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The Paradox of the 'Care' of London's Children: Discourses of 'Safety' and 'Respect' in England's Ministry of Justice Inspection Reports

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The Paradox of the 'Care' of London's Children: Discourses of 'Safety' and 'Respect' in England's Ministry of Justice Inspection Reports

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Abstract: Using English prison inspectorate reports the article reports a Goffmanesque-informed discourse analysis of official accounts about the younger inmates of London's Feltham prison and the conditions characterizing their lived experiences in this prison environment. The construction of this prison estate captures dilapidation, unhygienic conditions, and endless social danger. The stigmatizing construction of the child prisoner intimates a pervasive culture of violence and bullying resulting in their aversion to purposive activities. While, at first blush, prison inspectorate reporting is based on the policy of ensuring a safe and rehabilitative prison experience for youth it is argued that the nature of the reporting of incarceration obviates a critique of the wider political fabric that custodial interventions reproduce. The Inspectorate operates within the state's dominant class stratified political ideology. The adoption of a generic labelling discourse in the reports minimizes the communication of harms inflicted on children by criminal 'justice' that can only worsen their wellbeing and reproduce the harmful intensity of their imported marginality.

Keywords: discourse; harm; Feltham; inspectorate; violence; safety; respect; purposiveness

1. Introduction

Wacquant (2012), commenting on the United States, recognized a deeply punitive politics of class and ethnic marginalisation extending to what he calls 'prison fare', a term implying that imprisonment is a mode of welfare for the poor and disadvantaged. Stigmatizing stereotypes are unavoidable within this milieu. Black and ethnic minority children constitute a significant proportion of Feltham's population (Feltham 2010)[1]. In Wacquant's view a post-industrial proletariat is targeted by systems of state control that include the use of imprisonment (Wacquant 2009). Wacquant (2000) argues prison has morphed into a surrogate ghetto, a conclusion this article sees as applicable to the prison estate for young persons in London. To help explain the extent of reoffending and return to a 'surrogate ghetto' we need to recognize the role that official accounts by England's inspectors of the prison estate, play in this landscape of cultural reproduction. The British state's 'Healthy Prison Tests' mask, we suggest, the dysfunctionality and stigmatizing identities they unwittingly project onto children serving custodial sentences.

Using annual prison inspection report data 2010-2022 drawn from the Ministry of Justice website [2] this article evokes Goffman's (1963) epistemological understanding of stigma as a phenomenon that arises in social interactions across society (Frandsen et al. 2022). Despite work to uncover shortcomings in the incarceration of children, such incarceration continues to recirculate the harm imposed by adherence to the British state's philosophy of a prison regime policed by its inspectorate. Cox (2021) argues processes of criminalization intersect with racist, social, and economic stigma. Stigma is a prejudice based upon stereotypes that lead to discrimination and negatively modified self-identities (Byrne 2009; Scheff 1999). So, the research question investigated in our article

[1] https://hmiprisons.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmipris_reports/hmyoi-feltham-a-4/. Downloaded: 30/7/24.

[2] https://hmiprisons.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/our-reports/. Downloaded 30/7/24.

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is how is stigma constructed and officially reproduced amongst an already stigmatized population of young persons through the prison inspectorate's evaluations of what they deem a 'healthy prison'? It is argued in the article that despite their disclosure of negative features of imprisonment, inspection reports are a nevertheless a source of power enabling the maintenance of cultural hierarchy connected with criminogenic labelling (see Link et al. 2013).

We argue that stigma and criminal reproduction is an inevitable consequence of the written discourse utilized in prison inspection practices which are available to the public and members of the networks surrounding the lives of these children. The latter discursive treatment of young offenders is apparent in recent reports about Feltham – a young offender's prison - located in south London. The original Feltham was built in 1854 as an industrial school (Adult Learning Inspectorate 2006: 1). There are six Young Offender Institutions (YOIs) across England: Aylesbury, Cookham Wood, Parc, Feltham, Werrington and Wetherby (Independent Monitoring Boards 2021). The Inspectorate adopts a *Healthy Prison Test* framework; our focus is upon two of its four tests that are designed to be protective of inmates and ensure the effective use of government resources in the running of prisons. Feltham comprises two age period components under the same management team within the same geographic area split site: HMYOI Feltham B holds 'youth' offenders aged 18-21. Feltham A's 'child' offenders are aged 15-18.

This article's focus is upon Feltham 'A' prison. The case study is by means of an analysis of government documents that have been composed by the inspectorate of prisons. For reasons of analytical depth and article space its younger incarcerated demography are in focus through the prism of the inspectorate's safety assurance framework. To help the amelioration of social disadvantage and structural injustice it is necessary to appreciate how ideologies and discourses present in systems of prison inspection contribute to these entrenched phenomena that originate early in the human life span. Each inspectorate report is around 60-70 pages in length. The article focusses exclusively upon the eight annual reports about Feltham A which are deconstructed to identify shared overarching discourses. The report data utilized by the discourse analysis is listed in Table 1 (see Appendix 1). The custodial age range investigated is 15-18, the inmate population size on each visit is stated in terms of an 'N' number and the periods of the inspection listed date from 2010 to 2022 which is sufficiently long to track a discursive continuity over time. To underpin the data analysis and the argument theoretically the article exploits the theorization of stigma and labelling associated with the seminal work of the US sociologist Ervine Goffman and the scholarship he inspired.

1.2. Theoretical Perspective

Stigma is utilized by the state and others to produce and reproduce social inequality (Tyler and Slater 2018). It is a form of social control and governmentality. Stigma, these authors argue functions as a form of power, both cultural and political. Goffman (1963) constructed stigma as an organizing concept, a way of perceiving, categorising, and understanding discriminatory practices (Tyler and Slater 2018, p. 729). In the wake of neoliberalism Tyler and Slater suggest Goffman's perspective aids an understanding of social decomposition, inequality and injustice. Wacquant (2008) argues neoliberalism intensifies the stigmatization of minorities in public discourse and amounts to violence from above on the urban poor. Extending this analysis Yang et al. (2007) claim Goffman (1963) saw stigma as a process based on the construction of a social identity.

Stigmatized persons or group by assimilating standards learn what it is like to process stigma and the "discredited" status it confers over their identity development. Yang et al argue stigma is therefore a social identity adopted through interactions with socially constructed categories. Goffman's symbolic interactionism thus conjures stigma within the perspective of labelling theory, the application of deviant labels to individuals alters not only their self-perceptions, but also the availability of social opportunities and risk for negative life outcomes. Link et al. (2014) coin the term "stigma power" to indicate stigma's capacity as a resource for those with an interest in keeping people down by controlling and excluding them in ways that are hidden from view. Eventually, Link et al argue, the stigmatized cope by staying "down" in a field of structural social hierarchies whose governance they internalize through contact with exercises of power.

1.3. Incarcerated Young Offenders

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To aid our grasp of what the Feltham prison estate inspection regime reproduces, and to connect with our argument that draws upon stigma, it is necessary first to appreciate the literature regarding the heightened vulnerability of social backgrounds of lives that endure the stigma and adversity associated with what Wacquant describes as a transnational urban poor. Wacquant's notion of marginality conjures a world of exclusion and 'treatment' that exacerbates rather than heals social harm. The urbanized social worlds imported and re-created in Feltham are found in extensive bodies of academic research about the demographics of those with experience of penal environments in general. Themes of prisoner vulnerability, violence, exclusion, and psychological health issues pervade the discourses present in academic and policy literature and, as we uncover here, prison inspection reports. Being an inmate is inseparable from existential threats to physical and psychological wellbeing. While the state has a responsibility to punish criminal offenders, less attention has been given to the Government's approach to the protection and safety of children imprisoned in young offenders' establishments in England; as a group they are assessed as more vulnerable than young adult prisoners. Our contribution is to challenge the Government's policies of child protection as they are evidenced at Feltham. Gresham Sykes' (1958) idea of the 'pains of imprisonment' illustrates the injurious experiences instigated through incarceration (Crewe 2011). Younger offenders are amongst the most excluded in society (Gibson 2008). Prisons inject ideology and coercive power into the prisoner's experience through constant ontological insecurity and uncertainty about the present and future, coupled with loss of trust in the controlling regime (Giddens 1991).

Scholarship on young offender institutions gives qualitative insights about education, masculinity, goal aspiration, violence, and prison gangs (Anderson 2000; Chantraine and Sallee 2013; Fitzpatrick, McGuire and Dickson 2015; Gallard, Evans and Millington 2019; Holligan 2013; O'Grady 2017; Kennedy 2013; Mitchell, Pirooz, and Decker 2021; Poa and Monod 2017). This literature portrays the fraught and dangerous nature of incarceration. In England and Wales 75% of juveniles held in young offender institutions (YOIs) are boys aged 15-17.

During the period 2019-20, 40% of offending children and young people in England were reoffenders. Violence, weapon carrying, and drugs are the offence groups in this demography with the highest percentage point increase over 2011-2021. Finally, age, poverty, and class underly the vulnerabilities which criminal justice statistics about youth further highlight. Barnes, Green and Ross (2011) uncovered six types of disadvantage as risk factors for youth criminality through a longitudinal survey among 14–19-year-olds in England: Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET), teenage parenthood, emotional ill-health, criminal activity, and substance abuse. Emotional ill-health was the most significant risk factor. Criminal activity (fighting, knife-carrying) and substance abuse was found to be especially prevalent among boys. Barnes et al. (2011, p. 64) conclude these multiple disadvantages constituted conditions of "detachment from mainstream society".

2. Material and Methods

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) is recognized for its capacity to identify circulating discourses in texts. Magistrates' decision-making, for example, relies upon written documents produced by police, schools, and social service (Petites 2019). A parallel point can be drawn from this article's exploitation of England's Ministry of Justice inspection data. Discourse analysis explores relationships between written discourse and reality, offering an interpretative analysis of social constructions of a society or community. Documents and records are forms of data (Parker and Burman 1993). CDA is the most apposite methodology for this case study which examines discourses about the incarcerated in Feltham, as articulated in the Ministry of Justice inspectorate reports referenced in Appendix A.

Michel Foucault's (1965) discourse analysis informs the CDA of Norman Fairclough and it is the CDA of Fairclough (Fairclough 1992) that is adopted here. It posits that language contains discursive formations (Phillips and Hardy 1997). CDA embraces a social constructivist epistemology. A social world is treated as an ideological construction (Berger and Luckmann 1967; Kress 1995; Phillips and Hardy 1997). CDA is a means of analyzing how discourses used by institutions or individuals construct and convey social reality and are themselves shaped by often hidden relations of power that legitimate pre-existing structural inequalities. Through the close analysis of texts, ideologies replete with, for example, processes of stigmatization may be identified.

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3. Results

3.1 Discursive field: 'Safety' Healthy Prison Test

What, for teenagers held in Feltham, does 'being held safely' mean? What factors in this environment challenge safety? The article's literature review (Para. *1.3* above)) sets out a context with which the findings of the inspection reports connect, and by implication illustrate the importation into Feltham of factors such violence, self-harm, and bullying. In Table one the scope of the key issues that inspectors found interfered with the physical safety and welling of inmates are set out, with descriptive examples. The concept of 'Safety' in the Feltham reports interconnects with discourses about preservation of well-being and preserving human rights. As data in Table 2 illustrates, being a prisoner in Feltham is dangerous in terms of interpersonal confrontation and undermining in terms of risk of subjection to isolating behaviour-management techniques. Critical discourse analysis, whilst it is interested in how micro-level text, such as the data in Table 2, can also be interpreted to reveal structural bias in broader societal practices and values within which there is secreted power and ideology. In Table 2 key terms are recorded under the two thematic headings that connect with the 'Safety' prison test. These terms are dominant in the accounts of 'Safety' in the inspection report accounts.

Table 2. 'Safety' Healthy Prison Test.

Violence social field-areas	Segregation social field-areas
Racism	Punishment segregation
Fear	Reception into prison
Bullying	Cellular isolation
Self-harm and suicide	Harsh rewards / punishments
Gang affiliations	High restraint levels
Fights	'kept apart' prisoners

Violence Social Field

Bullying and Intimidation

James and James (2004) argue that it is important to know the ways in which the construction of childhood occurs in any society and especially its cultural context of construction. Enroos (2015, 399), writing about children in prison in Finland, comments that institutional practices are created by understanding a phenomenon in a specific way: children in prisons, they recognize, have come to be constructed as a social problem to be contained and restrained. Undoubtedly, the stigma that accompanies their entry to the prison will shape that childhood construction and resultant management processes. Enross (2015, 400) points out that it is rare for prison practices to be justified in relation to UNCRC rights of the child. In the vein of this article's analytical treatment of Feltham her research emphasises the importance of examining the vocabularies used to describe and classify people and conditions as an avenue to gain insight into how children are constructed as a social problem. The extracts below from inspectorate reports represent official constructions of social realities that, as this article suggests, occlude different viewpoints on these incarcerated children. In the next extract themes of restraint conjure a childhood that has become uncontrollable. The related theme of bullying highlights dysfunctional social relations. In neither case do the inspections offer alternative ways to classify behavioural issues:

"The majority of child protection referrals related to allegations of excessive use of force… 46% of young people said that they had felt unsafe at some point at Feltham against the national comparator of 25% and 30% reported in the previous survey. Gang issues were a considerable management task and involved some multiagency work. Good efforts were made to consult young people about the extent and nature of bullying, but it was clear that young people remained reluctant to be completely open about bullying and intimidation… Violence was an ongoing problem and the

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use of restraint remained high with a number of peaks and troughs. The vast majority of incidents of restraint involved separating young people from fights or assaults…" (Feltham 2011).

Admittedly, the themes in this 'Bullying' extract about the 'Safety' prison test inspection criteria highlight childhood as co-existing with an unsafe and dangerous environment; stigma power is present in the focus on these children, some of whom are constructed as perpetrators of violence whilst others are stigmatized through a lens of being victims of severe physical restraint methods to control them. Goffman (1963) defines stigma at the individual level as "an attribute that is deeply discrediting", arguing that it reduces a stigmatized person from being a "whole and usual person to a tainted, discontented one" (Goffman 1963, p. 3). In the next data extract a violence discourse is extended into the field of behaviour management and its failure, prompting the use of force to control. Childhood is constructed as a social problem requiring the application of behaviourist psychological methods to contain:

Behaviour Management

"The approach to behaviour management was now overwhelmingly punitive and ineffective. The level of violence, much of which was serious, continued to rise and was very high. Use of force and adjudications had also increased… The number of violent incidents per boy had increased since the last inspection and was now very high. Many were very serious and involved multiple assailants and weapons. Various restricted regimes for perpetrators of violence remained difficult to manage on mainstream units… Behaviour management was concentrated on the use of sanctions and regime restrictions with too little incentive to encourage or motivate good behaviour… Use of force had increased since the last inspection and was very high. In many cases it was used to restrain and protect boys in fights and assaults…" (Feltham 2017).

In the first extract we are encouraged to perceive the child protection referrals in terms of "excessive use of force" and to recognize that "gang issues" challenged the prison management. Such discursive prisms of interpretation illustrate a bias that is favourable to the British state which absolves itself from responsibility for the conditions that imprisonment in Feltham engenders. The interior life of the prison is constructed around the children in custody whose behaviour is in reaction to penal dysfunctionality. Instead, we are encouraged to frame the inmates negatively through the state's pathologizing lens. Behaviour management is accepted as valid in principle, thus legitimating a model of coercive treatment. Governance through mechanistically framed tools that include "sanctions" and "regime restrictions" de-humanizes the teenagers life world and personal status. The inspection of "safety" becomes a proxy for legitimated systems of control. The "excessive use of force" discourse does not seek to ban force as such.

The prison is unable to manage violence in its "mainstream units", hence a policy of containment. The "multiple assailants and weapons" discursively abstracts rather than explicates the reasons for this dangerous culture. References to feeling "unsafe" in extract one is a discourse which hints of disingenuousness, it being expressed in the environment which warehouses teenagers whose sentence is likely to have involved violence. A similar conveyance of disingenuousness is present in "good efforts" being made to consult young people "about the extent and nature of bullying." Allusions to discourses of consultation neglect institutionally legitimated asymmetries in power relations between staff and inmates. The overarching discourse that characterizes these data represents the bureaucratization of the concept safety. The delivery of the inspection system itself is one that 'collaborates' in seeking to imposes a totalizing practice of modes of restraint on children and arguably breaches human rights standards, given that this place of custody is unsafe and does not resemble life in the community (HMIP 2018, pp. 16-19). The removal of children from their communities is segregation. Isolation from established bonds is itself punitive.

Segregation Social Field

Cellular Exclusion

The presence of dangerous boys renders the lives of other boys unlivable. Besides being stigmatized as fearful and withdrawn, others merit being shut down by prison officers who utilize

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solitary confinement to exercise control over their behaviour. The majority of their days are spent locked in cells. Feral identities are projected onto these children who are arguably responding to prison harms identified by Gresham Skyes as pains of imprisonment. The stigmatization of these children as requiring inhumane treatment protects the state by what Frandsen et al. (2022) call a "stigma shield" which acts to protect the agents of stigmatization from the realization they are investing in the reproduction of stigma. As extract one illustrates the 'stigma shield' is present in the exploitation of the inspectors' duty of care for these children which is couched under a code of critique, shock and surprise:

"A small number of boys were too frightened to leave their cells and spent about 23 hours a day hiding, locked away behind their doors… At the time of the inspection, the use of segregation in the bleak, unsuitable care and separation unit shared with young adults, was also high and an informal system of 'basic for violence' resulted in some boys being only allowed half an hour out of their cell a day… The average amount of time boys had out of their cell had reduced since the last inspection and averaged just 5.5 hours on weekdays and 4.35 hours at weekends. We found 38% of boys locked in their rooms during the peak working day. CQC colleagues were shocked by how little outside exercise the boys had – 30 minutes a day or less – and the detrimental impact this was likely to have on the health of the adolescent boys…" (Feltham 2015).

Goffman (1963) argues individuals experience stigmatization personally, existentially and emotionally damaging by virtue of the social evaluations of others. Identities are threatened by the impact of stigmatizing which in this case study reiterates imported stigma

Restraint Governmentality

Criminologists argue youth justice systems harm through imposed punitiveness and sometimes undermine opportunities for rehabilitation and care (Goldson 2018). Selman (2017, p. 213) found youth 'justice' in disciplinary schools in Texas for criminal offending had failed to improve the lives of youth on their release. Selman's analysis of a state's official Code of Conduct written handbooks, designed for the authorities running prison regimes< prescribed harsh resocialization measures. He concluded prisoners were being 'prepared' for entrapment in a 'career' in the official system of criminal justice. Besides ideological entrapment its visceral form is evident in the next inspectoral extract regarding containment and segregation methods:

"Seventy-four per cent of children told us they had been restrained, but governance of and accountability for the use of force by staff had all but collapsed. A third of children said they were out of their cells for fewer than two hours a day during the week. At the weekend, this figure rose to nearly three-quarters…Not only were children not getting to education, but neither was education getting to them. In the four weeks leading up to the inspection some 800 hours had been scheduled to be delivered on residential wings, but only around 250 hours had actually materialized…The negative cycle of containment and separation that we have commented on in the past still dominated the day-to-day lives of those who lived and worked in the establishment…The regime for separated children was poor. Security procedures to keep children apart affected the delivery of key work in every area of the prison" (Feltham 2019).

Segregation connotes conditions of inequality and as it is oppressive it denies the rights of the oppressed group (Browne 2024). Segregation harms by concentrating social ills that disproportionately effect those who are already disadvantaged and in the case of urban blacks in the US it is known to promote high levels of violence as it concentrates structural inequality (Light and Thomas 2019). Segregation by colour, ethnicity and wealth impacts on the social cohesion of communities in London's inner-city areas (Sturgis et al. 2014).

Self-segregation through remaining "locked away behind their doors" represents the failure of the state to protect the children it has incarcerated. Cellular confinement for up to 23.5 hours per day constitutes a form of solitary confinement. The discourse of "care" that is advised to work in tandem with "respect" in inspection frameworks is not realized in practices nor is its viability for this prison regime recognized. The discourse of governance and the justification of the use of force in extract two (Feltham 2019) act to distinguish these official and bureaucratic meanings from the wider human

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rights argument that being confined within this prison estate harms and stigmatizes children (HMPI 2018). Discourses of segregation mean children do not have access to educational opportunities: their mental health is referenced as suffering. By not ensuring the safety of incarcerated children, the prison test of respect is compromised: discourses of violence in provoking separation and othering contribute to practices of segregation within Feltham's regime, as constructed by its inspectors.

Case and Haines (2021, p. 4) not surprisingly support arguments that the entire youth justice project is harmful, inappropriate and ought to be abolished, adding the post-industrial construction of 'childhood' as a period of innocence has now pivoted to see these children as dangerous threats. We dichotomize the 'Respect' Healthy Prison Test into two components: one revolves around cleanliness, the other focuses on relationships. Illustrations of each strand depicted Table 3 and exemplified as narrative in the extracts that follow.

Table 3. 'Respect' Healthy Prison Test.

Discourse: cleanliness-themes	Discourse: relationships-themes
communal areas were grubby	canteen remained one of the major sources of bullying.
showers in a poor condition	Wing file entries demonstrated good interaction between staff and young people
many cells were dirty	Racial complaints were low
poor standards of cleanliness in some areas	quality of staff-prisoner relationships appeared reasonable
wing serveries were dirty.	Electric sockets were turned off during the daytime in the cells of unemployed young people
graffiti on walls and scratched into windows	young people were negative about their relationships with staff
cell furniture needed repairing	over a third of young adults felt victimised by staff

3.2. Discursive Field 2: 'Respect' Healthy Prison Test

'Respect' Healthy Prison Test

The Respect test of the Healthy prison embraces several strands. Those strands include the cleanliness and good maintenance of the physical prison estate environment. Respect also entails human relationships and their daily elaboration between the prison population and staff employed to ensure their security and wellbeing. As the first extract in this section illustrates, unkempt furniture, anonymized cell accommodation, crumbling decorative features, and graffiti are signals of a pervasive disrespect. Dysfunctionality of such an extent will inevitably engender self-stigma and othering of those who endure it. The inspection report communicates the surface manifestations, but does not investigate who is politically culpable for departures from respectful custodial conditions.

Cleanliness

"…basic standards of cleanliness require improvement…there had been deterioration in the general state of the cells and the cleanliness of the communal areas, and particularly showers, since the previous inspection…Daily cell checks were carried out and there were incentives to encourage cell cleanliness, which was effective for some, but not all, young people. Efforts were made to eliminate graffiti as soon as possible and there were no offensive displays. Cells were properly equipped but overall, they were shabby…Some cells used for double accommodation for young

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adults had insufficient screening of toilets and some furniture was damaged…The residential environment had deteriorated. Most cells contained the basics, but overall, the living conditions were austere and spartan. There was little evidence of cells being personalized, or of children taking pride in keeping them clean and tidy. All the shower areas were in a very poor state, often with large areas of peeling paint on the ceilings and discolored wall panels…" (Feltham 2021)

Thinking of this failing environment, classified through the vocabulary of "cleanliness", as a territory that needs "fixing" resonates with the argument of Kallin and Slater (2014) regarding politics being overlooked in regeneration projects that aim to remove territorial stigma in city areas. Feltham merely paints over a structural problem: the inspectorate's attempt to regenerate Feltham through an inspection audit 'fix' interferes with radical systemic policies to address injustice (as Kallin and Slater argue in a different working-class, urban, and stigmatized locality). Ignoring a politics of inequality and confining attention to cosmetic leaves structural problems of advanced marginality outside of the official narrative (Wacquant 2007, p. 67).

The concept of cleanliness in the extract (Feltham 2021) conveys the importance of hygiene and order and is arguably symbolic of an interest in sanitizing away the intractable harm engendered by this Feltham regime. Huangfu, et al. (2021) suggest physical cleanliness is a metaphor for moral purity, but it might also carry a presentational meaning whereby a clean place implies a place that is working efficiently in its caring and respect roles. These authors argue degraded environmental conditions influence immoral behaviours and adherence to higher social norms in workplaces. As we see in the cleanliness discourse, the Feltham environment is a threat to children's social and moral status as suggested by the discursive realities of the safety discourses around violence and segregation. The inspectorate's treatment of cleanliness obviates the causal ties described in the literature, keeping instead to merely describing physical conditions of prison life. India's poor citizens in Mysore, deemed to be the 'great unwashed', are excluded from participating in society: Anantharaman and Browne (2022) conclude that the Indian state's failure to increase opportunities for cleanliness contributed to deepening pre-existing social stratification. The social and cultural geography of Feltham's imprisoned children are subjected to a not dissimilar reproduction of inequality.

'Respect' Healthy Prison Test

The punitive ethos that emerges from the discourses presented suggests that incarcerated children live in a climate of fear and intimidation. The case for mobilising change in the conditions of penal confinement is clearly highlighted in the reports, but as this article argues a 'stigma shield' and 'stigma power' may curtail an undermining of the cultural reproduction of stigma. The suffering highlighted by those co-opted by the state to police its carceral institutions might themselves keep hierarchical governance running. Potential institutional racism and hostile relationship management as represented in the next extract arguably embody stigma presence in the social fabric:

Relationships

"…Some good work had been done at HMYOI (Her Majesties Young Offenders Institution) Feltham with some aspects of diversity, but the management of equality and diversity had recently lost focus and work with foreign nationals had deteriorated…There were efficient daily briefings to monitor young people convicted of arson but not those convicted of racist and other hate crime… only 59% of young people said that most staff treated them respectfully. We saw mainly positive interactions, with a small number of exceptions... black and minority ethnic young people reported much more negatively than white young people across a range of areas. In particular, only 53% said that staff treated them with respect, compared to 93% of white young people…more staff than boys were using the discrimination incident report form process to challenge racist behaviour. Investigations, especially against staff, were sometimes inadequate and dismissive…" (Feltham 2013).

In European jurisdictions the penological philosophy is that staff-prisoner relationships are at the heart of prisoner treatment and rehabilitation (Molleman and van Ginneken 2015). The Feltham data signals a bureaucratized perspective about human relations. Auty and Liebling (2020, p. 358) found that in English prisons a high quality of prison life, including relationships, supports better

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outcomes on release. Auty and Liebling would conclude Feltham damages rather than repairs. The envelop of dysfunction in the meanings present in the data extract includes racism and staff hostility. Those from ethnic minorities suffer disproportionately more than white counterparts. A discourse of understatement regarding the depth of harm circulating in Feltham minimizes the extent of the impact of radically inadequate and severely damaging staff-prisoner relations. The data displays neo-liberal technicist language which de-personalizes the culture of the institution, creating the impression of a child warehouse governed by logics of efficiency. The political bias in choices of terminological and metrics convey Feltham's neoliberal governance: "efficient daily briefings," "mainly positive interactions," "much more negatively," "the management of equality", and numerical objectification of individual human rights infringement.

4. Conclusion

On the strength of the documentary data harnessed from the Ministry of Justice website the attempt by its inspectorate to improve a deeply troubled and inhumane custodial environment constitutes not merely a conflicted struggle, but also the tacit recognition of a hotbed of stigma which official penal inspection practices do not seem empowered either to recognize or to address. Moreover, the terms of the corporate discourse colouring the conduct of the inspection task de-personalizes the turbulent life world described, imposing upon its occupants the stamp of miscellaneous negative labels. Stigma power entraps these urban children within an official 'surrogate ghetto' echoing the conditions experienced within their city neighborhoods. Day (2023) notes risk-based, rather than 'child first' approaches continue to be practiced on the front line, undermining a humanistic focus on child prisoners as individuals in need of care and support. Myers, Goddard and Davidtz (2021) add that human attachment bond issues imported into prisons require that youth justice attends to the individual relational needs of young people as a priority if criminal justice interventions are to be effective.

The conditions experienced by incarcerated children breach many of their human rights as defined within several Articles of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child dealing with policy criteria for those below the age of 18.[3] The behavioural psychology regime that accompanies life in Feltham influences decision-making in the management of its children. The legal-rational, authority present in reports about Feltham does not embrace or reference contested interpretations regarding the stigmatizing environmental conditions associated with offending histories that Feltham amplifies (Allen 2004, p. 100). The absence in the inspection reports of the political premises or boundaries that prescribe inspection regimes gives rise to the paradox of care mentioned in the article's title. This article develops the view that exercising care in this environment borders upon a conceptual and practical impossibility. We argue that instead of care we see an application of harm as a lived norm in Feltham. References in the inspection reports to inadequate mental health support is tacit recognition that the prison regime inflicts psychological damage on some of these children. Attempts to educate and introduce purposeful activity into Feltham is failing spectacularly as these children either disengage, clash with others, or otherwise resist bullying pressure to conform from both above and below them in the institution.

Appendix A

Table 1. HMYOI Feltham 'A' prison (ages 15-18).

Feltham A N-664 prisoners	11-22 January 2010.

[3] https://www.unicef.org.uk/what-we-do/un-convention-child-rights/- downloaded 22/07/2024.

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Feltham A N=229	18-22 July 2011
Feltham A N=181	21-25 January 2013
Feltham A N=180	11-15 August 2014
Feltham A N=180	27th July-2nd August 2015
Feltham A N=126	23 January – 3 February 2017
Feltham A N-140	21 December-12 January 2018
Feltham A N=148	14-24 January 2019
Feltham A N=106	4-19 July 2019
Feltham A N=63	9-17 February 2021
Feltham A N=75	21 February – 4th March 2022

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