burn and a mobile phone and when they got that from him they came to me and said 'we've got your stuff'. I said 'what are you talking about? [. . .] Look I've got another friend, so what? You got one, you ain't got the other one and you won't get it' and that's it. I said 'sixty two phone cards, twelve burn that's nothing, I've got that and more'.

Paul's description suggested a game of dealing and policing drugs, in which he and officers acknowledged their respective roles with surprising candour (see also, Sparks Bottoms and Hay 1996, p.201). His explicit contributions within their dialogue are especially striking given that his practices were illegal. Meanwhile, although he baited prison staff, his tone also implied a form of respect for their efforts. The description of security staff as 'straight' signalled a common perception among prisoners that much else in the late modern prison was, by contrast, bureaucratic and opaque. It also had masculine connotations of 'honesty' and the 'man-to-man contest'. Ashley's comments, that he had prevailed in the officer world in a way that they could not do in his, disclosed more macho notions of mastery and confrontation. Both revelled in describing their prison lifestyle as dangerous and ruthless.

Martin was a white prisoner in his mid-20s. As a teenager, a job in the leisure industries had paid him enough for him to live well, buying 'nice clothes' and 'always smoking weed'. Having always sold soft drugs within his circle of friends to make extra income, he had got more seriously involved in selling drugs from his early 20s, after his first spell in prison:

People'd take me out all the time and that, but I don't like being like that. I like to have my own money and you know, fend for myself. I seen one of my mates who sells heroin in big lumps, yeh, he's given me a quarter [. . .]. Anyway I started selling heroin, then from that I started selling heroin and crack cocaine. [. . .] Then that was it, I was just selling drugs, I was selling quite a lot of drugs.

Martin regarded drug dealing as 'an occupation', rather than a status pursuit: 'it's a job, just a way of making money; it's not something to boost you up'. In his descriptions of the lifestyle that his dealing afforded him, he made no reference to status or power. Instead, Martin described settling down with a girlfriend, and buying a 'nice house [and] nice car', before being convicted for a violent offence. Appropriately, then, his ambition was not to accumulate wealth and social standing inside the prison, but to make enough money to 'be alright' and independent on release:

The idea was, if I can make two grand for when I get out then I'll be alright for when I get out instead of just having like 100 quid, cos that aint really nothing nowadays. When I get out I want to be able to go and buy myself a nice pair of trainers, shoes, everything and get myself on my feet quickly. [. . .] It's made me a nice bit of money for when I get out, so. Cos I'm not really interested in, you know some people; getting all brand new clothes sent in jail, I get a few clothes in now and then but I'm not here to impress nobody, you know what I mean, I just want my money for when I get out, it's more important.

Likewise, in contrast to Paul and Ashley, he made little attempt to glamorise drug dealing, and played down, or expressed some embarrassment about, its more mercenary aspects.

Martin claimed to be staying out of trouble now that his sentence was coming to an end (as did Paul and Ashley), but he described a number of incidents that suggested otherwise. Pushed on this issue, he explained that 'sometimes in jail you do try and stay out of trouble [but] things just happen, it's just the way of jail life'. Later in the interview, discussing his dealing activities, he noted that 'even from an early age it's been a part of me, I've always, like, sold drugs'. Both comments – and a subsequent incident that saw him heavily disciplined within the jail – suggested that Martin's involvement in the prison drugs market was tied up with his identity in ways that made it difficult to resist. Ashley likewise linked his activities in the prison to his past history, celebrating similar urges to be at the heart of the action:

My strategy is just: do it hardcore. That makes it easier for me. [. . .] Anything that's not nailed down: have some of it. Get involved. Not involved in the prison, but involved with the lads and the scammers and the dealers and the wheelers. I'm more comfortable that way [. . .]. It's how I am outside.

Paul insisted that his main aim once he arrived in Wellingborough was to get out as soon as possible. Asked how this ambition squared with his participation in illicit activity, he replied that risk was part of life ('You don't know what's going to happen tomorrow'), that a great deal of money could be made, and that he was sufficiently skilled as a dealer to avoid being proved guilty, despite the suspicions of officers.

The Logistics of Prison Drug Dealing

Interviewees described three main means of bringing large amounts of drugs into the establishment. The first, and most fruitful, was through members of uniformed and civilian staff. Projecting his own motivations, Paul considered the establishment of such links as inevitable:

It'll happen again because people are only human. [. . .] Everyone comes here for money, yeah? I'm here because of money, you're here because of money, it's all the love of money and more money. Everyone would like a little bit more and whilst there's people that want a little bit more money and criminals that want a bit more money, it just takes two of them to link and that's it.

As a convicted drug dealer, and one constantly under suspicion for selling within prison, Paul did not attempt to corrupt staff directly. Rather, he would approach another prisoner who he noticed had a good relationship with a staff member, and suggest to him that some kind of deal might be brokered:

I say to him: 'do you think they will bring things in?', and he goes: 'yeah'; I say to him: 'well if I get someone to drop him the drugs and some money, they bring in the drugs, they give it to you, when it comes I'll give you something', that's it.

Ashley outlined the gradual process through which someone could be manipulated and then blackmailed into bringing in goods. This first involved giving out and then extracting 'little snippets' of personal information in order to fashion the semblance of an intimate relationship. From this point, he might ask the person to bring in some biscuits or a magazine, building up his requests into bigger things, whilst continuing to provide a sympathetic ear for any issues that he might be able to take advantage of:

Things start getting bigger and bigger. And at the same time you're hearing their problems. They're human [...] – they'll start telling you about their bills, and 'I've got to do this, and I've got to do that' and you're: 'I can make that easier for you' and then you don't mention it again. Let them suffer for a few more months. Then you show them bits more.

Once a certain stage in this process was reached, such approaches could not be refused without the staff member risking being informed upon for the infractions they had already committed. At the point at which any transaction occurred outside the prison, they were, in Ashley's words, 'tied up [...] finished, because any smart person, when you're outside dropping off the money, you'd have a car behind or someone across the road taking a picture'.

Martin had been approached by another prisoner, who knew a staff member from outside the prison and had already suggested to this contact that some kind of deal could be forged. Like Paul and Ashley, Martin's experience and his connections in external drugs networks enabled him to organise the delivery of drugs and payment to the staff member. In Martin's case, this was a £250 sum every two weeks for a package containing 18 ounces of cannabis, a few bags of heroin, and other occasional items, including two mobile phones. Ashley reported payments of £1,000 per month for the import of heroin, steroids, cannabis and mobile phones.

The second method of importing drugs involved using these phones to arrange for them to be thrown over the prison's fence (they were also used to make social calls to friends and relatives). Martin had used one to describe to a friend where to aim a package containing four-and-a-half ounces of cannabis resin, an ounce of weed, and a minor amount of crack cocaine. A payment of half an ounce of cannabis was made to one of the wing's outside cleaners to pick up the parcel and pass it through the shower window to another prisoner who then gave it to Martin to cut up and distribute.

The third supply route was through prison visits. Experienced visitors could be highly adept at storing drugs in their mouths, bras, or body cavities, and then passing them to prisoners under the cover of a tray, into a crisp packet or drinks can, or through kissing. The drugs would then be 'plugged' by the prisoner, in his anal cavity, or swallowed and passed out later. Again, here, a well-connected drug dealer might take advantage of a prisoner who was known to be successful in such a practice:

You might have a geezer whose girlfriend brings him a £5 draw of cannabis up every visit. And I'll say look, I'll pay her £100 to bring this up. And I'll give you £20 worth of cannabis, and some smack, and some phone cards, and burn. [. . .] You've got to find somebody who's got a willing girlfriend.

In cases involving a prisoner who was able to bring in large quantities of drugs but was reluctant to act as a dealer, an experienced supplier would ask for a 50% cut of the goods in return for managing their distribution.

Once they had 'broken up' the drugs into suitable portions, and allocated it to others for storage or dealing, or sold it on to lower level dealers, Paul, Ashley and Martin themselves had minimal contact with the goods. Martin was particularly conscious that being caught would result in a significantly extended sentence, and he was less concerned than Paul or Ashley to affirm status through his activities. He kept his operation as quiet as possible, until the drugs 'landed', at which time he preferred to get rid of his drugs as quickly as possible, cutting up the cannabis resin and spreading it throughout the establishment within a few hours through dealings in the gym, on association, in the chapel, on the wing, at work and on the prison corridors. For a small share or payment, a handful of trusted associates would hold some of the drugs, whilst the rest would be given to others to sell on a shared profit basis. This profit did not come back to him until the drugs were sold. To minimise the risk that he might lose revenue through a seller ripping him off or being caught in possession of his goods, Martin gave only small quantities (never more than an ounce) to each one. Heroin, the most profitable drug, was kept within much smaller circles: Martin himself plugged his portion, and paid others to store what remained, ensuring that, despite frequent cell searches, he was never caught in possession of his stock.

Paul sold all his goods to other prisoners for onward selling. For this, he demanded a 50-50 split of profits, or a one-off payment that would be made by friends or relatives of the buyer to a specified address outside the prison. To minimise the risk of being 'grassed up', Paul spread his drugs – and the other goods they generated – widely and strategically, guaranteeing that as many people as possible had an interest in his activities.

I just give each of the cliques something so they're not looking at the other person, they've got their own [. . .] drugs to sell or items. If I've got too many items I'll give – 'yeah you do some double bubble or hold them for me'. [If there's a phone about, you don't just keep it to yourself, you pass it about so everyone gets a little taste of it so no-one wants it caught. [. . .] If everyone is gaining by it then there's less chance of the screws ever finding out. If you're not generous there'll be some dickhead that will blow you out. [. . .] If you're a person that tries and hoards everything to yourself and don't share with no-one, everyone is jealous of you so you'll never get anywhere.

Likewise, if his sellers were caught, Paul did not insist that they repaid him lost profits, calculating that, in such a situation, they might choose to escape their debts by naming him to officers.

Although he presented this strategy as a form of generosity, Paul recognised that it was primarily self-interest. Ashley's operations were described in similar terms:

If I get drugs, I give everybody a bit. All the smokers, everybody. [. . .] Because hands wash hands. [. . .] I don't expect nothing, until it arises. If I give somebody something, I'll give it them out of love. [But] I've got a lot of friends who ain't got nothing. Their families don't send them no money, maybe they haven't got a job in the prison, they ain't even got a phone card. I look after them people. I like looking after the poor people because you get more benefits from them. It's not that I'll directly go to use them, but I may need one of them [. . .] to hold this for me, or I may need them to take [drugs] somewhere I can't go.

For Ashley, using his drugs 'wisely', by 'looking after people', rather than overtly abusing his power, was all the more important because it helped ensure that respect for him did not diminish when he did not have a supply of drugs. Equally, his concern with status within the prison meant that he was less concerned than Martin to get rid of his drugs as quickly as possible.

On the whole, the relationship between drug dealers was primarily one of co-operation rather than direct competition. Martin had asked another dealer to stop giving drugs to another prisoner to sell on his wing, and occasional turf wars occurred over dealing rights, particularly when there was a large quantity of drugs within the establishment. Normally, though, dealers from different wings routinely lent each other small amounts of drugs to sustain their markets in times of shortage. Ashley disclosed that, on his wing, where more than one dealer existed, they took turns to handle canteen day (when users had tradeable goods), an agreement that ensured that prisoners who did not pay up could be blacklisted. Nonetheless, drug users frequently reneged, and conflict between dealers was not uncommon, making it necessary for dealers to carry a credible threat of violence or pay others to enforce their contracts. As Pearson and Hobbs (2001) have noted though, although pervasively implied, the visible and inflammatory nature of violence makes it a last resort for dealers, who tend to operate according to business principles. For the same reason, high-level dealers tended not to smoke their own goods.

If contracts did need to be enforced, payments were easy to make, given the quantity of goods that dealers could accumulate through their trade.⁸ Drugs sat at the apex of a multi-level and expansive economic system that incorporated tobacco, phonecards, canteen products and foodstuffs, toiletries, and everyday favours such as ironing clothes and providing protection. Tobacco and phonecards were the main forms of currency used to buy drugs, and were lent out at interest rates of up to 100%, often by the same people who were supplying the drugs in the first place. One interviewee described the manner in which an economy could develop like a pyramid scheme, with high-level dealers the prime beneficiaries, but lower-level lenders also profiting:

The dealers ended up with all the phonecards – they had about 500 or 600 phonecards at their disposal, which they distributed to certain individuals on the wing. [. . .] And these distributors are lending the same cards out that the junkies

gave to the dealers initially, for them to buy more smack off the same dealers. [...] What happens is, say somebody owed me [a distributor] ten cards – they'd come up to me one week and say 'there's three cards'. And I'd say 'right, the seven you owe me, I'm adding another three onto them, so it's ten again the next week'. They come up to me the following week and give me six, I say 'right, so you still owe me four. I want six for the four'. They'll come up the following week and give me three. I'll say 'right, that three, I'm doubling it up to six. I'm not taking any more shit, I'm doubling it, so that's six again next week'. The following week they come up with four – so I've got about 15 cards already, and they still owe me five or six cards. [...] The initial deal between me and the dealer is 'right, there's ten cards. You can put the ten out: for the 20 that you get back, five of them's yours'. [...] So I can sell these ten cards, and I'm getting 20 back the following week. Five of them that's coming back's mine. 15's going back to the dealer. But the dealer'll just say 'gimme ten, and put another 10 out'.

So it just becomes an ever-expanding economy, an ever-expanding debt economy?

Yeah, everybody earns off it; if it can keep going for maybe five or six months, a lot of people stand to make a very, very reasonable living in jail. [...] Every week, every Friday, there's more cards getting put into that economy. And it ended up on the wing – it was just one big massive store of 600 cards. And the screws got em, and it was, bop, the bubble burst.

Dealers could amass a wealth of goods and profit, which functioned, in turn, to display and secure significant influence. As Paul explained:

At the end of the day, people owe you [so you can make them do] anything, you name it. You don't get on with someone, you want their cell burnt out: 'You owe me ten items, you get the ten items, burn out his cell'. Anything, whatever you want. 'My mate's just come in, he hasn't got a radio: you've got a radio, you owe me items, you're going to give me your radio and forget the items or rent it out', what do you want to do?

The Social Context of Prison Drug Dealing

In noting the influence that drug dealing could bring, Ashley highlighted the broader context of status relations in which the drugs economy was embedded. As I have described in more detail elsewhere (Crewe 2005), whilst most heroin users in prison were stigmatised for breaching established inmate norms about weakness and solidarity towards others, drug dealers occupied an elevated position in the prisoner hierarchy. This did not necessarily equate to admiration, although suppliers were accorded a certain amount of kudos simply because of their ability to organise the importation of their goods into prison. Rather, it was a form of power rooted in the drugs themselves and the financial clout that they engendered. Thus, while drug dealers were not necessarily respected in terms of their behaviour and values, they had to be *given respect* because of the influence they could wield. Describing the power that he had held when dealing, Paul emphasised the role of drugs in defining the nature of the inmate hierarchy:

When I was [dealing] I could say: 'I'm a top dog. I've got drugs, I've got this, I've got that, yeah, no-one can't fuck with me'. [...] I'm getting out now, there isn't really no

real top dog no more. There isn't really no drugs [. . .]. Drugs is power in here, yeah, so is tobacco, and without drugs, tobacco and phonecards don't really work.

Ashley concurred that 'drugs run every prison. [. . .] When you've got heroin, you're up there. You're one of the men. If you've got a constant flow of heroin, your prison life can be very comfortable'. Martin enjoyed the kudos of 'being known' around the prison that drug dealing ensured – 'everyone knows who you are' – but claimed that he did not abuse his power, not least because drugs could: 'set you up for a big fall [. . .] you could let it go to your head and start thinking that you're a lot more powerful than you are'. Dealers who did over-use or flaunt their power were described as having 'powder power'. The term partly conveyed the way that some dealers were powerful primarily through their drugs rather than any other source of status such as violence, criminal offence or personal integrity. Their influence could therefore be fairly transient, and needed to be managed all the more carefully. As Paul outlined, drug dealing was accompanied by risk, and, for prisoners who got involved in it, it was advisable to already have some social status or physical backing:

If you have the drugs but you have no violence, does that mean the drugs just get taken off you? No not necessarily, because you might be a staunch geezer. You might be a good lad. If you're a dickhead, then yes, it's gone mate. [Drugs] might backfire on you. And if you're not willing to take the consequences, or you're not willing to stand up for yourself and fight, then you're in big trouble. [. . .] You need backing. You yourself don't need violence. You've got bounty hunters in prison. [. . .] People who, for a price, will protect you. [. . .] Any smart person would get linked up with the right group. [. . .] You fall into a clique.

As suggested here, physical support might be hired or based upon social networks. In this respect, prisoner social relations provided the context for the operation of individual suppliers. Most of the prisoners who Ashley used to store and distribute drugs, enforce his dealings, and stockpile his spoils were associates from his home city, who formed one of the main cliques on his wing. Martin's primary associates were, likewise, from his home town, or, predominantly, were other athletic, white prisoners on his wing. Paul's main accomplice was a prisoner whose brother he was friends with outside prison, a link which was deemed strong enough to guarantee mutual support and trust. When drugs were scarce in the prison, little trade occurred beyond these limited circles.

Meanwhile, there was some suggestion that heroin was itself responsible for the reshaping of prison social relations. One interviewee described how its value and power had encouraged the formulation of cliques as instrumental means of protection and support:

Say I was coming in with half an ounce of heroin and I was selling it [. . .], what I do is have a couple of lads next door, I give them a few bags, and that's my protection then from being robbed. [In the past] If you got a bit of cannabis in on your visit you were more tended to say, 'here y'are, have a spliff'; [. . .] It's not addictive, it weren't, 'fucking hell, I need that, I'm going to rob you for that'. [Now,] nobody is going to give you a bag which is worth £10 when you can only spend £20 a week in jail. [. . .] It's money at the end of the day, money talks, money is power, and heroin, as far as

I'm concerned, is money in jail. [...]

So you're saying that people then gang together because it's a form of protection?

Yes, it's a form of protection and it's power. If I've got half an ounce of heroin I can turn that into probably three or four grams, that's a lot of money in prison, and if you're keeping two or three guys sweet with you, they don't want that breaking up. They're thinking, 'fucking hell, we're living alright, we've got it easy in here, nobody is fucking up our little crew, we're sticking together'.

Issues of race and ethnicity were also deeply woven into the conditions of drug dealing. First, as Paul outlined, it was important to avoid accusations of racism:

The worst thing you can do is give to one person and not give to another. You're better off giving to no-one, because if you give [to someone] and [then] I go to you and you say you haven't got any, I'll say 'what are you racist? You've given to him' – you're putting yourself in a [difficult] position.

Secondly, the different levels of social power held by different ethnic groups influenced the organisation of drug dealing. Both Paul and Ashley claimed that much of the heroin that came into prison was imported by Asian prisoners,⁹ but that their subsequent involvement in the drugs economy was 'very undercover', because they had insufficient confidence in their physical power to control their trade without external assistance. Ashley's description of the consequent arrangements highlighted the complex relationship between economic and physical power:

So if they're bringing that in, why doesn't that make them powerful as a group?

Because they're not powerful people. They're powerful with money, whereas the black male is powerful with money and powerful with violence. The Indians don't have the violence. [So] they'll get a parcel of heroin, and they'll find a black lad. [...] They buy people, basically. [...] They're pulling strings but the strings are very – it's nylon, it's thin. [...] That [Asian] will pay that person not to rob them. But you've also got to remember the person who can rob this Asian, he knows it's to his benefit to befriend him. Because he's got lots of money, and he's always got drugs. [...] Most of the time, the deal is, they'll go halves. [The Asian prisoner] just kicks back in his cell, basically. [...] Very comfortable. They want for nothing. [...]

But they don't have the same influence?

No. Definitely not. They're only not being robbed because of that black guy. If that black guy weren't there, the white boys would rob his little house.

Is it normally black guys who are the most powerful?

Yeah. Most definitely. [...] Because they set the trend for violence.

Asian prisoners were perceived by many other inmates to be both insular and overbearing. Forming a small but highly cohesive group, and one that forcefully asserted its political-religious identity, they were regarded by some prisoners as 'getting ideas above their station' and as seeing themselves as superior to the rest of the inmate population. In this respect, with very strong in-group loyalties, but apparently restricted affiliations beyond that, Asian prisoners were vulnerable to other groups on the wings. As Paul explained:

They feel that if they say they've got drugs they'll be eaten [by] other people that feel they're above them or maybe even below them and know that they can maybe beat them or rush them for their things. [...] They'd rather go through me or someone else.

Depictions of Asian prisoners as economically powerful but reluctant to impose themselves physically were repeated by other interviewees, and corroborated somewhat by observations of their relatively restrained presence within the prison compared to other social groups. At the same time, as black prisoners, Paul and Ashley may have had an interest in portraying themselves as part of a more physically dominant, capable and influential constituency. Certainly, such accounts matched their self-representations as hard-nosed, clued-up, menacing prisoners who were not to be messed with.

The Institutional Context of Prison Drug Dealing

The social power and practices of drug dealers also existed within the context of institutional culture and policy. Testimonies from staff and prisoners suggested that, in the past, powerful prisoners were highly visible and their power was often harnessed by officers in the running of the wings. By giving these prisoners privileged jobs, in return for them 'keeping the wing quiet', prison staff reified their status and allowed them, within limits, to dominate prisoner subculture. Such practices may still occur in some prisons. However, it has become difficult and risky for prisoners to exert power in such blatant ways. First, the establishment of anti-bullying policies, and an institutional insistence that 'we do the job that we're paid to do, and that is we manage prisoners, [rather than] use other prisoners to manage them on our behalf' (prison governor, March 2003), has meant that staff are less likely to sanction prisoners using power against each other. Secondly, the introduction of an incentives and earned privileges scheme has given prisoners more to lose if they are found to be exploiting their peers. Rather than openly exhibiting their power, influential prisoners used the power afforded them by drugs to surreptitiously exploit the inmate hierarchy, using weaker and poorer prisoners for their ends. Ashley explained:

Nowadays, you won't find the real bullies. You won't really notice them. You'll notice the weaker people more. Because the bully's in the background, isn't he. He doesn't really need to leave his cell. He's got ten lads on the wing doing what he wants. They're getting noticed. So the screws will look at them and not him. Whereas before, the bully could be up front. [...] When they moved all the bodies on our wing, it was just all the weak people being moved. It weren't the proper lads.

So it's the sort of [...] 'underlings' who get noticed?

Yes. Because they're doing all the dirty work. [...] A top dog doesn't want to be spotted. The top dog's always the person who's just kicking back.

In this respect, then, prison policy and the nature of the influence that heroin bestows appear to have altered the way in which power is manifested. Powerful prisoners have been allowed and encouraged to

'go underground', whilst it is weaker prisoners whose (drug-related) activities have been made more prominent.¹⁰

Meanwhile, one way that the internal drug market and the hierarchy it created was regulated was through the debt, animosity and moral hostility that drug dealing also generated. As one governor noted: 'if you've got people that are prepared to put themselves out and rise to the top of the pecking order, they will have made enemies on the way'. It was these enemies, often at the bottom of the prisoner hierarchy, whose information was frequently employed to dismantle networks of drugs and power, in exchange for institutional favours, such as prison transfers, extra tobacco, or a wing move.

In terms of institutional ambitions, there was some indication that drug dealers viewed their criminal motives as incompatible with the prison's rehabilitative ideals. Paul explained that there was more to gain in pretending to be a drug addict than in being honest about why he had been a drug dealer outside prison:

When I came to prison I said that I was a crackhead and I only sold drugs to maintain my habit which was a lie but it worked. [...] When you come to prison you have to have something to blame, something to correct, yeah. [...] If I come in and say I've got a drug problem their job now is to try and help me address my drug problem. If I come in and say I've got a problem with money, you can't help me address that. You can't stop me from wanting money, yeah. I sell drugs because I wanted money – that's not good. [...] They like to know the root of the problem. 'What started you?' 'I saw a geezer with a nice car, nice gold chain and I said: "I'm going to sell drugs like him"' — that's not good enough. But if you said to them 'look I have got a drug problem, my whole reason why I'm here is because of drugs; you help me deal with my drug problem and then I won't need to do it', they say 'yeah'. [...] I've seen people that use drugs get more than people that don't. Benefits, better moves, better courses, more parole.

With such comments, Paul suggested that prisoners who regarded themselves as rational, entrepreneurial agents of crime, and whose motivations were material, might be deceitful because they perceived the prison as less capable of correcting their behaviour than that of prisoners whose problems and motivations were psychological, cognitive or rooted in drug addiction. On official record, Paul was polite, compliant and seeking rehabilitative attention. In truth – and as many officers recognised – he had been heavily involved in illegal trade, and had little normative commitment to the rehabilitative aims of the prison.

Conclusion

Paul's final comments here alert us to one of the strengths of ethnographic methods compared to research that uses only institutional or statistical data. In official figures, he would have been (mis)represented as a crack addict participating on relevant drugs courses: an indication of the prison's potential and initiative. At a time when the success of an establishment is measured primarily according to performance targets, research that reaches beyond official data is particularly valuable. In this case – and

where anti-bullying strategies may end up identifying visible ‘heavies’ rather than the real power brokers, as described above – it can alert practitioners to the unintended consequences of well-meaning policies.

There may also be lessons to draw from what research of this kind reveals about the complexities of personal motivations to desist from or continue criminal activity while in prison. At one level, prison drug dealing appears to be driven by many of the same motivations that are regarded as legitimate and laudable in the outside community: the desire to provide for others, to be self-sufficient in the future, and to acquire status through wealth and power. In this respect, and in its many business-like qualities, there is much about this pursuit that mirrors conventional entrepreneurial activity. It suggests an identification with mainstream values rather than an inversion of them, or a distinctive subculture (see Young 1999; Nightingale 1993). We may see prison drug dealing as morally problematic, but it appears far from irrational or unique in its logic.

On another level (and as one would also assume outside prison), prison drug dealing is more than simply an economic activity. It is also bound up with self-identity, masculinity, game-playing and emotion. It provides a means of characterising oneself in relation to family members, other prisoners and staff. It defines a range of personal and social interactions (at the same time as it is also defined by them), and, one might speculate, it can allow economic transactions to stand in for emotional ones, in an environment where the latter are largely proscribed. It may therefore be naïve to believe that by raising prison pay and discharge allowances, or increasing levels of activity to keep prisoners busier, drug dealing would become a less appealing option. This article is based on too few sources to decipher what it would do. Nor, without more systematic analysis, can it explain why, for some prisoners, the narrative function of drug dealing relates primarily to status, whilst for others it fulfils different social and emotional needs. There seem to be clear connections between prisoners’ life narratives and their motives to deal drugs in prison, but the ultimate function of this activity remains somewhat unclear.

There are also dangers in taking descriptions of prison drug dealing at face value. As suggested above, Paul and Ashley had an interest in presenting their practices through discourses of ruthlessness and danger. In fact, whilst violence and exploitation were certainly elements in their activities, co-operation and consideration also featured in significant ways. Life on the landings was not as frenzied or brutal as their testimonies suggested, particularly for those prisoners with no involvement in the drugs economy. The vocabulary of ‘assassins’ and ‘strongarms’ employed by some dealers was not recognised by many interviewees. Again, it is through sustaining a long-term presence in the research field that this kind of disparity between representations and realities can be recognised and understood.

Although they have an appetite for their world (and their place within it) to be understood, governors and other staff are not always in the best position to hear these representations or observe the realities in any depth: they have other immediate priorities, and are unlikely to be given access to

the more illicit dimensions of prisoner culture. The same is often true of the researcher. However, it is a great advantage to be able to offer the kind of time, sympathy and interest that is in short supply in the prison environment. Aware that they are a demonised population in a little-known world, most prisoners want to be understood, and are keen to explain the intricacies of a world that is often, for them, a normal social pathway. Some do so with a remarkable, almost hyper-, awareness of the social norms and systems that they have to negotiate whilst imprisoned. It is these personal motivations and ambitions, and the cultural codes, social relations, and institutional policies in which they are embedded, that the ethnographic approach can explore. Given the current punitive climate, there may be little public impulse to try to understand offenders, and even less those who pursue illegal ends even when imprisoned. Within the UK academic community, the barrier to comprehending such issues is more practical than ideological. Nonetheless, our knowledge of the terms and conditions of everyday prison culture remains relatively limited. In these circumstances, the value of a flexible, inductive and open-ended research method should be all the more apparent.

Notes

- 1 That is, it may well be that it is primarily younger and less-established researchers who are able to conduct studies of this nature, and that these researchers are less likely to secure publication than more senior academics, who have less time to conduct such work.
- 2 Specifically, a three-year Nuffield Foundation New Career Development Fellowship in the Social Sciences (award NCF/00076/G), for which I am most grateful. Many thanks also to Susi Pinkus, Dave Green, Anna King and Shadd Maruna for comments on draft versions of this article.
- 3 All names used in this article are pseudonyms.
- 4 Before interviews began, interviewees were told that I would have to disclose information to the prison authorities if it involved the potential loss of life or a major security breach (that is, an escape attempt).
- 5 Liebling (2001, p.475) recommends affective presence and engagement – ‘openness, warmth, “devotion” to the task, the capacity to be sympathetic’ – as the key to good research, and suggests that it is possible, and suitable, to feel multiple sympathies without compromising one’s objectivity. Perhaps it is *sincerity* that allows the researcher to inhabit the dual position of making genuine affective bonds with research subjects whilst knowing that these bonds are temporary and mediated by the very fact of one’s role as a researcher.
- 6 One technique used by the author to display his status as an outsider was the wearing of a badge marked with his name and institutional affiliation.
- 7 One interviewee explained his willingness to talk as follows:

You know, it just happens that we’ve spoke a few times on the wing and I find you a pretty sensible fella. You know, so I don’t really mind – we’ve spoke on the landing, I see how you’ve spoke with other people, I’ve seen how you’ve dealt with them: you’ve heard them, you’ve listened to them, you’ve got your own points of view.

- 8 Once inside prison, drugs had a value between four and six times what they held outside. As a consequence, the interviewees claimed that it was possible to make more money whilst in prison than in the free world.
- 9 A claim that is loosely supported by the research of Pearson and Hobbs (2001), who suggest that middle market brokerage roles in UK drug markets are often occupied

by networks with South Asian connections. North American readers should note that the term 'Asian' refers to prisoners from the Indian sub-continent.

10 Certainly, from observation alone, it would not have been apparent who the prison's main drug suppliers were, although users and low-level dealers were less difficult to identify.

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