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Redefining Offender Pedagogy: Promoting Participatory and Transformative Learning in a Teaching and Learning Context

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Abstract: Despite the importance of education, there persists a constant and consistent failure of current and former offenders. Statistically, compared to the national average, a disproportionate number underachieve. Without hope for a better future, the overwhelming majority face diminished life opportunities; marginalised and disadvantaged individuals are drawn together through complex and multifaceted personal, social and political circumstances. Over the previous three decades, the term subculture has become a more fluid and diverse concept. Used in a much broader context, subculture research and inquiry examine the lifestyle choices, customs, values, and consumption patterns of individuals, groups, and countercultures who deviate from traditional social patterns, modes of living, and behaviours. From a postmodernist viewpoint, they are dynamic and interpersonal hubs that provide ontological gratification, satisfaction, and emotional attachment. Rather than viewing the types of non-conventional learning that offenders experience in subcultures in derogatory and harmful terms, this article will highlight and explore how non-normative principles and paradigms associated with criminal subcultures can be used to structure teaching pedagogy and practice in a teaching and learning context. The transformative potential of education to support and mentor offenders toward desistance, rehabilitation, and broader social inclusion will be discussed and analysed. By creating a positive and negotiated learning space, I will tell the stories of how the research participants were supported into meaningful and productive pathways.

Keywords: Transformative, Education, Offender [s], Subculture [s], Rehabilitation, Desistance

1. Introduction

This article is based on a four-year PhD investigation that began in February 2015 and concluded in early 2020 [70]. After working across different private sector provisions – mentoring, supporting, and teaching young adults and former offenders – in 2014 I set up Hope Education and Support Services in Bradford, West Yorkshire. The research volunteers who agreed to participate in the inquiry were all former offenders with a history of substance misuse [70]. Due to the men's negative learning experiences, the investigation addressed and tackled a fundamental concern about what counts as appropriate education and training for persons who feel they have no place in a teaching and learning context. Having worked with the men for a few months, it became apparent that they harboured ontological, emotional, and psychological anxieties towards learning.

The research inquiry documented the learning experiences of two main research volunteers. I was first introduced to Mark in April 2013. Raised and socialised in the heart of Bradford, West Yorkshire, during his childhood he spent extensive periods in the care system due to his troubled and fragmented home life. He recalled his first encounters with different delinquent subcultures as a disengaged and disaffected young male in his early teens. In the second in-depth narrative, Craig, also from Bradford, West Yorkshire, had an extensive history of imprisonment and substance misuse. Affiliating with different subculture cohorts as far back as he could recall, he was neither ashamed nor apologetic; this had provided him with the necessary acquired status to survive and thrive throughout decades of adversity. One of ten siblings, following his father's death he was sent away and raised by a distant relative across the other side of West Yorkshire. This article will also include

the contributions of Terry, to whom I was introduced in 2014. Unemployed and living alone, he had spent much of his adult life attached to different offending and deviant subcultures. Born and bred in West Yorkshire and without children, Terry had little reason to associate with other groups and people outside his small network of friends and associates.

In the quest to challenge a morally unjust education system, a substantial period of time was spent speaking to the men honestly; I wanted to dig deep into their previous experiences, and it was imperative to understand and structure the teaching and content around what they required a learning programme to involve [70]. As a cohort, their prolonged periods of subculture participation, intense and impactful, influential and uncompromising, had instilled and embedded into the men distinct ethics, norms, and behaviours unique to non-conforming communities and subcultures. In appreciating the men's journeys, and drawing on personally relevant subculture participation, a community of practice was nurtured over an extended period. Through dialogue, the research volunteers felt that learning should be engaging, personally relevant, and representative of the service user's voice [70]. When spending time with the research volunteers, they wished to be taught through a non-conventional teaching approach and pedagogy. In particular, what they described was a way of working and communicating that, in many ways, resembled the theorising by Lave (1996) [56]. She wrote about the importance of providing the necessary care and time for progressive and positive learning.

As highlighted by official statistics, there is a systematic and repeated failure to reduce initial offending and break the cycle of reoffending [77, 78]. Statistics also reinforce the overwhelming correlation between crime and poor educational outcomes [77, 102]. According to the Ministry of Justice (2013), poor educational outcomes, diminished employment opportunities, and higher than average rates of mental health diagnoses are correlated with pathways into youth and subculture participation and later-life criminality [103] (see also, HM Inspectorate of Prisons Annual Report, 2021-22 [43]; Ministry of Justice Education and Employment Strategy, 2018 [64]; The House of Commons Education Committee, 2022-2023 [91]). As detailed by J-F et al. (2014: 1) [47], 'low levels of education attainment not only limit but restrict a number of pro-social and economic prospects needed for one to be successful in a community'; formal accreditation among serving inmates remain much lower than the national average [77, 78]. As detailed by Costelloe (2014) [23], successfully participating in some form of penal and post-release education and training can make the difference between recidivism and desistance.

For nearly two decades, in attempts to connect to offender service user clients, the natural starting point was through dialogue that acknowledges individual people in their uniqueness [80, 84]. Thus, when negotiating to the complex and multifaceted barriers common among the offending populace, education fosters the capacity to connect to repressed emotions and psychological remains. Hence, over an extended period, we increase the chances of tending to

and negotiating with damaged ontologies, worldviews, and different forms of existential crisis, which are detrimental to leading a productive and meaningful life [70]. In conventional research inquiries, the data gathered are objective, impartial, and value-free; multifaceted and subjective insight and phenomena are theoretically constrained and presented through numerical and formulaic correlations and epistemologies [51]. As highlighted by O'Connor (2021: 1) [71], 'one of the primary reasons attributed to an education system, systemically at blame for the continuing failure to connect in meaningful and productive ways with the offending community, is the demand by the government, politicians, and other power elites to obtain data ground in numerical and mechanistic processes of perceiving reality'. Moreover, statistics dehumanise, numerically nullify, and objectify offenders and other minority cohorts; they become stripped of human characteristics [24]. This makes vilifying and ostracising 'outsiders' easier to justify and implement [8].

In the view of Bennett (2009) [9], moving away from traditional ways of knowing is imperative if we are to appreciate the impact of structural inequalities; teaching paradigms and constructs founded on mechanistic worldviews and epistemologies limit dialogue and curtail the expression of thought. Kimberley, Nicholls, and Will (2009) [53] suggested that data presented by academic scholars and researchers fail to capture authentic insight and perceptions; conventional research methods remain insufficient and ineffective. As Frey et al. (1996: 111) [33] maintained, the 'commitment to identification with others, sometimes expressed as "solidarity", should not be confused with friendliness or charity'. Thus, 'social justice is not a matter of "us" being hospitable and welcoming "them" into "our" community; it is an insistence that a community of integrity cannot exist if some are excluded'.

More recently, literature by Szific (2021) [89] has enriched and informed our existing theoretical understanding of offender education. Working with current and former offenders, she explored in a penal context the types of concepts, pedagogies, and ways of working that support learning and help the participants towards pathways of rehabilitation and desistance. As noted by Szifis (2021: 10, 16) [89], 'in reality, there is little research into the link between employment-related education in prison and post-release outcomes'; the primary aim of education 'ought to be for growth and personal development'. More generally, there persists a lack of meaningful insight and transparency in exploring and shedding light on the relationships that enable interpersonal and relational dynamics to develop in a post-incarceration teaching and learning context; this remains woefully under-researched. Expanding beyond the prison walls, this article highlights the potential of education to transform the lives of those most isolated and socially astray. At the heart of this article are the emotive, subjective, and thought-provoking stories that illuminate their adversity, pain, and hardship; the participants, without any hope for the future, have resided in the shadow of mainstream society,

away from public scrutiny and hatred [70].

Through the narrative, the participants provided a unique insight into their lives; they articulated feeling suppressed, alienated, ontologically withered, and consumed by chaos. In alignment with the view of Smith and Sparkes (2007: 10) [87], existing in such adverse conditions rendered the men ontologically and emotionally impoverished; this 'produced, sustained, and exacerbated their social oppression'. They described a feeling of being imprisoned and confined to drug-fuelled, desolate subcultures; at specific points in their lives, they were left suicidal without a cause or reason to continue living. As conveyed by Clandinin, Cave, and Berendonk (2017: 90) [17], 'stories are lived, and told, not separated from each person's living and telling in time, place, and relationships, not seen as text to be separated from the living and telling and analysed and dissected'. Having experienced similar personal and wider social issues to the research volunteers, and as a teacher and mentor with eighteen years of experience working across various educational settings, this article will describe how this guided and informed the approaches and strategies outlined.

This article will explain and illustrate the research subjects' fears and apprehensions towards teaching and learning. In the view of Pitard (2017: 109) [76], 'listening to our internal dialogue relies upon that dialogue being spontaneous, springing from a stillness of mind which allows our past experience to guide our present'. Laverty (2003) [58] contended that existence cannot be statistically nullified and reduced to a specific and particular place, space, and time. As will be discussed, 'individual realities are not just something out there; they exist for the creator, constructed and derived from experience, situated and confined to a particular time and space' (O'Connor, 2019: 41) [70]. In agreement with Linghede, Larsson, and Redelius (2016: 90) [59], creative approaches such as informal and unstructured interviews, first-person narratives, and literary stories embody knowledge and 'reverberate with the reader not only as information, but also as emotions and desire'. By adopting a reflective approach to inquiry 'our thoughts are constantly re-shaped when converted into language and brought out in the presence of others' (Raelin, 2001: 21) [79]. Rosemarie Anderson (2001: 2) [3] said that 'embodied writing brings the finely textured experience of the body to the art of writing; as the process evolves, we replay human experience from the inside out and entwining in words our senses with the senses of the world in which we live our lives'. Tyler and Swartz (2012: 465) [94] stated their belief that:

> In storytelling, the right context and the quality of listening create the ''field'' that elicits the story – an energetic negotiation between the teller and story. When the system instability forces the old linear narrative to fall apart, the story can "restory" itself into a more complex form. A change of form may reflect a transforming of the storyteller that occurs through interpersonal interaction. By moving to this different systems level, where it is now open to interaction with other people and other stories, the story may build more complex connections and ultimately

have meaning at an even greater scale.

2. Overview of Subculture Theory

This section will provide a summary and overview of some of the key contributors to subculture theory and research, spanning both sides of the Atlantic through to more recent postmodernist thinking and literature.

Subculture theories have a unique Western origin. Moreover, for nearly a hundred years, sociology, criminology, and psychology have shaped subculture as a concept. Towards the latter part of the nineteenth century, the University of Chicago established its first graduate programme working with and training graduate doctoral students. Renowned for its contribution and introduction to urban qualitative-based research and theory, the Chicago School viewed crime as rooted in the inner-city community, cultural, and broader social context [100]. Departing from the conception that crime arose from natural, biological, and pathological conditions and triggers, the 'University of Chicago was developed into one of the most complete social laboratories in the world' (O'Connor, 2019: 117) [70]. Lutters and Ackerman (1996: 2) [60], describing the social, economic, and political context during this period, highlighted the 'intensified population shift from the rural, homogeneous, agrarian community to the vast, heterogeneous, industrial metropolis'; this validated and warranted the need to undertake analytical subcultural inquiry and participation. By studying people in their natural environment, a key tenet of the Chicago School was that the subject's true 'human nature' could be studied authentically within the space they resided and shared with other like-minded peers [60]. Further, through ethnographic inquiry, researchers sought a better understanding of those who lived in rundown lower-social-class communities; often, they held similar views to other isolated and underprivileged youth [60].

In the first half of the twentieth century, a detailed analysis of urban subculture life was presented by theorists Frederic Thrasher, in his classical study titled 'The Gang: A Study of 1,313 Gangs in Chicago' (1927), Paul Cressey's 'Taxi-Dance Hall: A Sociological Study in Commercialized Recreation and City Life' (1932), and William Foote's 'Street Corner Society: The Social Structure of an Italian Slum' (1943), among numerous others [100, 45]. According to Thrasher (1927, cited in Hunt and Laidler, 2001: 45) [45], a deviant subculture is an 'interstitial group originally formed spontaneously, and then integrated through conflict', in which 'collective behaviour is the development of tradition, unreflective internal structures, esprit de corps, solidarity, morale, group awareness, and attachment to local territory'. Due to the rapid growth of industrialisation, resulting in cultural diversity, and the precipitous decay of social control and traditional functionalist values, the city of Chicago became a hub for chaos, crime, and unpredictability; like-minded youth navigated towards different non-normative subcultures and communities [45]. Through the work of Park

(1925) [39], an ecological model of crime and deviance was presented. The belief was that 'subcultures in the US arose in part as a result of urbanization'; concepts such as 'collective lifestyles', 'social control', and 'moral order' within groups were empirically analysed (Williams, 2007: 573) [100].

Towards the late 1960s, the emergence of a liberal or structural-functionalist approach dominated American subculture literature and texts; this was followed by a Marxist British version towards the late 1970s [65]. Based on the earlier writing and theory of Durkheim, functionalist Robert Merton (1938) further developed the impact that Westernised progress, materialism, and advances in industrialisation had on crime and deviance. He believed that a state of normlessness arose when traditional societies entered a period of dramatic upheaval and change [65]. He also argued that for those chasing the 'American dream', disadvantaged youths aspiring and striving to attain legitimate goals experienced feelings of frustration and resentment towards the lack of conventional and available opportunities to achieve. Encouraging deviancy, he viewed this as a natural consequence imparted on the human condition when people lack the means and ability to solve this internal conflict [10]. As detailed by O'Connor (2019: 118) [70], 'underpinning his theory is the notion of cultural goals, where the primary rationale of deviancy is to improve material wealth; aspirations include the need to acquire and obtain luxury goods and accessories'.

American sociologist Edward Sutherland (1947) asserted that crime is a learned phenomenon through his theory 'Differential Association'. Through observation, interaction, proximity, motivation, and learning, crime is socially constructed amongst deviant peers through intimate personal encounters [61]. In the opinion of Morrison (1995: 150) [65], a central tenet of Sutherland's theory was the belief that 'the cultural learning process involved not only the actual techniques of crime, but also the motives, drive, attitudes, and rationalisations favourable to the commission of anti-social acts'. Moreover, 'the intensity and unity shaping verbal and non-verbal communications created a unique cultured knowledge' (O'Connor, 2019: 118) [70]. Learning is the outcome of an ongoing process; it is ever-evolving, changing from moment to moment, with individuals creating and co-creating reality [97]. Viewing crime from a primarily positivist perspective, Sutherland (1939) contended that learning is determined through pre-existing variables, including one's participation in distinct cultural surroundings [61]. As noted in the research by O'Connor (2019: 118) [70], delinquent peers are 'adjoined by similar lived experiences, values demonstrating a collective sorrow form the bedrock and fabric of socially isolated communities'. Influenced by the work of George Herbert Mead (1934), individuals take up roles in deviant collectives to solve situational happenings through non-conforming means; the duration, intensity, and severity of offending vary accordingly to the symbolic and micro interaction one is exposed to [61]. The writings of Sutherland offer a bridge between positivist theories and intimate personal settings. Offering a more comprehensive

theory, he posited a detailed rationale explaining how crime occurs [70].

Albert Cohen (1955), a student of Merton, adopted a more analytical approach to subculture inquiry. Along with Walter Miller, they sought new theoretical understanding and knowledge of dominant and subordinate value systems [42]. Rather than perceiving crime as correlated with the psychological strain and inability to achieve material means, Cohen put forward a cultural understanding of the reasons and rationale for working-class crime; this involved non-utilitarian crime. Through his landmark study 'Delinquent Boys: The Culture of the Gang', he asserted that 'cultural values and norms overarching American culture emerged from the middle-class ranks' (O'Connor, 2019: 119) [70]. Therefore, working-class boys were 'assessed against what Cohen described as the 'middle-class measuring rod'; most were rarely able to match or compete against these expectations' (O'Connor, 2019: 119) [70]. He maintained 'all human action... is an ongoing series of efforts to solve problems' and 'that all... factors and circumstances that produce a problem come from... two sources, the actor's "frame of reference" and the "situation" he confronts' (Cohen, 1955: 50) [18]. According to Cohen (1955: 178) [18], a gang is a group of boys who derive 'meaning' from their sense of disaffection and estrangement, and who are 'governed by a set of common understanding, common sentiments, and common loyalties'.

Other contributions have included Cloward and Ohlin's (1960) theory on 'Illegitimate Opportunity Structures'. Drawing on Merton's (1938) anomie-strain theory and Shaw and McKay's (1942) social disorganisation theory, Cloward and Ohlin argued that lower-working-class boys, disadvantaged from birth, face diminished opportunities and life prospects in American society [65]. Due to inherent social inequalities impacting young people, legitimate access to resources and other valued goals are blocked. In their response to this, and through association, opportunity, and learning, their frustration, anger, and resentment are demonstrated through non-normative and delinquent actions; this structural inequity raises awareness of lower social standing and dissatisfaction. Through a gradual process of social withdrawal, dejected and astray young people drift into new forms of subcultures; see also Matza (1944) [65]. Cullen and Wilcox (2010: 8) [25], reviewing the writing of Cloward and Ohlin (1960), posited crime as involving both a 'learning and a performance structure'; hence, crime 'cannot be completed if a person cannot learn the skills and values required to do the act and then have the opportunity to use these abilities to victimize a person or place'. For many, the spirit and soul are comforted and liberated through a profound connectedness. Without a voice external to their subculture, these associations lead to gratuitous and selfless moments and encounters for the men and women, defined and categorised through sub-human rhetoric, language, and discourse. In their writing, Cloward and Ohlin (1960) described three subculture formations: criminal, conflict, and retreatist subcultures [69].

2.1. British Subculture Theories

Towards the late 1940s, following the Second World War, the flow of immigration grew as manual toil and labour were sought to rebuild the landscape. Moreover, as opportunities for social mobility increased and Britain entered a new age of media technology, a significant social and political change was observed; these cultural conditions materialised to create the British post-war subculture movement. Hebdige (1979: 74) [41] remarked how 'it has become something of a cliché' when describing how 'traditional patterns of life in Britain were swept aside to be replaced by a new, and superficially less class-ridden system'. Moving away from the American tradition, which framed subculture theory within a structural-functionalist paradigm, British subculture theorists preferred 'a neo-Marxian approach to class and power' (Williams, 2007: 575) [100]. In opposition to an academic and popular orthodoxy, which portrayed working-class youth in derogatory terms, the Birmingham School sought to redefine and bring an alternative understanding to this field of research. According to Cohen (1972: 43) [19], when 'subculture theory appeared in Britain at the beginning of the Seventies it was concerned to show how radically it differed from the traditional. And it could hardly have looked more different'.

Founded in 1963 by Richard Hoggart, scholars from the CCCS (the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies) presented a broad-ranging interdisciplinary approach to cultural studies: 'concepts such as structuralism, hegemony, and semiotics' (O'Connor, 2019: 210) [70] were to establish their theoretical foundations and literary contributions [100]. As detailed by Blackman (2014: 497) [10], 'epistemologically, the CCCS theory locates itself within an interpretive paradigm: their innovative approach was to undertake deviance as informed by consciousness and agency'. According to Williams (2007: 576) [100], in contrast to the structural-functionalist approach of American subculture theories, British subculture approaches, through the ethnography of urban subcultures, 'were primarily grounded in semiotic analyses of style'. By incorporating a semiotic framework analysis, O'Connor (2019: 120) [70] noted how research 'attempted to deconstruct and make sense of the taken-for-granted meanings that defined and influenced the practices and behaviours of subculture participation'. He also said that through the work of the CCCS, the emphasis shifted from 'studying youth gangs to style-based youth cultures, such as Teddy Boys, Mods, Rockers, and Skinheads'; these subculture movements dominated the British subculture scene from the 1950s (O'Connor, 2019: 120) [70]. Mostly pioneered by the CCCS, British subculture theories flourished in the 1970s; crime was theorised as stemming from community fragmentation and conflict, as opposed to material strain that merged social inequalities with psychological indifference [69], [49]. Further, the influential work of Resistance Through Rituals (1976), pioneered by the Birmingham School, maintained that working-class youths reacted and rebelled against wider structural changes; the transitory adverse period in post-war Britain impacted individual and collective wellbeing.

Departing from the notion that material inequality created a psychological 'strain' for those without the means and goals to achieve (Merton, 1938), British subcultures were framed 'as sites of resistance to cultural hegemony – the struggle between the bourgeoisie and proletariat for cultural and social power' (Williams, 2007: 576) [100]. As highlighted by Milovanovic (1997a: 27) [62], 'without an understanding of the nature of the relationship of the subject to discourse, one cannot accurately describe hegemony nor develop prescriptive visions for change'. Williams (2007: 575) [100] asserted that the 'goal was to explain the emergence of youth subcultures in post-World War II Britain, not all subcultures across time and space'. Bennett (1999: 600) [9] contended that 'deviant behaviour of such youth cultures or ''subcultures'' had to be understood as the collective reaction of youth themselves, or rather working-class youth, to structural changes taking place in British post-war society'. Hebdige (1979: 74) [41] positioned the development of youth cultures post-war as 'just part of the process of polarization'; opportunities for social mobility, greater family diversity, and a move towards a more tolerant and embracing society created newfound affluence and liberation, and the youth had 'never had it so good'. With advancements in technology, enterprise, and the media, working-class youths were afforded greater spending power than previous generations. Due to this, they entered into new and innovative emerging trends, fashions, and stylistic movements, which created complex and diverse factions in traditional working-class communities. Young (1999) pointed out that as living standards rose, crime continued to rise; thus, a more complex rationale was required to explain the increasing crime rates among British working-class youth [104]. One possible explanation was presented by Young (1999: 12) [104], who said that disgruntled youth, denied recognition in postmodern society, turn to:

> Cultures of machismo, to the mobilization of one of their only resources, physical strength, to the formation of gangs, and to the defence of their own 'turf'. Being denied the respect of others, they create a subculture that revolves around masculine powers and respect.

Phil Cohen (1972), in his study 'Subculture Conflict and Working Class Community', sought to 'identify with and explore the visible deterioration evident in inner-city locations' (O'Connor, 2019: 120) [70]. Coining the phrase 'magical recovery of community', he examined the post-war 'cultural adjustment', focusing on the 'effects of community fragmentation' (O'Connor, 2019: 120) [70]. Throughout the 1950s, run-down inner-city housing estates were replaced across the East End of London with more modern dwellings [20]. As parts of London experienced a period of depopulation, many working-class youths were left residing in poor conditions and dwellings, thus contributing to the breakdown of community cohesion. With the 'migration of the indigenous community to the new towns and estates', there was an influx of migrants and low-income families

relocated to these slum areas. As a knock-on effect, 'the high-density and high-rise schemes were to destroy the function of the street, the local pub, the corner shop as articulations of communal space'. Moreover, 'the isolated family unit could no longer call on the resources of wider kinship networks or of the neighbourhood, and the family itself became the sole focus of solidarity' (Cohen, 1980: 67) [21]. Cohen believed the weakening and erosion of working-class cohesion and identity had compromised notions of security and belonging, predominantly affecting uneducated and disengaged males.

According to Hebdige (1979: 74) [41], the 'disintegration of the working-class community' and the 'demolition of the traditional environment of back-to-backs and corner shops merely signified more intangible changes'. Cohen (1980: 71) [21] believed that the breakdown of family relations resulted in intergenerational conflict. He also said that as the community became disintegrated and disjointed, there arose a 'need to create and express autonomy and difference from parents and, by extension, their culture, and the need to maintain the security of existing ego defences and the parental identifications which support them' (Cohen, 1980: 73) [21]. Therefore, to avoid face-to-face discord and disunity, the emerging strain and disharmony were removed from the 'interpersonal context', and 'expressed and resolved, albeit magically' through participation and association with different subcultures. Thus, the conflict was resolved through a 'generational specific symbolic system' (Cohen, 1980: 71) [21]. This point was reaffirmed by Williams (2007: 576) [100], who maintained that subcultures founded on stylistic connotations, challenging parental correctness and acceptability, were a 'symbolic resource for youth insomuch as the dominant culture dismissed, marginalized, or rejected its appropriateness'. In this way, the different subcultures helped to alleviate 'the contradictions which remain hidden or unresolved in the parent culture'; this protected against elements of the traditional family that had been lost and were now absent, or fragmented within the home environment (Cohen, 1980: 71) [21, 81]. Moreover, Cohen (1972: 23) [19], one of the pioneering British subculture scholars, described subcultures as:

> So many variations on a central theme – the contradiction, at an ideological level, between traditional working-class Puritanism and the new hedonism of consumption; at an economic level, between the future as part of the socially mobile elite, or as part of the new lumpen. Mods, Parkers, Skinheads, Crombies, all represent, in their different ways, an attempt to retrieve some of the socially cohesive elements destroyed in their parent culture, and to combine these with elements selected from other class fractions.

Cohen did not regard the causes of crime as 'criminogenic', or manifesting from a working-class false consciousness; crime was a rational and conscious act. In the opinion of Williams and Hannerz (2014: 3) [102], 'working‐class youth cultures were seen as naturally in a state of conflict with bourgeois culture'. Through the work of Cohen (1980), youth culture research was equated with a status often negated in other theoretical perspectives, in which class was presented 'as an abstract set of external determinations'; he also 'showed it working out in practice as a material force, dressed up, as it were, in experience and exhibited in style' (During, 1999: 3) [29]. These symbolic and stylistic countercultures and movements liberated and freed youth from the dominant parental culture; from a more general Marxist perspective, 'class was considered a key analytic variable' (Williams and Hannerz, 2014: 2) [102]. Challenging the mundane and the norm, stylistic, innovative, and contemptuous imagery was used to differentiate the emerging youth subcultures from the dominant parental culture.

British sociologist Stanley Cohen 'opted to explore crime using a less liberal stance' (O'Connor, 2019: 21) [70]. He famously explored the Brighton riots during his 1972 case study titled 'Folk Devils and Moral Panics, The Creation of Mods and Rockers' [19]. The two opposing youth subcultures, and emerging stylistic trendsetters in post-war Britain consumer society, were studied and interviewed through a qualitative research focus and analysis following violent altercations. The Mods and Rockers, who had previously existed in relative harmony, became the focus and scrutiny of the media. When 'reporting on deviant events and happenings, Cohen argued that the media narrative sensationalised and distorted the nature and morality of these occurrences and those involved' (O'Connor, 2019: 121) [70]. In the view of Foucault (1977: 286) [32], the 'delinquent appears both as very close and quite alien, a perpetual threat to everyday life'. Due to this, a moral and wider social panic can ensue, thus influencing how we portray, define, and label non-conforming social groups.

2.2. Move Towards a Postmodern View of Subcultures

No definitive theoretical explanation exists to explain the motivating factors influencing a person's decision to participate in different subcultures, affiliate with gangs, or associate with other non-conforming and anti-authority groups, communities, and movements. Regarding the literature on the CCCS more generally, Williams (2011: 29) [101] noted that 'we find very little in the way of insight into embodied subcultural participation'. Hence, notions of existence and agency were negated and nullified; psychological and behavioural correlations and observable patterns structured approaches, research, and treatments. Traditional theory, perceiving and positing subculture formation and engagement as a response to 'human material conditions', now appears to be an over-simplistic theoretical analysis; it neglects other subjective/agentic facets [69]. Giddens (1984) [36], critical of traditional research and theory for negating agency, reflectivity, and unconscious motivation, believed that 'structuralism has been particularly blind' in the theoretical and epistemological analysis of the human condition; for a more detailed analysis of the 'human condition', see Arendt 1998 [4], and Sennett, 2008 [85]. Further, Hebdige (1979: 73) [41] made the point that conventional and classical subculture explorations 'attribute

an inordinate significance to the opposition between young and old, child and parent, citing the rites of passage which, even in the most primitive societies, are used to mark the transition from childhood to maturity'. Nonetheless, despite the emergence of different hybrid groupings and cohorts, in an ever-evolving and fragmented postmodernist society, social class as the primary determining and distinguishing variable refuses to disappear. As stated by Blackman (2004, cited in Blackman, 2014: 1) [10], 'subculture was a chameleon theory which possesses an ability to change its hue according to the sociological paradigm'.

Until the mid-1980s, research investigating working-class youth predominantly and stereotypically studied males residing in poor communities and neighbourhoods; literature, research, and data had a limited and narrow theoretical interest and focus [38]. Further, government rhetoric and policy were lodged between theory and ideologies from left and right realism during this period. The Conservative Government, whose roots were morally and philosophically correlated with an earlier functionalist approach to crime, adopted a right-realist perspective. Charles Murray's 'underclass' subculture theory and the research on the impact of fatherless families by Dennis and Erdos (1990) [28] were some of the primary contributors. Former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher (1987: 3) [90] 'spoke of the devastation created by crime'. Adopting a right-wing individual orthodoxy approach, crime was endemic within 'underclass' communities; thus, 'she maintained how crime invades homes; it breaks hearts; it drags down neighbourhoods, and it spreads fear'. Left realism opposed these right-wing ideologies, which originated from Karl Marx's philosophy. Key kinds of literature included those by Taylor, Walton, and Young (1973), Lea and Young (1984), and Young (1986). Gilroy (1980) and Hall (1978) further contributed to the debate by drawing attention to the wider social, political, and inherent structural racism present in British society.

Moving away from primarily positivist assumptions, paradigms, concepts, viewpoints, and ways of perceiving social reality, researchers and scholars throughout the 1990s challenged the dominant ideologies and postulations: 'cultural studies scholars had begun disassembling the class‐basis of subcultures' (Williams and Hannerz, 2014: 3) [102]. Over the previous two decades, research and theory have considerably expanded on youth-subcultural phenomena. As argued by Bennett (1999: 599) [9], the term has never been adequately defined; 'it has sometimes been applied inexactly, becoming little more than a convenience "catch all" term for any aspect of social life in which young people, style, and music intersect'. More broadly, Hebdige (1979: 5) [41] highlighted that 'culture is a notoriously ambiguous concept…refracted through centuries of usage, the word has acquired a number of quite different, often contradictory, meanings'. The author During (1999: 1) [29], reviewing Hebdige's (1979) influential literature 'Subculture: The Meaning of Style' said that historically, 'subcultures form in communal and symbolic engagements with the larger system of late industrial culture'. With this in mind, it remains problematic to posit objective and deductive factors to explain the lure of deviant subcultures: 'they are organized around, but not wholly determined by, age and class, and are expressed in the creation of styles'. He also contended that the 'line between subculture as resistance and commercial culture as both provider of pleasures and an instrument of hegemony is in fact very hard to draw - especially when youth markets are in question' (During, 1999: 1) [29].

As highlighted by O'Connor (2019: 127) [70], 'postmodernism lies in the traditions of idealist and relativist Western philosophy'. According to Chamberlain (2015: 152) [14], it is 'through this intellectual heritage that we cannot know anything about the so-called ''real world''; rather, everything we experience is mediated through mental and linguistic constructs'. Moreover, subcultures are vibrant, intense, and desirable settings in which the disenfranchised and stigmatised retreat; they seek shelter, safety, and recourse (St John, 2005 [48]; Young, 1999 [104]; Ha and Park, 2011 [39]. O'Connor further said that traditional sociological explanations of gangs negate and fail to illuminate any 'recognition of the diversity and ideologies that exist within them, and the role of this diversity in producing and transforming gangs'. Through the writings of Thornton (1995) [92] and Bennett (1999) [9], accounts of non-offending subculture participation affiliated with dance, stylistic movements, tribe affiliation, and other amorphous facets were offered. Due to the innovation of the research, materialist and structuralist paradigms and correlative patterns were now deemed theoretically insufficient [67]. In the view of St John (2006: 14) [48], there has been a shift towards less deterministic epistemologies and ways of presenting reality 'where consumption experiences, including the consumption of experience, have become central to identity production and self-expression'.

In postmodern paradigms and approaches, there is a greater focus on the participant's identity [12]. The writings of Smart (1995) [86], Foucault (1977) [32], Muggleton (2000) [66], Bennett (1999) [9], Bauman (1992) [6], Baumann (2007) [7], and Blackman (2014) [10], among many others, have challenged traditional and stereotypical thinking; they have contended that we cannot comprehend or theoretically explain with any degree of certainty, with the required depth and understanding necessary, the inner worlds of those who are socially impoverished. Postmodernism argues that traditional epistemologies and methodologies nullify existence, thus presenting an over-simplistic and convenient stance from which to frame complexity: 'the desiring subject is imprisoned within restrictive discourses' (Milovanovic, 1997b: 10) [63]. As theorised by Wall (2006: 6) [96], postmodernism aims 'not to eliminate the traditional scientific method, but to question its dominance and to demonstrate that it is possible to gain and share knowledge in many ways'. According to Bauman (1992: 35) [6], 'the postmodern perspective reveals the world as composed of an indefinite number of meaning-generating agencies, all relatively self-sustained and autonomous'. Advocating a

dynamic and more creative research lens, the postmodernist subcultural approach to research and inquiry has diverted away from theory based on rigidity, predictability, and reductionist certainty to a 'post-subcultural position that believes style is now expressed through individual consumption and lifestyle rather than its relation to production and struggle' (Blackman, 2014: 505) [10].

Hebdige (1979: 103) [41] believed that 'through rituals of consumption... the subculture at once reveals its "secret" identity and communicates its forbidden meanings. It is basically how commodities are used in a subculture which marks the subculture off from more orthodox cultural formations'. Contributing to this ever changing, dynamic, and evolving philosophical debate is the concept of 'neo-tribe' highlighted by Muggleton (1997) [66]. This term overarches numerous and varied postmodern and poststructuralist youth groups and affiliations [70]. In his analysis, Bennett (1999) [9] offered a more 'playful approach' to subculture participation. This new theoretical and literary focus, bringing together different contemporary youth collectivities, is 'superseding "subculture" as a heuristic device'; thus, 'neo-tribes are interconnected in a network, with each node representing a possible site of belonging for contemporary nomads, each achieving their fullest expression in the festal' (St John, 2005: 65) [48]. Brady and Bennett (2011: 305) [12] summarised the influence of Muggleton (2000) on the development of contemporary youth culture, stating that through his contribution [s], 'culture can no longer be regarded as a direct reflection of class background'; within postmodern consumer-based societies, identity is now shaped through a range of intangible, fluid, and negotiated online variables that were not available to previous generations of young people. In the view of Blackman (2014: 209) [10], post-subcultural theory places:

> Emphasis on individual meaning in subcultural practice, in terms of individualistic identity, pleasure, and individualistic performance defined as offering fluidity, locality, and hybridity. At the same time, post-subcultural emphasis on consumer choice to buy into subcultures reduced subcultural identity to a neo-liberal cash nexus, where freedom to choose was confused with authenticity and the DIY basis of subculture agency and dissent was lost.

Through the fluidity, flexibility, and haziness of postmodern approaches, subculture study can now be conceived 'as a metaphor that possesses a deep, romantic, and poetic resonance for many scholars' (Stahl, 1999, n.p.) [88]. As stated by Khan and Kellner (2005: 15) [52], postmodern subculture inquiry provides 'a vital oppositional space of politics and culture in which a wide diversity of individuals and groups have used emergent technologies to help produce creative social relations and forms of democratic political possibility'. Moreover, one cannot overlook the fact that emerging subcultures are gaining prominence in a world that is saturated with media awareness and being propelled into new global configurations by technological advances such as the Internet and other multimedia platforms [70]. From the viewpoint of Thornton (1995: 166) [92], the 'flexibility of new modes of commodity production and the expansion of multiple media support micro-communities and fragmented niche cultures'. For many young people, subcultures empower and liberate, supporting freedom of expression, creativity, and identity performance (Ha and Park, 2011) [39]. Pearson (2009) [75] examined how online users create and cocreate concepts of self and identity; these performance rituals and representations, intangible and fragmented, transform and evolve notions of personhood and online identity. Further:

> These performances exist within the imagination of users who then use tools and technologies to project, renegotiate, and continuously revise their consensual social hallucinations…to create not only online selves, but also to create the staging and setting in which these selves exist (Pearson, 2009, n.p.) [75].

In the view of Ulusoy and Firat (2016) [95], postmodern society's fragmented and fluid origins make it possible to study phenomena through diverse methodologies, investigating numerous social contexts. They further said that groups collectively 'constitute their own cultures and alternative modes of living and being largely on the basis of personal and collective choices and preferences arising from specific worldviews, lifestyles, musical interests, and ideological orientations' (Ulusoy and Firat, 2016: 1) [95]. Moreover, etched within this alternative and fragmented coming together of identities, bonded through shared tastes in music, fashion, and other online and stylistic trends, are 'decentred subjects'; the individual has many contradictory and multifaceted identities (Milovanovic, 1997a: 26) [62]. Kjeldgaard and Askegaard (2006: 231) [54] highlighted how the 'uniform consumption habits of young people all over the world—their clothing styles, music tastes, and media habits' have transformed subculture dynamics and focus. Hodkinson and Lincoln (2007) [44] said that 'partial or full membership to subcultures' has evolved through greater Internet access, choice, freedom, and diversity [70]. Thus, different multimedia, 'artistic, stylistic, and cultural practices no longer have to be performed in the structured community landscape' (O'Connor, 2019: 130) [70]; participation is now removed from the traditional public spaces in which conventional research inquiry took place. They pointed out that 'rather than forming fixed collective groupings…. young people today are more likely to.. [negotiate] personal paths through a myriad of temporary and partial identities' (Hodkinson and Lincoln, 2007: 3, 5) [44]. Mason and Wigley's (2013: 173) [99] research 'explored the chav phenomenon as a consumer subculture, with special reference to branding and consumer behaviour'; the identity of those engaged in chav subcultures was reflected through their choice of clothing. Pertaining crucial symbolic meaning, it helps them to 'feel part of a group by keeping up with the fashion trends of their friends'. Other research by Goulding and Saren (2006: 205) [37] on Gothic subcultures found that performance of gender identity was expressed through their

'choice of clothes, hairstyles and make-up'; in turn, the individual was able to create 'an appearance for private and public consumption'.

As shown in the research by Nayak (2003: 306) [68], post-subculture studies now 'dominate colourful, cultural accounts of young people's lives, which celebrate the optimism of stylistic and musical possibility'. Thornton (1995: 160) [92] posited the influence of the mass media more generally as being significant in the public's perceptions and attitudes towards subcultures, contending that 'the media do not just represent but participate in the assembly, demarcation, and development of music cultures'. According to Baudrillard's concept of 'hyperreality', the individual's inability to make a distinction between artificial simulation and real-life happenings is compromised due to the continuous exposure and bombardment from multimedia stimuli. Expanding on this, Allen and Mendick (2013: 12, 13) [1] explored the extent to which reality television shapes notions of class-based identities: 'social class is always being re/made in and through judgments of authenticity, as young people negotiate the reality contract with a range of reality television programmes'. More broadly, despite the need for young people to develop individual coping strategies and other modes of resilience, 'many young people are managing their transition to independent adulthood via explicitly collaborative techniques', and 'sharing transition experiences, whether positive or negative' (Cuzzocrea and Collins, 2015: 19) [26].

3. Methodology

The men who participated in the research were former offenders with a history of substance misuse; making sense of their lives required a methodology that recognised their biographical complexity. In addition, each research volunteer had previously been engaged with drug and alcohol misuse programmes and had previous involvement as a service client with other ETE provisions [71]. Due to the non-conventional approach adopted, this study did not confine itself to one specific research setting. Participant data were collected through two primary sources: informal Dictaphone conversations and written narratives. Dictaphone conversations with the men took place in several locations, such as in the fields and farm areas where some of the manual work occurred. At different points in the study, the research volunteers were asked to amend and clarify any contradictions of events and happenings they considered misrepresentative of their learning and lives; they were routinely consulted and spoken to privately [71]. The length of taped conversations and the time allocated to each participant or cohort discussion depended on the client [s]; they decided on each taped interview's start and finishing time. All the research volunteers were male, between 18 and 65 years of age. Moreover, all the men were raised in the working-class community of Bradford in West Yorkshire, with English being the primary language [71]. Over a three-to-four-year period, we met once or twice a week. Besides

this, there were also weekly one-to-one mentoring sessions with individual group members. Additionally, for two years, twice a month, we arranged group outings; the group discussed and agreed upon the location of the excursions [71].

Because they were volunteers in the investigation, they were free to leave or take time away from the inquiry; they could return at any time to resume their participation [71]. Also, due to the complex histories of the men, periods of absence from the research process were anticipated. When overcoming substance misuse and its association with mental illness, the research volunteers could have potentially relapsed and removed themselves from the study at any time [15]; any action taken would have adhered to ethical guidelines and protocol. More generally, if they wanted to withdraw from the inquiry, this did not affect their right to continue their involvement in the education provided. Also, there was an ongoing concern regarding the many slip-ups and setbacks that could have arisen at any time amongst the cohort; this contributed to making the investigation unique. The reasoning for this flexibility was that it was never the intention to silence the men. It was vital that they conversed, communicated, and acted authentically, passionately, and with conviction [71].

Autoethnography was used as the primary research methodology; this enabled me to locate personal experiences of offending within the wider social and political context in which my offending behaviour took place, and help the clients appreciate the extent to which similar personal, social, and economic barriers have impacted their lives [71]. Generally, it is evident that 'criminologists tend to present their analysis in the form of inhuman data', to which I ask 'Why?' One academic's answer was that 'So no one will care, keep it statistical, inhuman, no compassion' (Bosworth et al. 2005: 259) [11]. By allowing relationships to evolve naturally with the volunteers, they were encouraged to express themselves honestly and openly. The research focused on personally significant experiences and pivotal moments in life, including learning and education, which often have little value or go unnoticed in offender research and study. In agreement with Ellis, Adams, and Bochner (2011) [30], if we are to challenge the hostile rhetoric and demonisation of struggling minorities, including former offenders, it is important not to negate or remove emotions, subjectivity, and uniqueness from literature and theoretical construction. This has been perceived as fatalistic among traditional modernist theorists and scholars. As a methodological paradigm, autoethnography opens up a space of resistance between the individual (auto) and the collective (ethno), where the writing (graphy) of singularity cannot be foreclosed [30].

Rather than feeling the need to suppress the richness of the researcher's experience, the narrative of the men was liberated in numerous genres of writing; it became imperative to the process, and through multiple layers of writing, personal experiences were connected to the wider social and cultural context [71]. Also used in the original research was narrative inquiry; the transcribed data presented occurrences

and instances of microscopic detail that often go unnoticed [5]. Overcash (2003) [74] emphasised how narrative accounts permit participants the opportunity to recall events and interpret them from their perspective; they also enable the necessary time and freedom to reflect and make sense of one's own story. Therefore, experiences that continue to evoke sensations and feelings can be captured; even those lasting a split second in time become a source of data. Because of this, something of greater significance arose: the subject became the owner and author of their story, and they were permitted the freedom to recollect sensitive happenings without feeling the need to conceal moments of immense significance [71].

The stories aimed not to present a structured and analytical format. Due to autoethnography's intent and theoretical propositions, it was crucial that the research volunteers articulated in their own words the extent to which, if any, they had been influenced through the unfolding educational process. As told by Attard (2012, p. 169) [5], the dialogue allowed the research volunteers the opportunity to give 'meaning to their lives through the stories they tell'. Clandinin and Connelly (2000: 4) [16] gave emphasis to the importance of the 'mutual construction of the research relationship in which both practitioners and researchers feel cared for and have a voice with which to tell their stories'. For almost five years, boundaries were blurred through a teaching style that was unorthodox and non-conventional [35]. Furthermore, although most offender senior managers would enforce the practice that such interactions remain strictly professional, structure and expectations were implemented informally. Remaining on the perimeters when you feel touched by an authentic sensation, one which leads you into a world of intrigue, is denying yourself moments that otherwise seldom reveal themselves; you must remain open to their possibility [84]. To establish the types of connections necessary to form meaningful and compassionate relations and rapport, through dialogue it was important to engage in reciprocal conversation; together, we shared in each other's stories, adjoined in real conversation, and bonded through a communal and unique understanding of the world [70]. Granted, disagreements and petty quarrels occasionally arose. However, through group discussion dialogue, they were resolved; it was imperative to deal with and rectify them appropriately. We learned how to tolerate each other and respect the many differences that existed; the men always found a way to resolve firmly held viewpoints and opinions [71].

4. Findings

The findings demonstrate the potential of education to support former offenders to live meaningful and productive lives [71]. Emerging from the investigation were the advantages of assimilating and structuring the teaching and learning around crucial subculture ethics and paradigms. Through their histories of crime and substance misuse cultures, we discovered fertile ground to nurture, transform,

and evolve. Similar to their experiences of subculture life, having a voice absorbed the men into a 'communicative space' [31], which supported inclusion and participation [93]. In this environment, 'learning was neither by force or coercion, and how they perceived others needed to be respected' (O'Connor, 2021: 7) [71]. Demonstrating the value of time and acceptance, a space was collaboratively and compassionately created; hierarchy and status eroded. Working with the participants in a non-judgmental, inclusive, and accepting environment was crucial; it was essential to educate the men in a manner they could relate to through their histories of subculture participation [46].

As a group, we challenged the 'rigid objectivity of the education system, trialled and sought alternative strategies, and placed purpose and meaning over targets and outcomes'; evidence supported 'that the simplest modes of teaching' induced positive ontological change (O'Connor, 2019: 96, 199) [70]. Further, the men developed a yearning to contribute to society, promoting attitudes and behaviours to support rehabilitation. Nonetheless, 'I understood that change possesses a certain fragility, impossible to predetermine, foolish to guarantee' (O'Connor, 2019: 199) [70]. The findings support Bauman (1992: 3) [6], who considered the 'humanization process' of education; hence, 'educators hold the key to the continuous reproduction of cohabitation as a human society'. The men described how in the years and decades imprisoned in criminal gangs and substance misuse subcultures, allegiances were formed through the uncompromising and non-negotiable code of the street [2]. In this research, relationships were nurtured through norms, values, and attitudes the men could associate with through their subculture affiliation. Terry summarises the sense of solidarity, cohesion, and togetherness:

Terry: Tuesday, September 22nd, 2015: In our group, I know it is only a small group but the people who are there, are there because they want to be, not because they have been forced into it. When you are not being forced into it, you look at it differently. If you are forced into it (education) you think, fuck that. Especially when you are younger, you rebel against it, don't you? You play up to your teacher and stuff, and end up getting detentions and that sort of shit. But up there (at the farm) it is a more relaxed informal social gathering, rather than an intense education.

One of the primary considerations when deciding how best to foster a space in which the men felt protected, cared for, and safe was to listen empathetically, without motive, bias, or prejudgment to the voices of these brave and honourable men. We spoke of our encounters with contrasting criminal subcultures through individual and group Dictaphone conversations. Over time, this helped to 'bridge the gap between the so-called expert knower and the voices of prisoners and former prisoners who are largely absent in the discipline of criminology' (Darke and Aresti, 2016: 26) [27]. Taking these into account, fostered was a community of learning that, in many ways, loosely resembled the different subcultures in which we had found ourselves imprisoned;

connections were formed with others who also felt that society was a closed door. Over time, the research volunteers agreed that the intrinsically gratifying sensations and feelings experienced in the group were similar to those felt in isolated and marginalised subcultures. Through a process of acceptance and togetherness, we were captivated, albeit willingly, into a group that offered refuge and shelter. The research volunteers commented that the learning culture provided a spiritual space in which they felt secure and acknowledged. Without undue pressure or expectation, they found the courage to explore the shards of existence that had manifested in horrific, ritualistic, and violent acts and happenings for years and decades; when left dormant, these embedded sensations and memories become cancerous to the human condition. As the trust between the men developed, they felt able to share their thoughts and feelings; they experienced a sense of citizenship and benefited from a culture that promoted equality [72]. Below, Mark highlights the advantages of being part of a group that accepted and embraced the unique and diverse personalities and qualities inherent within offender learning subcultures:

Mark: Friday 9th January, 2015: For me, it is all about the people there and yourself (Colin). Because we can all contribute to the group, we are all individuals, we are all different people from different backgrounds, and some of the group are in recovery. Some of the group are still using (reduction programmes). However, we do not attend intoxicated, we go there for the education, and we get something out of it. We just do not sit in a classroom getting tutored and taught, talked down to, and talked at. We are asked questions and it is informal, it is good and I enjoy it. I get a lot out of it, without the group I think I would be back to square one again, back to the drink. I have been to some other services, and to be honest with you, they are just not for me; I have tried them all. You can come when you want, there is no pressure, that is why I like the group.

Lave and Wenger (2014: 6) [57] would describe the research volunteers as being 'a group of people who shared a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic and who', over time, developed a community of practice through the nature and intimacy of 'time spent together working towards a common goal'. From a personal perspective, 'I have always assumed that regardless of academic ability, the voices, needs, and aspirations of the students should be embraced and respected at all times; they are, therefore, my equals as individuals' (O'Connor, 2019: 86) [70]. To ensure I worked with the men in an honourable, ethical, and authentic manner, I dedicated many hours to recollecting and narrating my subculture experiences spanning two decades. Sat at my desk, weeks and months were spent reflecting on why I remained psychologically and emotionally attached and loyal to a lifestyle that celebrated violence and endorsed areas, regional segregation, and brutality, and remained indifferent to the passing of comrades and peers. One crucial point emerged from the narrative, irrespective of the petty and often minor fallouts, which was that the bond established

ensured forgiveness; we accepted the errors of ways, behaviours, and mishaps common in subcultures. Appreciating the fallibility of the men who stood before me, I welcomed the challenges and unforeknown setbacks. Stepping away from familiarity into an unfamiliar and unchartered landscape evoked in the men fear of the unknown; together, we walked towards the future with optimism and an air of surety. Mark summarised this on Tuesday 29th September, 2015:

The thing is with you, you have not given up on me, and a lot of people have done. They have closed the door in my face. Where with you it is different, you have never judged me, you have never given up on me, and you have always been there for me.

Another essential theme to emerge was the therapeutic benefits one receives through prolonged engagement; criminal subcultures support the disclosing and revealing of stories grounded in biographical adversity and misfortune. Sharing gritty and often traumatic incidents and events with an attentive audience provides interpersonal, emotional, and psychological well-being. In these exchanges, men become embroiled, accepted, and adjoined in these ritualistic encounters. When listening to their stories and insightful accounts, men stood as equals, voices pertained to equality, and friendships were formed, which helped the research volunteers reconnect to the trauma and anguish still evident [70]. To support teaching and learning, these intimate and at times intense exchanges were used as a means to explore attitudes and ontologies towards offending. To take the men back in time to a specific place, context, and setting, one strategy employed was the notion of 'offender sharing'. For over four years, each session began with a confidential and thoughtful group exchange of dialogue; providing unconditional and uncompromising relational support was imperative during these moments and encounters [80]. Baumann (2007: 6) [7] 'deems the concept of human dignity as a normative one, and human dignity is like a right in this respect: it does not go away if violated'. The extract below demonstrates the respect, dignity, and affection the men shared in these encounters:

Terry: Tuesday 8th September, 2015: Everybody should have a voice. It is that some people find it easier to express themselves more than some other people do. We all give each other a chance. It is like if we are doing a catch-up or how has your week been, we will all sit and we will listen, and then we will question afterwards. And then it moves on to the next person. But if you are in a college, they have not got the time to spend on a one-to-one. And people get disillusioned with that.

The research volunteers agreed that informal, caring, and compassionate relationships needed to be sustained and established over an extended period of time. Prior to the research, the men spent countless years lurking in the shadows of society. Moreover, we understood that the social stigma we own, the subhuman, socially indifferent, and tarnished notions of personhood that define and disadvantage, reflect a wider social and political injustice and bias towards

current and former offenders. Aware of the sanctuary and security provided in alienated and stigmatised cohorts and countercultures, the best way to support and nurture the learning was to create an ambience in which the men felt accepted, understood, and embraced. The gentle steps taken back into conventional society can be fraught with uncertainty. Although the terms subculture and counterculture are often used interchangeably, in this article, the concept of 'counterculture' refers to the research subjects' explicit 'rejection of the dominant cultures' view on appropriate teaching and learning (Williams and Hannerz, 2014: 2) [102]. Despite their concerns and trepidations, the men were emboldened and inspired, and they realised that society was not a closed door. In particular, they spoke of being educated in a kind, thoughtful, and respectful manner throughout the inquiry, something not experienced in conventional learning settings [70]. With a growing sense of togetherness, strong intimate bonds were formed. The collective sense of equality experienced by the participants brought the group together as a whole. In many cases, the cohort dynamics were likened and comparable to the subcultures we had spent years and decades participating in. Mark summarised this in the extract below:

Mark: Friday 9th January, 2015: There is a good atmosphere between everybody. Everybody gets on and everyone understands about everyone else's problems, and there is no judging. No one judges anybody else; it is all supportive. I have been to other services where it is all about the individual, whereas in our group it is about us (collective), and I get a lot from it. Although I am speaking for myself, I can guarantee you that if you speak to the rest (other group members), they will tell you the same as what I am telling you. Most other groups and services patronise you, whereas now I feel that I am finding myself, and I feel like I know where I am going now. For me, it is all about the people there and yourself (Colin). Because we can all contribute to the group, we are all individuals, we are all different people from different backgrounds, and some of the groups are in recovery.

Ospina et al. (2004: 55) [73] noted that trust between persons needs to be sustained and 'comes only from relationships built over time'. By creating a culture of learning that validated the conditions necessary to care for and compassionately educate, the men who began this journey as strangers discovered the strength to re-open and re-live deep-seated traumas; this helped to balm the wounds of the past. As highlighted, years and decades were spent escaping the past through alcohol abuse, dirty syringes, and crack pipes; the different subcultures narrated kept the men locked in a cycle of self-harm, turmoil, and mistrust towards others who they considered to be disingenuous and insincere. Committing themselves to each other over an extended period of time, the communal support and appreciation of the suffering endured by the others transcended the meaning and significance of learning beyond paradigms of anything resembling conventional or pragmatic approaches. The fluidity, openness, and dialogue conveyed among the men

supported the recollection and deconstruction of rich modes of existence pertaining to adversity and pain; together, we addressed and sought resolutions to their 'individual and social obstacles; my loyalty was without compromise' (O'Connor, 2019: 145) [70]. I asked Craig to summarise the significance of embedding the offender's life experiences into the framework of teaching and learning; how had this essential learning paradigm enabled them to move forward?

Craig: Wednesday 9th September, 2015: We are supporting each other, and it is understanding. You feel comfortable in talking about your situation, nothing is held back, and everyone is sharing their problems, and the deepest problems what they have got, probably what they would not talk to other males about or other people about. And for males to feel comfortable with others and to talk about their problems, in truthfulness, it is good because you know that you are not alone in your problems, and plus you can help each other.

Anderson (1999) [2] wrote about the 'men and women who live, breathe, and die by the code of the street' (O'Connor, 2019: 93) [70]. Relationships built on trust unite the alienated and protect against structural and wider social inequalities. One of the core prerequisites to healthy and sustainable relationships is trust; this cannot be compromised or violated. The research volunteers also considered trust a necessary requirement to contribute and demonstrate allegiance and loyalty. Craig, on Thursday 19th March, 2015 indicated that 'trust is important between me and you. Respect me as a person, not just Craig who has been the ex-addict or ex-offender. It is just like Craig, do you know what I mean, you are just like Colin. You have got to have personal respect, and respect for each other, their feelings and their past'. On Friday, 29th May 2015, he also asserted that 'because we have got trust, it is give and take; I get out of it as much as you get out of it. If I was not getting anything out of it I would not come'. Thus, throughout the investigation, the notion of 'trust' was one of the vital learning values; without this, relationships would only ever have been superficial, peripheral, and depthless. As trust developed, relationships progressed to a much deeper level and friendships were established. By offering myself to the men, something authentic was experienced and felt in the space we shared. Craig elaborated on this, as detailed in the extract below:

Craig: Friday 29th, May, 2015: I see you more as a mate than anything else, and if you have a good relationship where you are free to open up and say personal stuff and have banter, it just makes the whole learning process as more informal, it does not seem like a chore. It is like bettering yourself in an environment where you can be free, and have fun, and not be conscious about this, that, and the other. But I do know that there has to be a limit on that, because when people are doing a job, we can't all be friends you know. But there has got to be some sort of leeway.

By the end of the inquiry, all of the 'research volunteers had moved into various productive and meaningful

progressions they previously perceived as either unattainable or far-reaching beyond their capabilities' (O'Connor, 2019: 99) [70]. Attending voluntarily, what 'began as initial intrigue, or as a means of filling the void, in time unfolded into something entirely unexpected; the men now had high expectations and aspirations' (O'Connor, 2019: 100) [70]. The counterculture of education provided a space for the men to transform in ways they did not think were achievable or possible. Drawing on the theory of Rogers (1961) [80], 'openness to new experiences and situations are more likely when we accept rather than distort or try to fit together dysfunctional and damaged existing meaning structures' (O'Connor, 2019: 178) [70]. The extract below summarised the progress made by Craig, who secured a voluntary work placement at a local crime and substance misuse service in Leeds City Centre:

Craig: Wednesday 29th April, 2015: If I could go back ten months, I would not think I would be in this position. Ten months ago, I would have been robbing lead off the roofs, and using drugs every day and grafting (robbing) all I fucking could, without even thinking where I am getting a bag (drugs) from tomorrow, let alone anything else.

Researcher: Wednesday 29th April, 2015: So, is there light at the end of the tunnel now?

Craig: Wednesday 29th April, 2015: Yes, I am nearly at the light at the end of the tunnel. Twelve months ago, I could not even see a tunnel, it was dark. I am seeing a bright future, if I knuckle down and put some hard work in, it does not just come free, does it?

Terry, unemployed for over two decades, described his newfound aspirations and yearning to lead a more productive life. After squandering years and decades imprisoned in offending and drinking subcultures, he needed time, care, and compassion to find his voice. Living unconventionally and viewing life through a hazy intoxicated worldview, he found companionship in his relationship with alcohol. Recollecting both the personal and the wider social and political facets underlying his lower social status over many years brought Terry to the realisation that life had more to offer. Despite setbacks, he was ready to impact the world. He wore his heart on his sleeve as he bonded with his peers through their shared adversity and hardship. By permitting Terry the necessary time, he could assess the genuineness and authenticity of my actions and intentions. This supported his transformation through the challenges, uncertainties, and ambiguities of research inquiry. In the testimony below, he articulated a newfound hope and sense of optimism:

Terry: Wednesday 13th May, 2015: From March last year 2014, I have had a lot of distractions, my priorities have completely changed. The stuff that has happened I never thought that I would have been able to do……I have took a step, and I don't know where that next step is going to lead to. And this step on Monday (college) could lead to all sorts. Because I mean I might be there, and then I might bump into someone with an idea, who might have an idea, and it could come to fruition. I know it sounds daft, but it is a possibility, anything is possible.

The subculture of education that developed ensured that each cohort member felt valued, included, and embraced. Over the years spent working together, Mark learned to trust other likeminded peers. Creating similar emotional, psychological, and spiritual conditions and connections resonated with Mark through his previous experiences of subculture participation. Labelled as being troublesome by other services and provisions, he changed in ways that could have neither been predicted nor foreknown. By the end of the inquiry, he had secured a voluntary work placement mentoring former offenders with a history of substance misuse. In the extracts below, Mark summarised his learning journey:

Researcher: Tuesday 29th September, 2015: During the last two years there has been a lot of ups and downs, it has been a long journey, how do you feel today? You are due to start working as an offender mentor for the Directions Service in Halifax?

Mark: Tuesday 29th September, 2015: It is the best that I have felt in a long while to tell you the truth because I have only ever been surrounded by drink. The Directions Service really made me feel like they wanted me to be there. And I can't wait to start next week, half a day on Thursday and then a full day on Friday just to start with, and then as I progress, I will take some more days on.

Researcher: Tuesday 29th September, 2015: I can sense that this is a real passion:

Mark: Tuesday 29th September, 2015: Well, this has always been a passion, but I have always been intoxicated, I have never been as absent for so long. The times I have been, it has not been one hundred percent (in terms of commitment), there has always been that shadow of a doubt that I will want to drink. Whereas now, I don't want to drink. I just want to focus on my life and my future.

5. Conclusion

This article demonstrates the transformative capacity of education to connect to those who statistically fail to achieve in mainstream education. A key theme from the investigation has been the positive influence on the men's learning journeys when values, elements, and paradigms, more commonly associated with deviant subculture affiliation, were embedded and assimilated into the framework of education. The research volunteers described how the learning culture contested their prior perceptions and stereotypes of education. As the research progressed and unfolded, the depth, nature, and intimacy of dialogue nurtured over many years created an ambience conducive to the interrogation of complex biographical adversity. Repressed memories, feelings, and sensations were revealed through conversation in various nuanced ways; the lasting significance of the past was evidenced in the narratives of the men. Throughout the inquiry, the men were supported as they bravely entered 'the fearful journey into himself, into the buried fear, and hate, and love which he has never been able to let flow in him' (Rogers, 1961: 67) [80].

The article supports the view that education as a concept is neither static nor fixed, it is ever-evolving, fluid, and dynamic; the men's journeys were transformative, authentic, and layered in complexity and uncertainty. Over an extended research period, the men described how their learning and experiences were in contrast to what they had previously come across in education. As a result, their learning flourished; this signified a key turning point in their lives. The research volunteers spoke in detail about their passion and willingness to commit to the project. Established was a culture of learning that supported freedom of speech; the quietest to the most boisterous were equally valued and embraced. Listening to the men's voices, without judgement, bias, or urge to modify or dilute the words conveyed, was highlighted as imperative through the different stages of transformation and rehabilitation.

The men commented how the subculture of learning enabled them to thrive and engage in the most extraordinary ways. Within the space we occupied, time became our ally, absorbed in heart-felt dialogue that 'leads us to a shared meaning, a process of negotiation and persuasion' (Ryan, Amorim, and Kusch, 2013: 120) [82]. Over time, 'learning amounted to much more than accreditation. It captivated the men and challenged them to overcome personal biases, which they came to recognise as negatively affecting their ability to live more constructively' (O'Connor, 2019: 229) [70]; they discovered the will and determination to break free from the shackles of oppression. As a result of what educationally developed, for the first time in years, they found the 'strength to take their place in the external world, which they had previously regarded as daunting' (O'Connor, 2019: 255) [70]. The narratives of Mark, Craig, and the other research volunteers provide theoretical and academic support for the transformative potential of offender education when pedagogy and practice depart from conventional attitudes and processes to education.

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