

# Exploring Friendships behind Prison Walls through a Knowledge Equity Approach

*Donna* is a Research Fellow in Public Health at the University of Southampton. *Marc* is the CEO of Fair Justice, an organisation striving for a fairer criminal justice system.

**Positive connections between men in prison are rarely thought about or discussed in academic research. Yet as Crewe (2014),<sup>1</sup> Laws and Lieber (2020),<sup>2</sup> and Morey and Crewe (2018) highlight,<sup>3</sup> considerable intimacy and camaraderie exists between imprisoned men. In this paper, we utilise academic collaborative writing — taking a knowledge equity approach — to examine friendships between imprisoned men. One author with first hand lived experience of prison (Marc) writes about their experiences freely in their own words, in the first person, and creates the wider narrative together with an academic (Donna). We suggest these conditions create a more relaxed and natural position for a person with lived experiences of prison to share them, arguably encouraging openness surrounding sensitive topics like friendships during incarceration, deepening insights. Through this process of co-production, we aim to bridge some of the distance from the conventional space of ‘research participant’ towards a more equitable ‘participant author’.**

In the following sections, we present and discuss the participant author’s experiences of prison friendships. We argue that there are similarities as well as differences in how these friendships function compared to friendships beyond the prison gates. Similarities include friendships becoming established through shared interest and values, being maintained by shared bonding experiences, creating safety and trust, and becoming fractured and finished by disagreements. The differences with wider community friendships include the function of safety as a necessity, the unavoidable shared trauma and also empathy, and the compounded grieving of loss involved when friends are removed. We also highlight that the specific dynamics of imprisoned friendships are infused with an ‘imposed intimacy’, which

functions in complex ways with various psychological impacts. We make four new contributions to the existing small body of work on imprisoned friendships, i) unpacking different stages of a friendship life cycle in prison, ii) expanding understandings of positive emotional flows between imprisoned men, iii) identifying a previously unexamined feature of imprisoned friendships, ‘imposed intimacy’ and discussing some of its impacts, including, iv) highlighting associated potential psychological risks. We have added an additional section to the paper where we reflect on our collaborative process of working towards knowledge equity.

## **Experience of forming, maintaining, fracturing, and endings of friendships in prison**

This part of the paper presents my (Marc’s) personal views and experiences of friendships in prison. Having served multiple custodial sentences, with the last being an Imprisonment for Public Protection (IPP) sentence where I served eight years in prison, I have experienced a wide range of friendships. These friendships consisted of multi-layered dynamics in the way that they were formed, maintained, fractured, and finished. These layers were infused with complexity.

Friendships between people who are or have been incarcerated together within the prison system tend to be thought of as ‘bad’ and stereotypically accompanied with negative connotation by prison staff, probation officers, and other officials who hold the power within the prison estate. However, friendships in prison can also be built on positive interactions borne through mutual experiences little recognised by prison officials.

## **Forging Friendships Inside**

So, how do these prison friendships form? People with common interests tend to gravitate towards one

- 
1. Crewe, B. (2014). Not Looking Hard Enough: Masculinity, Emotion, and Prison Research. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 20(4), 392–403.
  2. Laws, B., & Lieber, E. (2022). King, Warrior, Magician, Lover’: Understanding expressions of care among male prisoners. *European Journal of Criminology*, 19(4), 469-487.
  3. Morey, M., & Crewe, B. (2018.) Work, intimacy, and prisoner masculinities. In *New perspectives on prison masculinities* (pp. 17-41). Palgrave Macmillan.

another. This is not any different to friendships built outside of prison.<sup>4</sup> For example, in prison it is typical to see people who use the gym associating with other gym users, or people who use narcotics associating with other narcotic users, or people who are interested in studying hanging around with other students. Other factors, for instance, cultural, regional, or life habits, such as addictions, can all be inroads for a friendship to form. This is seen in rehabilitation journeys as well. The same people will attend educational classes and offending behaviour programmes and behave in ways that steer away from criminality and recidivism.

Shared language, dialogue, and dialect are common features in the initial stages of forming a friendship in prison. A recognisable street or regional slang can be comforting where you feel understood and accepted. Although people in prison clearly all have one thing in common — serving a custodial sentence — this commonality does not automatically make everyone friends. Their wider interests and values become the foundations for friendship rather than criminal activity.

Prison by default is an environment that can easily create mistrust. When forging a friendship group that feels trustworthy, it promotes the sense of safety and acts as a vehicle to feel less vulnerable. Feeling safe within your friendship group becomes essential which is different to friendships on the outside where it is desirable but not necessary. Being a 'criminal' can lead to a very paranoid lifestyle and outlook of the world around you with a sense of having to second guess every interaction with people in an order to stay safe. Once you enter custody the paranoia experienced as a 'criminal' in the community is amplified to the point that it impacts your approach to making friends. This magnified paranoia draws you to people with common interests that make you feel safe and less vulnerable. When you strike up a friendship in prison you spend most of the 'unlocked' day with that person. You eat together, watch TV together, go to the gym together and even use communal showers together. This constant close proximity can generate shared emotional states between cell mates. For example, at times, when one person is happy so is the other, or when one is sad the other is also sad.

This close proximity comes with added tensions. For example, unwritten rules regarding the toilet whilst in multi occupancy cells. The expectation is that one

does not use the toilet for anything other than to urinate whilst the other person is in the cell and using the communal toilets outside the cell otherwise. This often creates animosity when there are no opportunities to use any other form of toilet facilities, especially at night when you are locked behind the door. You will not find this rule written down in any policy framework. As a first timer in prison, it is normally the first thing that you are told by your cell mate when entering the cell for the first time. It is seen as a sign of disrespect if this rule is not followed and can lead to physical altercations between cell mates which can damage the forging of potential friendships and fracture friendships that may already exist.

Although most toilets are behind a curtain or in a cupboard like fixture, these attempts at privacy bring their own issues as there are spy holes for the officers to check that you are in there. This always worried me as you would have to be careful not to be accused of 'exposing yourself' by using the toilet at the same time as an officer uses the spy hole. Allegations of exposure could lead onto disciplinary issues.

Relations with authority can break down quickly between officers and the men. For example, you could be speaking to an officer then the next moment you could be restrained by that same officer, or a spontaneous fight erupts between people on the landing. Prisons are environments where

everything appears calm one minute and the next, they become a place of total chaos. Paradoxically, this volatility can help friendships to become cemented as they act as a vehicle of safety amidst the instability of potential violence. With this in mind, it is fair to ask whether these are 'real' friendships or just friendships of convenience. Likewise, is this sense of safety through physical protection enough to enable the maintenance of the friendship over a period of time?

### ***Maintaining Friendships***

The importance of bonding is vital, as having common interests is not necessarily enough to maintain a friendship. Bonding happens through shared experiences. For example, treatment received from the prison system, issues with contact with children and families, or through enforced proximity. These bonds may vary from person to person but the stronger the bond that is shared, the stronger the friendship.

Paradoxically, this volatility can help friendships to become cemented as they act as a vehicle of safety amidst the instability of potential violence.

Mirroring the wider community, in-prison bonding also happens through shared celebrations and shared grieving. When it is someone's birthday, friends get together and celebrate the occasion. In some cases there will be cake, music, and a food spread. This is entirely provided by your peers and all purchased from the weekly available canteen. Similarly, when someone experiences a close bereavement their friendship group may go to the chapel and pray with them, light a candle, or be there as a shoulder to cry on.

Acknowledgement of your grief during incarceration is ever present through a shared understanding from your peers. However, the peer support differs from prison to prison. In HMP Grendon's therapeutic community there is the support of the entire therapeutic community as speaking and sharing experiences of grief is encouraged. This is distinct from prisons that are not run with therapeutic principles. In these prisons support is provided by close friends rather than the larger therapeutic support group.

A unique aspect of strong bonding inside compared to friendships in the wider community is the amount of shared trauma, taken on by all due to shared confinement. Examples of these traumatic experiences could be mistreatment from the system, being knocked back on a progressive move, being turned down for employment, or when someone experiences a death of someone that is close to them.

On the one hand, taking on other people's trauma when you yourself are experiencing your own trauma contributes to the maintaining of the friendship, especially when you may be experiencing the same type of trauma. But on the other hand, sharing experiences of similar trauma can also become overbearing. Even if the root cause of the trauma is not happening directly to you, it is still difficult to distance yourself — physically and psychologically — from the experiences of other people.

Take the case of a death for example. A member of the chaplaincy team gets assigned to inform the person of the death. If it is at a time where staff are available this is usually done in a side office or at the chapel, in a private space. However, if no staff are available or you are on lockdown behind the door then the chaplaincy member will share the news through the door, standing on the public landing. When this happens, the personal news can be heard by many others as the chaplain's

update and any subsequent conversation between the two will take place within ear shot of the rest of the landing. In prison sharing others' grief is unavoidable.

Openness is also unavoidable in prison as the close proximity of the living conditions means that people will know most of your deeply personal and intimate business. Others will know when you use the toilet, when you have a doctor's appointment, when you are having a personal visit, and when a loved one dies on the outside. Regardless of whether you want others to know or not, this knowledge is shared, inevitably leading to a deeper understanding of one another. They will see when you are upset and sad. There is no option to conceal these emotions as you might choose to with friends on the outside. This means friends made in

prison tend to know you better than those outside, even those friends you have known since birth. For instance, I would never go to meet a friend down the pub and open up about my feelings to the extent that I have whilst in prison.

Whilst in the community, there is the option not to engage with friends. You can switch your phone off, not answer the door, and become invisible. This is not the case whilst you are incarcerated. People know exactly where you are and what time you will be there. There really is no space to get away, and it is impossible to have time for yourself. Friends can come to the door flap at any time. There is

not anywhere to be alone. People come with good intentions, asking if you're ok, and sometimes you want to tell them to go away but instead you often internalise your emotions to avoid any potential confrontation.

Even if you are in a single cell at night the officers come round and check on you, turning on the light and slamming the door flap. This may cause high levels of stress and can promote a sense of claustrophobia, potentially encouraging frustrated outbursts. This can lead to negative consequences which could impact upon positive outcomes and progression. There is no time alone to destress. Even if you choose to cover your door flap to try and regain some privacy, this is against prison rules and so could lead to adjudications or other punitive measures.

The shared restrictions to privacy, shared celebrations and shared grief of bereavement, together with the spoken and unspoken shared empathy of each other's trauma, contribute to the strengthening of

A unique aspect of strong bonding inside compared to friendships in the wider community is the amount of shared trauma, taken on by all due to shared confinement.

friendship bonds. However, are these types of bonds enough to maintain friendships, if and when they end or become fractured?

### **Friendships' Fractures and Finishes**

There are multiple ways that friendships end inside prison. Mirroring friendships in the community, friends fall out over things such as money, differences of opinion, or people just drift apart. The most common reason a friendship ends is when someone leaves the establishment. This can happen when people come to the end of their sentence and are released, people get moved for progressive reasons, or people get moved for disciplinary reasons.

When people are finishing their sentences and granted approval to move to a lower security prison a date is normally known well in advance enabling everyone to prepare. Yet, when people leave the establishment for disciplinary reasons there is no warning, it comes out of the blue. There is no time for people to say 'goodbye' or exchange personal details as the removal is normally done covertly. Imagine that you have been friends with someone for two or even three years, living on the same landing as them. You say 'good night' and when you wake up in the morning, they are gone. You do not even know what prison they have been sent to as disclosing this information would be seen as a 'breach of security'.

Regardless of the reason, when friends leave, a grieving process takes place. Prisons can be very lonely places and having a companion within those walls can make it feel more bearable. When a friend leaves, this promotes all the feelings that may already be there from the things that you are missing from your life outside. This causes the sense of loss to become

Imagine that you have been friends with someone for two or even three years, living on the same landing as them. You say 'good night' and when you wake up in the morning, they are gone.

multiplied, adding to the feelings of loss that are already bubbling away underneath. Missing family and friends is ever-present for incarcerated people. For example, not being able to attend weddings creates feelings of loss and missing out. This is also felt when not attending funerals. Not being able to say goodbye to loved ones is an experience that is felt deeply when inside. I experienced this with the death of my grandmother. Unsurprisingly, when I had a close friend shipped out on a security move the feelings were similar. Not being able to say goodbye mirrored not saying goodbye to my grandmother.

### **Discussion**

Marc's account of friendships inside prison resonates with themes explored in the small body of existing research on prison friendships as well as the literature on friendships more broadly: both the function of physical support in providing safety and the emotional support which men provide for one another in prison and in the community,<sup>5, 6</sup> the significant role of trust in the process of forming friendships in prison and in wider society,<sup>7, 8</sup> and the role of therapeutic bonding.<sup>9</sup> Marc's account also adds nuance, advancing the literature by demonstrating how regime conditions infuse the dynamics of friendships in distinct ways

related to trust and care.

Supporting Liebling and Arnold's (2012) findings that low levels of trust were linked to perceptions of friendships being for convenience,<sup>10</sup> motivated by personal or group agendas in a high security prison, Marc also questions the authenticity of friendships forged in custody. Elsewhere, high levels of self-reported trust have been highlighted between

4. Dunbar, R. I. (2018). The Anatomy of Friendship. *Trends in Cognitive Sciences*, 22(1), 32-51.
5. Crewe, B. (2009). *The Prisoner Society: Power, Adaptation and Social Life in an English Prison*. Oxford University Press; See also footnote 1: Crewe, B. (2014).
6. Doroszuk, M., Kupis, M., and Czarna, A.Z. (2019). Personality and friendships. In *Encyclopedia of Personality and Individual Differences*. Springer Nature, 712-721; Magrath, R. and Scoats, R. (2019). Young men's friendships: inclusive masculinities in a post-university setting. *Journal of Gender Studies*, 28(1), 45-56.
7. Harvey (2007) *Young Men in Prison*. Willan; Niven, K., Holman, D. and Totterdell, P. (2012). How to win friendship and trust by influencing people's feelings: An investigation of interpersonal affect regulation and the quality of relationships. *Human Relations* 65(6), 777-805.
8. Buzzelli, C.A. and File, N., (1989). Building Trust in Friends. *Young Children*, 44(3), 70-75. Greif, G. (2008). *Buddy system: Understanding male friendships*. Oxford University Press.
9. Stevens, A. (2012). *Offender rehabilitation and therapeutic communities: Enabling change the TC way*. Routledge.
10. Arnold, H., Liebling, A. (2012). Social relationships between prisoners in a maximum security prison: Violence, faith, and the declining nature of trust. *Journal of Prison Law*, 40(5), 413-424.

imprisoned men.<sup>11</sup> The personal account in this paper suggests that heightened trust dynamics are deeply complex cultivated in part by care, supporting Crewe's insights on the emotional flows of masculine intimacy between imprisoned men and Anderson's conceptualisation of 'inclusive masculinity',<sup>12 13</sup> which captures the emotional openness and disclosure in contemporary 'male' friendships more broadly.

Taking these observations further we would add that these emotional dynamics are unavoidably infused by the unescapable conditions of confinement; there is no choice but to have the deep level of intimate knowledge of other prisoners. As Marc notes that 'people will know most of your deeply personal and intimate business... regardless of if you want to know or not, this knowledge is shared.'

We suggest that this uniqueness of enhanced trust and nurture during confinement can be understood as 'imposed intimacy.'

Whilst Anderson and McCormack (2018) argue that enhanced emotional openness between men is more reflective of the wider fundamental shift in the practices of masculinities,<sup>14</sup> Marc's experience suggests it may not be so straightforward. For some men in prison there is heightened openness in prison compared to wider society. However, as an imposed form of intimacy, the openness does not necessarily translate into positive outcomes, as Marc highlighted in his discussion of shared trauma at times being overwhelming. On first glance, openness in friendships in terms of sharing trauma may appear as a positive act, yet Marc's insights have shown that forging and maintaining friendships involving sharing trauma also harbours psychological risk.

The terms of friendship in broader society include choices over avoiding social interaction which imprisonment does not afford. As Marc explained,

'There really is no space to get away and it is impossible to have time for yourself'. This demonstrates how friendships inside may also function as a form of 'social overload'.

'There really is no space to get away and it is impossible to have time for yourself'. This demonstrates how friendships inside may also function as a form of 'social overload'. Borrowing the term from housing studies, research in residential nursing homes, and university student accommodation, social overload refers to the 'forced presence of others'.<sup>15 16</sup> We liken the concentrated interactions of the daily prison regime to residential crowding, both sharing excessive social interactions where there is reduced capacity to remove oneself either physically or mentally. The role of social withdrawal has been shown to be an effective strategy for coping with chronic residential crowding, reducing the short-term stress associated with the crowded conditions.<sup>17</sup> Yet as Marc reminds us in prison 'There is

not anywhere to be alone. People come with good intentions, asking if you're ok and sometimes you want to tell them to go away but instead you often internalise to avoid any potential confrontation'. In the face of social overload, there is no opportunity to socially withdraw, 'There is no time alone to destress. Even if you choose to cover your flap to try and regain some privacy, this is against prison rules and so could lead to adjudications or other punitive measures.' There are psychological implications for these conditions of imposed intimacy, such as social overload yet to be examined in the prison

context.

The confined intimacy is not through choice. As Marc shares, unique intimate prison conditions can produce psychological and physical stresses. The unwritten rules around toilet use and accompanying frictions are illustrative. On the outside, shared personal toilet use is usually reserved for those who have chosen to live in close quarters together. Similarly, we suggest it is those same relationships outside of prison where a fuller spectrum of emotions, including irritability and

11. See footnote 7: Harvey, J. (2007).

12. See footnote 1: Crewe, B. (2014).

13. Anderson, E. (2005). Orthodox and inclusive masculinity: Competing masculinities among heterosexual men in a feminized terrain. *Sociological Perspectives*, 48(3), 337-355; Anderson, E. (2010). *Inclusive masculinity: The changing nature of masculinities*. Routledge.

14. Anderson, E. and McCormack, M. (2018). Inclusive masculinity theory: Overview, reflection and refinement. *Journal of Gender Studies*, 27(5), 547-561.

15. Firestone, I. J., Lichtman, C. M., & Evans, J. R. (1980). Privacy and solidarity: Effects of nursing home accommodation on environmental perception and sociability preferences. *The International Journal of Aging and Human Development*, 11(3), 229-241.

16. Valins, S., & Baum, A. (1973). Residential group size, social interaction, and crowding. *Environment and Behavior*, 5(4), 421-439.

17. Evans, G. W., Rhee, E., Forbes, C., Allen, K. M., & Lepore, S. J. (2000). The meaning and efficacy of social withdrawal as a strategy for coping with chronic residential crowding. *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, 20(4), 335-342.

frustrations associated with domestic intimacies are exhibited. Crucially, when these arguably inherent domestic disagreements arise outside of prison, individuals have the opportunity to take time out and attain a level of distance where emotions can diffuse, taking us back to the importance of social withdrawal. Distance as a mechanism of diffusion with other individuals is relatively unavailable in prison and in its absence, we argue it is clear to see how tempers may fray.

Whilst distance may be in short supply between cell mates, distance from loved ones on the outside is not. Separation from friends and family is cited as the hardest part of serving a custodial sentence.<sup>18</sup> We can understand the pain of being separated from loved ones during incarceration through Crewe and colleagues (2020) concept of 'social dislocation'.<sup>19</sup> These losses become compounded. As Marc recounts, 'when a friend leaves... causes the sense of loss to become multiplied adding to the feelings of loss that are bubbling away underneath'. This is a 'double bereavement', the bereavement for oneself and then the loss of another.<sup>20</sup> Marc's narrative illustrates Hunt's insight that incarceration does indeed 'raise the possibility of a more complex grief process' (p.18). Whilst Hunt (2021) examines bereavement in the context of men experiencing deaths of loved ones during incarceration,<sup>21</sup> we suggest that Hunt's insights might well apply to the context of friendships within prison. After all, is the unexpected removal of a friend under the cover of night not akin to a death in the sense of the complete sudden removal of somebody close to you from your world?

Whilst existing literature discusses risks in friendships between men in prison in relation to manipulation and recidivism,<sup>22 23</sup> it appears fairly limited in scope given our discussion here. Marc's experience has revealed multiple additional potential psychological risks involved in navigating friendships within prison walls. We suggest these different

psychological risks relating to openness, shared trauma, and concentrated social interaction are all characteristic of friendships infused with imposed intimacies which necessitate serious consideration by those concerned with harms in prison and the wellbeing of those detained.

### Reflections on Working Towards Knowledge Equity

The enthusiasm we felt when embarking on this collaboration stayed with us throughout the process. As contributors to this Special Issue, we hope that our collaboration will show others, including those in prison, that this type of academic collaboration is a viable option for current and former prisoners to have their words directly heard with potential for shaping policy debates and decision-making. This approach allows the space for all collaborators to speak more freely and honestly about their trauma and experiences as there will be feelings of mutual contribution with their words being presented from a position in which they intended them to be. This promotes trust in the process, whilst leaving the contributor feeling like they have a voice, like they are valued, and ultimately resulting in a much more humanising experience.

Reflecting on the dialogical approach to our work, we had ongoing dialogue to deepen our understanding of Marc's experiences, incarceration, privilege, power and disempowerment, going back and forth on themes and concepts. We had ongoing discussions on the unavoidable power-asymmetries of one collaborator being inside the academic community — understanding journal and academic expectations and conventions — and the other outside.

We were also pushing back against the classic traditional academic training which encourages researchers to 'extract out' emotion,<sup>24</sup> instead acknowledging our emotion work in the process. Our

Separation from friends and family is cited as the hardest part of serving a custodial sentence.

18. Wessely, S., Akhurst, R., Brown, I., & Moss, L. (1996). Deliberate self harm and the Probation Service; an overlooked public health problem? *Journal of Public Health*, 18(2), 129-132.

19. Crewe, B., Hulley, S., Wright, S. (2020). Identity and Selfhood. In: *Life Imprisonment from Young Adulthood. Palgrave Studies in Prisons and Penology*. Palgrave Macmillan.

20. Hunt, K. (2021). Bereavement Behind Bars: Prison and the Grieving Process. *Prison Service Journal*, 254, 17-23.

21. See footnote 20: Hunt, K. (2021).

22. See footnotes 9 and 7; Stevens, A. (2012).

23. Benda, B. B. (2005). Gender differences in life-course theory of recidivism: A survival analysis. *International journal of offender therapy and comparative criminology*, 49(3), 325-342. Boduszek, D., McLaughlin, C., & Hyland, P. (2011). Criminal Attitudes of Ex-Prisoners: the Role of Personality, Anti-Social Friends and Recidivism. *The Internet Journal of Criminology*, 9, 1-10.

24. Jewkes, Y. (2011.) Autoethnography and Emotion as Intellectual Resources: Doing Prison Research Differently. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 1, 63-75.

dialogue involved the substantive content of the paper but also explicit discussions of our inner feelings, even when uncomfortable. Donna's overwhelming concern throughout was not imposing her ideas in a top-down hierarchical way to the detriment of knowledge equity. Discussing this, Marc helpfully reminded her that 'hierarchies are not necessarily bad things'. Marc was eager to have academic writing coaching, in his words, it being 'a luxury' to have one-to-one input on his writing. Whilst this reduced Donna's anxieties, they did not entirely disappear. Being mindful of not wanting to dilute his voice in the narrative, Donna avoided rewording as far as possible when editing the section on experiences of friendship. Donna applied minimal editing, focusing on grammar, punctuation and isolated words rather than rephrasing chunks as she might do in other collaborative writing ventures.

There were also fears from Marc that his voice may become overpowering. Being aware of Donna's anxieties he was concerned that because of this, Donna's voice may become stifled, and the running narrative and commentary would solely be his own. Marc's unfiltered voice was imperative to the personal experience section of the paper. The guidance that he received from Donna encouraged him to write in a more coherent way and allowed for his voice to be transferred onto the paper. Donna also learnt from Marc, honing her writing away from 'academese' to more accessible and plain English. In co-producing the content we learnt from one another, both improving our writing and cementing our shared belief in the benefit of collaborating outside of our usual sectors as an important strategy towards knowledge equity, and in doing so, we also forged our friendship.

### **Conclusion**

We set out to destabilise some of the established elitist academic knowledge production norms working towards knowledge equity in prison research context. Through co-production we achieved our shared aim of Marc becoming a 'participant author' with Donna as a conduit for Marc's own words getting written,

published, and read rather than being interpreted or direct quotations being cherry picked at the discretion of a researcher. Substantively, we discussed prisoner friendships with Marc's experiences during custody revealing many similarities between friendships inside and outside of prison. Importantly, we revealed what we argue are unique dynamics of friendships in prison which are distinct from friendships made and maintained on the outside. Complex dynamics shaped by the inescapable conditions of confinement, with both positive and negative consequences for friendships and psychological impacts. Marc's account suggests that positive friendships emerge in prison providing nurture and care produced at the intersection of the negativity of trauma and imposed intimacy. The imposed intimacy is forced upon incarcerated people promoting the sharing of trauma and empathy that bonds people together. At the same time there are limited options for social withdrawal, arguably a necessity for good mental health. These complex dynamics of intimacy contribute to the forming, maintaining and ending of friendships behind prison walls.

We hope this paper has shown the value and viability of a knowledge equity approach to academic collaboration in prison research paving the way for more of this work in criminology and across the social sciences. We have also opened up debates on friendships made in prison and future research potential and discussed little understood and unexplored aspects of incarceration. Whilst we have highlighted one person's experience in the context of friendships between incarcerated men, we acknowledge that men in prison are not a homogenous group and the way in which emotions, intimacy, and friendship's function will not be the same for all. Going forward, we plan to continue the work started here with continued collaboration to pursue the topic of 'imposed intimacy' in prison.

To cite this article: Arrondelle, D., & Conway, M. (2024) Exploring Friendships behind Prison Walls through a Knowledge Equity Approach. *Prison Service Journal*, 272.