Exploring the rehabilitative role of the prison library: addressing sensitive information needs via cultural activities.

Abstract

This chapter explores the role of cultural activity within prison libraries for not only the general wellbeing of prisoners, but also as a form of indirect intervention for addressing unrecognised and/or unaddressed information needs amongst prisoners, particularly those of a more sensitive nature often repressed (e.g. remorse, mental health, relationships). Drawing on research to date, we discuss the information needs of prisoners, the associated benefits of cultural activity for need recognition and understanding, and the support role of the prison library; and in relation, identify opportunities for further development of the library as a key change agent in the progressive rehabilitation of prisoners.

I.   Introduction

Many countries worldwide, concerned with high recidivism rates, are placing increasing emphasis on the rehabilitative role of imprisonment (McArthur, 2014). Redondo *et al.*, in McGuire (2002), state that offending behaviour, like any other complex human behaviour, is learned through experience and watching others, and explain that rehabilitation seeks to employ learning mechanisms which reverse anti-social learned behaviours in order to teach and encourage new pro-social behaviours (p.117). However, a number of scholars note that rehabilitative interventions are often met by resistance and non-participation attributed to overly direct, critical, or confrontational approaches (McGuire, 2002; McNeill and Whyte, 2007; Patterson and Forgatch, 1985). Turvey (2013) states that cultural activities, such as prison reading groups, offer prisoners the opportunity to engage in informal learning without the pressure of formal assessments or progress reports, and Hurry *et al.* (2014) explain that cultural interventions can be useful in engaging "hard-to-reach" prisoners, such as those who do not attend prison education (p.15) and can "offer a pathway into engagement with more formal learning opportunities" (p.49). Outcomes of cultural activity in the prison context are also recognised as having intrinsic rehabilitative value; such as the development of soft skills (e.g. improved literacy, communication, and social skills) which are crucial to reintegration into society upon release (Anderson *et al.* 2011; Bilby *et al.* 2013; Turvey, 2013). As such, engagement with cultural activities has the potential to support prisoners' rehabilitation and act as a stepping stone to further engagement with formal learning programmes. Given that effective methods of information access and support are recognised as central to rehabilitation programmes (Learning & Work Institute, 2018; Ministry of Justice, 2011; Scottish Government, 2015), it is crucial that prisoners' information needs are properly identified and understood by the prison establishment.

However, in addition to issues of disengagement, while effective methods of information access and support are recognised as central to rehabilitation programmes, prisoners' information needs are frequently reported as unmet; particularly those of a *sensitive* nature (e.g. relating to remorse, mental health, and relationships) which may be difficult to address due to issues of recognition and/or fear of negative consequence (Canning and Buchanan, 2018; Chatman, 1999; Nacro, 2009). It is crucial to explore potential avenues to support the meeting of sensitive information needs given that, if left unmet, they have the potential to negatively impact upon prisoners' ability to cope with imprisonment (Canning and Buchanan, 2018), and compound negative feelings (e.g. anger) which are fundamentally contrary to the rehabilitation process (Day, 2009). Again, this is where cultural activities may offer an appropriate method of intervention. Cultural activities designed to encourage recognition and discussion of difficult issues have been used in a variety of settings, such as bibliotherapeutic reading groups in the parole context (Umass Dartmouth, 2003a), and there is evidence that engagement with

such activities may support individuals to recognise sensitive information needs by encouraging them to confront their problems and discuss them, even if indirectly, with other members of the group.

To ensure that sensitive information needs are not only recognised but also addressed, it is essential that prisoners have access to the information needed to address such needs. The role of the prison library in providing information to help meet prisoners' information needs is well documented (Burt, 1977; Campbell, 2005; Canning and Buchanan, 2018; Emasealu and Popoola, 2016; Rafedzi and Abrizah, 2014; Sambo *et al.* 2017; Tarzaan *et al.* 2015), and a number of recent publications have attempted to draw greater attention to the prison library's often overlooked role in the rehabilitation process (Ings and Joslin, 2011; Šimunić *et al.* 2014; Zybert, 2011). The prison library is often the only specifically designated "cultural space" within the prison (Cramard, 2011, p.551), that importantly, also provides a neutral atmosphere that facilitates engagement with disengaged prisoners (Bowe, 2011; Lehmann and Locke, 2006; Nason, 1981). Like cultural activities in the prison context, the prison library is also viewed as having the potential to act as a "bridge to other life long learning programmes" (Brosens *et al.*, 2014, p.1500). As such, the prison library offers the ideal setting in which to engage with prisoners and to explore the potential for cultural activity to support prisoners to recognise and address sensitive information needs.

In consideration of above, this chapter explores potential avenues through which prisoners can be supported to recognise and address their sensitive information needs, by examining the information needs of prisoners and the impact of cultural activity in the prison context to identify associated benefits for information need recognition and understanding, and by investigating the potential support role of the prison library; and in relation, identifying opportunities for further development of the library as a key change agent in the progressive rehabilitation of prisoners.

II.   The information needs of prisoners

The concept of information need is a much debated, and for some, a problematic concept; but it is nonetheless generally recognised as a useful construct for understanding why people seek information, and is commonly regarded by information behaviour scholars as a context-sensitive secondary need triggered by primary physiological and/or psychological needs and associated feelings of uncertainty (Case and Given, 2016). While information seeking is generally viewed as the normative behavioural outcome of information need recognition, Wilson (1996) explains that a number of factors influence information behaviour and ultimately determine whether an information need will be met or unmet; including *intervening variables* which influence types of information sought and information sources utilised (i.e. psychological, demographic, interpersonal, environmental, and source characteristics), and *activating mechanisms* which influence individuals' motivation to seek out information; (i.e. preferred coping responses to stress, evaluations of risk versus reward of seeking information, and perceptions of self-efficacy). It is important to note, however, that information needs are not always recognised and to explore potential reasons for this, Taylor's (1968) question-negotiation theory offers some insight. Taylor proposes that information needs may exist at four levels from the moment they are initially triggered in an individual up to the point that they are articulated to a system or other individual (p.182):

> Q1—*the actual, but unexpressed need for information (the visceral need);*
> Q2—*the conscious, within-brain description of the need (the conscious need);*
> Q3—*the formal statement of the need (the formalized need);*
> Q4—*the question as presented to the information system (the compromised need).*

Taylor emphasizes that these four levels are not entirely distinct from each other, and instead "shade into one another along the question spectrum" (p.182). While the latter three levels indicate recognition of an information need (even if poorly understood), the *visceral* initial conception of an

information need is only experienced by individuals as "a vague sort of dissatisfaction" (p.182). It is important to note that only once an information need has entered an individual's consciousness can they begin to take actions to resolve it, therefore, the progression of an information need from 'visceral' to 'conscious' (i.e. formally recognised) is crucial if needs are to be met. A review of literature suggests that information needs may remain unrecognised for a variety of reasons; e.g. because they are misunderstood or misinterpreted (Derr, 1983), they are deemed less important than other needs (Johnson *et al.* 2001), and/or they appear complex and overwhelming (Case, 2002).

To better understand prisoners' information needs and the extent to which these are met in the prison context, the following section presents a review of empirical studies which examine the information needs and behaviours of prisoners and looks wider to prison library studies for further insight. This review presents overviews of each study including data collection methods, participant demographic details (where provided by the authors), key findings, and limitations. A broad net is cast given the lack of research in this area and discussion incorporates studies from across the world and concerning a range of prisoner demographic groups. Studies are discussed in chronological order.

(a) Information need and behaviour studies in the prison context

Stevens (1994) examined the information needs of US prisoners, drawing on a data collected from semi-structured interviews with 36 prisoners (sex and age unspecified) and 24 prison staff across three US prisons of varying security level. Stevens does not identify specific categories of need, but reports that prisoners' information needs are determined by length of sentence and time left to serve, and that the extent to which information needs are satisfied is dependent on the prison regime and perceived effectiveness of formal information channels (p.30). Stevens notes that prisoners themselves may be unable or unwilling to articulate their information needs for a variety of reasons, including: distrust towards prison authorities, the rapid institutionalization process, low motivation, and low expectations (p.31), and identifies a number of factors which negatively influence prisoners' information seeking, including limited independent access to information; inconsistencies and arbitrariness of information provision; poor timing of information provision; lack of advice on how to utilise provided information; inadequate staff training and staff shortages; and prisoner hostility towards staff (p.32). Stevens concludes that, as a result of these issues "in some cases information needs were not addressed at all", adding that even when needs were met and prisoners were happy with the end result, they were often "dissatisfied with the process" (p.33). However, the significance of findings is limited as this study is reported in the form of a short report which offers limited empirical data to evidence findings.

Chatman (1999) examined the information behaviours of US prisoners through ethnographic research and interviews with 80 adult female prisoners from one prison. Drawing upon Merton (1972)'s sociology of knowledge, Chatman (1999) reports that prisoners become integrated into the small world of the prison by means of a shift in their belief-system though specific language and customs, transitioning from *outsiders* to *insiders*, whose values lie within the prison (p.208). Chatman uses several key concepts to describe aspects of small world living which influence types of information shared and what information is withheld; *social norms*, codes of behaviour which dictate what is normal and accepted and what is not; *social types*, characteristics which distinguish individuals from other groups; and *worldview*, a system of beliefs held by all members who live in the small world (p.213-214). Chatman explains that by becoming integrated into the small world of the prison, prisoners become part of 'life in the round' which she describes as "a public form of life in which things are implicitly understood" (p.212). Chatman concludes that life in the round will ultimately have a negative impact on information seeking, as members will only cross the boundaries of their small world in order to seek out information if "(1) the information is perceived as critical, (2) there is a collective expectation that the information is relevant, and (3) a perception exists that the life in the round is no longer functioning" (p.214). Building on her earlier work on information poverty (Chatman, 1996), Chatman (1999) argues that the small world of the prison contributes to a state of information

impoverishment amongst prisoners, with their needs remaining largely unaddressed due to social barriers (p.214). However, various limitations (e.g. participant demographic, case study elements, and age of study) call into question the validity/generalisability of findings, and as this study focuses primarily on information behaviour, little insight is offered into prisoners' information needs.

Nacro (2009) examined the information needs of UK female prisoners with mental health issues via 6 focus groups and an unspecified number of interviews with juvenile and adult female prisoners at two prisons in England. Many participants reported a need for mental health support while serving a prison sentence, with some stating that other prisoners were the best source of support with regards to mental health issues while others reported feeling "scared" of revealing such needs to other prisoners and preferred to discuss such issues anonymously over the phone instead (p.9-10). The authors described unmet information needs relating to healthcare and medication as "a huge source of anxiety" for female prisoners (p.12), and some participants expressed a dissatisfaction with waiting times for healthcare appointments which could impede their access to information (p.13). The report concludes, "From the discussions we had with the women, it was clear there is a lack of information available for women prisoners, and particularly those with mental health issues" (p.17), and highlights that unmet mental health needs may make reintegration into society more challenging for female prisoners following their release. However, findings of this study provide insight limited to mental health topics, and the generalisability of findings is limited as the study focuses on female prisoners with mental health issues (the report does not specify whether participants' themselves had mental health issues).

Rafedzi and Abrizah (2014) examined the information behaviours of young male Malaysian prisoners, through qualitative unstructured interviews with 23 male juvenile prisoners (aged between 13 and 21 years old) housed in four Malaysian correctional schools. Key findings include the identification of common information needs, including those relating to prison operations, family, sex, health, recreation, legal support and academic studies (p.7). Participants often reported feeling "a sense of vulnerability" shortly after their imprisonment, attributed to "fearful representations of prison in popular culture" which lead to an increased need for day-to-day information for security and mutual support (p.7). Other prisoners were valued as a "crucial source of practical and emotional support" and other frequently utilised sources of information included friends, teachers, family, television and books (p.10). The majority of participants reported feeling reluctant to interact with prison officers due to the perception that this was not the "correct or preferred source to get any information" but no explanation is given as to why this is the case (p.11). Overall, the authors conclude, "From the interviews we had with participants, it was clear that there was sufficient information available in the prison environment for juveniles, and particularly for those with different education levels" (p.13), but recommend further research including other prisoner demographic groups to ascertain the generalisability of findings to the wider prison population (p.15).

Bajić (2015) examined the information needs and reading interests of Croatian prisoners, varying in security level by surveying 504 male and female prisoners (age and sex ratio unspecified) housed in six prisons of varying security level in Croatia. The most common information needs reported included rights in the prison, family, life after prison, employment and prison rules, with less frequently reported needs included those related to sports, life outside the prison, finances, health, law, and education and training (p.525). The information sources reported as most commonly utilised were family and friends, followed closely by prison officers. Roughly a third of prisoners reported asking other prisoners, consulting books/newspaper, or consulting their lawyer for information. Less than 5% indicated that they would ask the prison librarian for information (p.525). When asked what barriers they faced when trying to access information, the majority reported that the main issue was a lack of access to computer and the internet (p.526). Bajić draws no specific conclusions from findings but recommends that prison administrations utilise the data presented to improve prison library services to ensure that prisoners' information needs are met (p.526). However, while this study offers some

valuable insight into prisoners' information needs, the unspecified demographics of participants limits the generalisability of findings.

Canning and Buchanan (2018) examined UK prisoners' information behaviour by conducting semi-structured interviews with 12 adult male prisoners and 6 members of prison staff at one maximum-security prison in Scotland. A number of prisoners' information needs are identified, including those relating to education, health, prison routines, legal, finance, housing, and employment (p.428). More sensitive emotional needs linked to remorse, mental health, and relationships which influence prisoners' ability to cope with imprisonment are also identified; however, the authors note that participants themselves often did not appear to fully recognise or reveal these needs, and instead were often alluded to or discussed only in relation to other prisoners (p.429). Findings suggest that male prisoners are particularly reluctant to reveal needs associated with weakness and vulnerability (mental health, relationships, etc.) (p.429), supporting assertions that hypermasculine contexts inhibit the expression of "inferior" and "feminine" emotions (Mosher and Tomkins 1988, p.67). When seeking to meet needs, participants reported a preference for interpersonal sources who were seen as non-judgemental and helpful, but a number of factors negatively influenced interactions, including social and affective issues such as distrust, fear of stigma, and low self-esteem, and complex access barriers connected to prison security and operations (p.430-431). In response to such issues, prisoners exhibited a range of self-protective behaviours, including secrecy and deception (supporting propositions of Chatman's (1996; 1999) information poverty and small world theories), leaving many of their information needs unmet; particularly those of a sensitive nature relating to emotions and coping (p.429). It is noted that unmet sensitive information needs have the potential to negatively impact upon prisoners' abilities to cope with imprisonment and take fundamental steps towards rehabilitation, and as such, the meeting of such needs is considered crucial (p.429). The authors conclude that (p.431):

> *There is a need for further research exploring issues of unmet emotional needs in prisoners, and in particular, assistive methods of need recognition and support in the problematic at-risk context. Such research faces significant challenges, not least in addressing issues of self-recrimination and rehabilitation within an environment of restrictive social norms and personal constructs.*

However, while offering substantial empirical insight into the information needs of prisoners, as this study focuses on adult male prisoners housed in a maximum-security prison, the generalisability of findings to other prisoner demographic groups is limited.

(b) Other relevant studies: prison libraries

A 2008 study by Omagbemi and Adunewu which examined the role of Nigerian prison libraries in meeting the information needs of prisoners appears to have been the catalyst for a number of related follow-on studies in recent years. Although focusing more on evaluating prison library services, these studies also offer some insight into the information needs of prisoners. Studies are discussed in chronological order.

Omagbemi and Adunewu (2008) examined the role of Nigerian prison libraries in meeting the information needs of prisoners by surveying 62 prisoners ranging from under 20 to over 40 years (exact age range and sex unspecified) from four prisons in Nigeria. A range of information needs are identified, including those relating to news/current affairs, legal, religious, psychological, recreational, vocational and educational needs; with the most frequently reported needs relating to education and news/current affairs, and the least frequently reported relating to recreational and vocational information (p.251-252). When surveyed on prison library services, 50% of participants reported that they felt prison library stock was inadequate to meet their needs (p.250-251). Notably, 70% of participants stated that they agreed information was important to the reformation and rehabilitation of prisoners (p.251). The authors conclude by recommending that Library Associations visit prison

libraries to "enlighten" prisoners on the benefits of information, that public libraries create outreach services to support prisoners following release, that library personnel be given more "adequate" training, that library collections be "improved" and readership promoted to prisoners (p.252-253).

Eze (2014) examined the role of Nigerian prison libraries in meeting the information needs of prisoners by conducting focus groups with 1095 prisoners (sex and age unspecified), and surveying 21 prison library/welfare workers from five prisons in southeast Nigeria. Eze reports that prisoners experience information needs similar to those of "free people", but explains that only prisoners' legal and spiritual information needs appear to be met to some extent, with information needs relating to education, vocation, recreation, health and finance not adequately met (p.251). While many of these needs are connected to education and self-development, recreational information was felt to help prisoners cope with loneliness and boredom, while spiritual information was felt to help prisoners "change for the better spiritually and emotionally" thereby supporting their rehabilitation (p.247). Eze concludes that the Nigerian prison service does not provide adequate library services to meet prisoners' information needs (p.251) but does not offer any recommendations on how to improve the current service provision.

Tarzaan *et al.* (2015) examined the role of Nigerian prison libraries in meeting the information needs of prisoners, conducted via prisoner survey (age and sex unspecified) at one medium-security prison in Nigeria. Tarzaan *et al.* report that prisoners experience legal, health, religious, educational, recreational, and vocational information needs (p.196). A number of information sources with which prisoners interact are identified, including billboards/posters, television, lawyers, religious bodies, and prison wardens (p.196). Some insight is offered into factors which inhibit access to information in the prison context, including; high cost of information materials, high rates of illiteracy, unawareness of information services, local-language issues, and lack of prison library or other information service (p.196). Again, Tarzaan *et al.* conclude that a number of prisoners' information needs are currently not met and recommend improving information services to prisoners by further investing in the development of prison libraries in Nigeria (p.198).

Emasealu and Popoola (2016) examined the role of Nigerian prison libraries in meeting the information needs of prisoners by conducting surveying 335 male and 39 female prisoners (age unspecified) and conducting focus groups (participant numbers/demographics unspecified) from two prisons in Nigeria. Emasealu and Popoola report that prisoners have information needs relating to legal aid, continuing education, professional development, finance, health, and survival and coping with prison (p.10). Participants reported that many library resources (i.e. dictionaries, encyclopaedias, bibliographies, directories, maps, and novels) were difficult to access (p.11), and that such materials were often in poor condition, outdated, or irrelevant to prisoners' actual information needs (p.13). Emasealu and Popoola conclude that a large proportion of prisoners' information needs are currently unmet by prison libraries in Nigeria, and recommend additional funding to support prison educational programmes and provide the information resources necessary to meet prisoners' needs.

Sambo *et al.* (2017) again, examined that role of Nigerian prison libraries in meeting the information needs of the prisoners by surveying 720 male and 41 female prisoners (age unspecified) and conducting interviews (participant numbers/demographic unspecified) from four prisons in Nigeria. Results include identification of a number of information needs, including; health, financial, spiritual, post-release information, legal, family/friends, education, human rights, and prison rules (p.10). Prison library services were generally perceived as inadequate by prisoners, with the majority addressing their needs instead through religious bodies, family or friends, or health professionals (p.11). A number of factors which prevented needs being addressed were identified, including; lack of library/prison funding, time restrictions, censorship, lack of professional staff, and poor staff training (p.12). Similar to Eze (2014), Tarzaan *et al.* (2015), and Emasealu and Popoola (2016), the authors conclude that prison libraries did not meet the information needs of prisoners in Nigeria.

While these studies offer some insight into the information needs of prisoners, the utility of findings are limited. For example, findings are predominantly presented in a library-centric format (focusing predominantly on reading interests and evaluating library service provision). Notably, the fact that all studies are based in Nigeria and several lack demographic detail regarding participants limits the generalisability of findings. There are quality issues (e.g. repetition of tables and translation errors in Tazaan *et al.* (2015)'s paper) and limited evidence to support findings (e.g. only one quote is provided in Emasealu and Popoola (2016)'s paper).

Discussion and summary

From this review of the literature, a number of broad themes emerge. First, that prisoners have information needs which are largely similar to those of the general public (e.g. relating to education, healthcare, finance, housing, law, and recreation), but also specific information needs relating to the prison regime for day-to-day living, and experience additional emotional and coping needs related to their imprisonment (Canning and Buchanan, 2018; Emasealu and Popoola, 2016; Nacro, 2009; Rafedzi and Abrizah, 2014). Second, a wide range of information sources exist within the prison environment but the majority of prisoners exhibit a preference for interpersonal sources of information, often attributed to the inaccessibility of information in other formats; it is also noted that prison library services were often viewed as inadequate and failed to meet prisoners' information needs (Bajić, 2015; Eze, 2014; Omagbemi and Odunewu, 2008; Tarzaan *et al*. 2015; Emasealu and Popoola, 2016; Sambo *et al*. 2017). Third, there is evidence of complex access barriers and internalised behavioural barriers impacting upon the meeting of prisoners' information needs; the former influenced by custodial policy and controls, the latter by restrictive social structures and norms, and issues of trust (Canning and Buchanan, 2018; Chatman, 1999; Stevens, 1994). Overall, evidence demonstrates that prisoners often exist in information-impoverished circumstances, with many of their information needs frequently reported as unmet.

There is also some evidence of unmet sensitive needs relating to managing emotions, relationships, and mental health (Canning and Buchanan, 2018; Chatman, 1999; Nacro, 2009). Canning and Buchanan (2018) present evidence of sensitive information needs in their study of the information behaviours of maximum-security adult male prisoners and note that such needs were often alluded to in discussions but not described outrightly as needs by participants. This was partially attributed to the restrictive social environment of the prison, but also the possibility that such needs were "not yet fully formed or understood as information needs" by participants (p.429). While there is evidence to suggest some of the reasons why prisoners may be reluctant to address sensitive information needs (e.g. distrust and/or fear of stigma), there is also currently limited depth of insight in previous studies discussed above regarding factors which inhibit recognition of such needs. Canning and Buchanan (2018) go on to argue that unmet sensitive information needs have the potential to negatively impact upon prisoners' abilities to cope with imprisonment and to take fundamental steps towards rehabilitation. This is supported by assertions that repressed and/or unmet emotional needs are linked with aggression during incarceration (e.g. Roberton et al., 2014, 2015; Velotti et al., 2017) and unsuccessful rehabilitation (Day, 2009). As such, is it crucial to identify potential interventions to support prisoners to recognise and address their sensitive information needs.

In summary, there are few studies which investigate the information needs of prisoners and of the small number which do exist, numerous limitations impact on the generalisability/validity of findings, including unspecified participant demographics (e.g. regarding age and sex), a lack of methodological detail (e.g. unspecified sample sizes for interviews/focus groups), a lack of empirical evidence, or library-centric design providing only limited insight into prisoners' information needs. In addition to various limitations, despite often also identifying issues of unmet information need in prisoners, few studies provide guidance on potential interventions which might help prisoners address their information needs, with many simply recommending improvement of the current prison library services with little or no guidance as to how to achieve this (Bajić, 2015; Omagbemi and Odunewu,

2008; Tarzaan *et al*. 2015; Emasealu and Popoola, 2016; Sambo *et al*. 2017). Therefore, to address this knowledge gap, the next section presents an overview of the impact of cultural activity in the prison context to explore the potential for cultural engagement to support prisoners to recognise and address sensitive information needs.

III.   Cultural activity in the prison context

Culture is also a problematic concept to define, with interpretations from various fields presenting conflicting views; for example, culture as *artistic and intellectual endeavours* through an aesthetic perspective (Arnold, 1867), or culture as the *marked characteristics* - behaviours, beliefs, and symbols - of a specific social group through an anthropological perspective (Boas, 1904). Kroeber and Kluckhohn (1952) present a more holistic overview, explain that culture can be understood as a concept describing specific human behaviours (e.g. traditions) and embodied objects (e.g. artwork) in terms of their significance to particular social groups. Cultural activities are viewed as "sports or activities which contribute to or enhance the aesthetic, artistic, historical, intellectual or social development or appreciation of members of the general public" (Law Insider, 2020).The role of cultural activity in supporting prisoners' rehabilitation is recognised in a number of publications which present evidence that cultural engagement in the prison context contributes to the development of soft skills which support prisoners' desistance from crime (e.g. improved literacy, communication, and social skills) (Anderson *et al.* 2011; Bilby *et al.* 2013; Turvey, 2013). There is also evidence that prisoners' engagement with cultural activity can encourage them to become self-reflective individuals, leading to better self-understanding and an increased capacity to empathise with others, further supporting prisoners' rehabilitation (Crossick and Kaszynska, 2016, p.7).

To explore the impact of cultural activity in the prison context and better understand the rehabilitative value of associated outcomes, the following section presents a review of studies which evaluate the impact of cultural activities in the prison context; including an overview of activities being evaluated, data collection methods, participant demographic details (where provided), and key findings. This section focuses primarily on empirical studies which include adult male prisoners given reports that this demographic group faces specific challenges in addressing sensitive information needs (e.g. those relating to emotions, relationships, and mental health). There is also a focus on studies in the UK context given that the function and design of prisons worldwide vary substantially. However, where additional insight can be obtained from studies involving other sample groups (i.e. female and juvenile prisoners) and geographic locations (i.e. outside of the UK), these are incorporated into the discussion. Studies are presented and discussed in chronological order.

Anderson *et al.* (2011) evaluated the impact of a programme of drama, playwrighting, singing, and visual arts activities designed to "stimulate offenders' engagement with learning, improve literacy skills, and demonstrate the potential of the arts to support the process of rehabilitation" (p.3). This programme involved seven national cultural organisations and took place in five Scottish prisons. Data collection methods were mixed, including 26 focus groups with prisoners (mixed age and sex), interviews with 27 prison staff and 15 arts organisation staff, case studies, feedback forms and prisoner surveys. Broad findings suggest that cultural activities improve prisoners' relationships with family, peers, and the wider prison community (including staff), increase prisoners' self-esteem contributing to sustained physical and mental benefits, and contribute to the development of soft skills crucial to the rehabilitation process included literacy, communication and social skills (p.97-98). The authors propose that arts-based interventions also support the rehabilitation process by encouraging prisoners to think differently and more positively about themselves and "to 'imagine' different possible futures, different social networks, different identities and different lifestyles" (p.40). Specific findings regarding a project aimed at adult male prisoners run by the Scottish Opera and Scottish Chamber Orchestra reported that participants felt they could better express themselves

and express wider range of emotions following their participation, attributed to the opportunity to communicate and interact with other participants during the project (p.50).

Browne and Rhodes (2011) evaluated the impact of the 'Fine Cell Work' needlework programme in five prisons in England by conducting group and individual interviews with 22 male and female adult prisoners (exact number of participants by sex/interview type not provided). This project trains prisoners in paid, skilled, creative needlework which is completed during their lockdown time. Participants report development of practical skills, better financial responsibility, improved mental health and family relationships, with some reporting that, beyond earning extra money, they felt the desire to "give something back" and the project enabled them to do so (p.4-10). The needlework reportedly offered participants a distraction from the stress and anxiety associated with the isolation of lockdown, acting as a "catalyst for reflection" (p.4). However, while most prisoners reported that they felt "part of something", given the individual nature of this activity (carried out while alone in cells at night), the strength of this attachment varied amongst participants (p.10).

Bilby *et al.* (2013) produced a report which presents overlapping findings from a number of arts-based interventions in English prisons. Evaluating one music project run by Music in Prisons, interviews were conducted with 7 adult male prisoner participants and 2 members of prison staff. This week-long project involved participants learning to play instruments, compose music, and deliver a live performance. Findings included improved social skills, increased confidence and self-esteem which helped build positive self-image, as well as participants feeling encouraged to reflect on themselves (p.34-39). Bilby *et al.* (2013) conclude by arguing that engagement with cultural activity in the prison context has the potential to lead to behavioural change as a result of prisoners reflecting upon themselves; thereby, also potentially supporting their rehabilitation (p.50):

> *The findings clearly demonstrate how the arts activities undertaken by participants provided the medium through which they were able to reflect upon their own self. In this sense, the art facilitated reflection, leading to changes in self-perception, and potentially changes in behaviour.*

Further evidence of the propensity for cultural activities in the prison context to encourage similar introspective reflection is seen in Billington's (2011) evaluation of the 'Get into Reading' project in one male and two female prisons in England. This project consisted of fortnightly reading groups which involved prisoners reading aloud and listening to others, as well as general book discussion. Findings, drawn from specific examples and testimony from participants and group facilitators (e.g. health professionals), demonstrate how participants felt encouraged to "think about other people's perspectives" (p.58) while also being supported to recognise "new possibilities for the self" (p.73), outcomes which are fundamental to the rehabilitation process (Schuller, 2009). Building upon this study, Billington and Robinson (2012) conducted a more thorough evaluation of the 'Get into Reading' project with adult female prisoners at one English prison. While findings of this study are derived solely from qualitative interviews with an unspecified number of prison staff involved in the project (thereby not necessarily reflecting the view of prisoner participants), they offer further valuable insight into the impact of cultural activity in the prison context. For example, staff reported improvements in prisoners' social skills (attributed to discussions and sharing humour which strengthened relationships and increased self-confidence), and improvements to prisoners' psychological and emotional wellbeing (attributed to their ability to 'escape' the reality of imprisonment and feelings of anxiety and self-consciousness) (p.5). There is also further evidence of the potential for reading groups to trigger self-reflection and encourage readers to empathise with other viewpoints, which might assist prisoners to better understand the impact of their past criminal behaviour on others who may have been affected as a result (e.g. family or victims). For example, one member of staff made the following observation (p.5):

There were repeated instances of the literature spontaneously eliciting specific and vivid autobiographical memory of moments of recognition, as well as of the reading activity encouraging a capacity (sometimes demonstrably progressive) for understanding personal and imagined experience from a range of viewpoints.

Further insight into the potential for cultural activity to encourage self-reflection among participants is provided by Turvey's (2013) who examines the Prison Reading Groups (PRG) project; which from 1999 to 2013 had run reading groups in twenty-four male prisons, four female prisons, and three community groups in England. This report presents extensive qualitative evidence drawn from prisoner interviews, reports and surveys, and identifies a number of benefits that reading groups offer prisoners, including; the ability to empathise with the lives of others through reading, to engage in critical self-reflection, to encourage mutual respect fostered in group discussions, and to feel connected to a wider culture beyond prison (p.5). Findings also suggest that participants feel a greater sense of their cultural heritage as a result of engaging in the self-reflective process which reading encourages, and that reading groups (which aim to foster a love of reading, with learning merely a secondary aspect) may help engage prisoners who are normally disengaged with formal learning (p.21). Alluding to the rehabilitative role of reading groups, Turvey explains that reading contributes to the development of soft skills necessary for employment (i.e. communication, articulacy, and decision-making) (p.31). Turvey (2013, p.31) also proposes that reading groups help individuals to develop a fourth form of capital which she describes as 'imaginative capital':

Why is imaginative capital important? It matters because it concerns the growth of the self: reflection and thinking, crucially about other situations and other people. This is often what prisoners need to do. An invitation to invest in imaginative capital proposes that I might be able to understand my own situation better by reading about someone else's.

Turvey (2013) presents evidence of this development of imaginative capital in her study, presenting evidence of reading group participants identifying with fictional characters due to similarities in their own behaviours and that of the characters. For example, one participant commented (p.37),

It's a great book and I recognised so much of it since I have mental health issues of my own, especially OCD. I had to stop and work out all the maths and spent more time on that than reading the rest. But I think that's what Christopher [fictional character in the book] would have done too.

This process through which individuals come to identify themselves with a fictional character or situation is described as 'identification' or 'mimesis' (Andringa, 2004; Pavel, 2000; Schaeffer, 1999). Stevens and Usherwood (1995) argue that reading fiction allows prisoners to compare their own behaviour to that of fictional characters, thus supporting them to review problematic behaviours and develop skills necessary to plan for and cope with imagined 'crisis' situations (p.59). Therefore, building imaginative capital may help prisoners to identify the problematic thoughts and behaviours which led to their criminal behaviour while also allowing them to better appreciate the negative consequences of such actions upon others; steps which McGuire (2002) argues are crucial to successful rehabilitation.

Hurry *et al.* (2014) evaluated creative writing workshops ran by the 'Geese Theatre Company' in 28 prisons in England and Wales. Methods were mixed, including observation of workshops, and surveying of 185 male and female adult prisoners. Participants reported an increase in self-confidence and self-awareness, development of a positive sense of identity as 'writer' and not just 'prisoner', and saw improvements in their literacy skills (p.21). Other findings of note included participants' responses to particular questions following their engagement; for example, 81% stated that the workshop had

made them think about themselves, 83% stated that the workshop had made them feel like expressing themselves, and 46% had thought about things that were bothering them as a result of their participation (p.21). Therefore, once again we see evidence that engagement with cultural activity encourages self-reflection, self-expression, and findings of this study also suggest that cultural activities can help prisoners to confront difficult issues. Hurry *et al.* also highlight the value of cultural activities for engaging 'hard to reach' prisoners; such as those not attending formal education programmes), explaining that, "Creative workshops can offer a pathway into engagement with more formal learning opportunities" (p.49).

Looking outside of the UK prison context, there are examples of cultural activity specifically designed and aimed at encouraging recognition and discussion of difficult and personal issues in the wider hypermasculine context of crime. For example, the US 'Changing Lives Through Literature' (CLTL) programme has operated in a number of US states since the early nineties, and offers reading groups to men and women recently released from prison who are considered at high-risk of reoffending. This programme is based on the principle that "bringing carefully selected works of literature to criminal offenders may help these men and women gain insight into their lives and behaviour, while learning that they are not alone with their problems" (Umass Dartmouth, 2003a, n.p.). To achieve this, literature is selected to reflect the "underlying issues" participants might be experiencing (Umass Dartmouth, 2003b, n.p.); for example, in men's groups, literature and discussion mirrored themes "such as violence, masculinity and individual identity" (Jarjoura and Krumholz, 1998). The programme states that it offers participant's "safety" by allowing them to explore their own experiences by discussing fictional characters and narratives with the group as opposed to formally confronting or revealing their personal problems (Umass Dartmouth, 2003c, n.p.). Insight into the benefits of engagement is provided by testimonials from participants of the men's CLTL Dorchester programme, which include statements such as, **""**I liked the opportunity I got to express my feelings. […] I learned a little more about myself from it", "The course has made me reflect on the things I have done in life, some of the mistakes I have made", and "Reading accounts of other people's experience helped me put myself in their shoes and see what I might have done" (Umass Dartmouth, 2003d, n.p.). These statements suggest that participants did obtain insight into their lives and behaviours as a result of their engagement, and in addition, there is evidence that some participants also learned that they were not alone with their problems; for example, one participant explained that reading about a fictional character going through and overcoming difficulties similar to those he was experiencing in real life offered him "a sort of comfort, knowing this ordeal can be overcome, and also knowing I'm not the only one who has to face such problems" demonstrating that his engagement helped to normalise the issue he was facing while also helping him to not feel overwhelmed by the prospect of facing it.

Discussion and summary

From this review of literature, a number of benefits resulting from engagement with cultural activity in the prison context are clear. For example, evidence suggests that engagement with cultural activity supports the rehabilitation process by helping prisoners develop their literacy, social, and communication skills (Anderson *et al.* 2011; Bilby *et al.* 2013; Turvey, 2013). There is also evidence which suggests that cultural activities can also help prisoners deal with difficult issues, such as their mental health, by offering opportunity to distract themselves from reality during difficult times (Billington and Robinson, 2012; Browne and Rhodes, 2011), by encouraging them to confront their problems (Hurry *et al.* 2014), and to think different about themselves potentially leading to a more positive sense of self-identify (Anderson *et al.* 2011). Cultural activities are also reported to be more attractive to 'hard to reach' prisoners often reluctant to engage in more formal learning programmes (Hurry *et al.* 2014; Turvey, 2013), providing a supportive and non-judgemental environment where self-expression is encouraged (Anderson *et al.* 2011). Notably, in all activities a strong theme of encouraging reflection is evident (Bilby *et al.* 2013; Billington and Robinson, 2012; Browne and

Rhodes, 2011; Turvey, 2013). The intrinsic rehabilitative value of such self-reflection is highlighted by Crossick and Kaszynska (2016) who explain (p.57):

> *At the heart of desistance from offending is an ability to think about oneself and others, to see genuine choices and options, and to imagine other life circumstances and other possible futures. Arts engagement in prisons has been shown to make a serious contribution to these processes […]*

However, while many studies acknowledge that engagement with cultural activity can encourage self-reflection among participants, this is often discussed only in terms of its benefit to the rehabilitation process. As such, there is little evidence of how engagement with cultural activity in the prison context influences recognition of information needs. Also, while the propensity for cultural activities to encourage self-expression and confrontation of problematic issues is recognised, there is no evidence to suggest how this might influence prisoners' willingness to articulate and to act upon information needs, particularly those of a sensitive nature. Some insight is provided by Turvey's (2013) statement that individuals may come to better understand their own situations by reading about someone else's (p.31) and Bibly *et al*.'s (2013) statement that engagement with cultural activity provides a medium through which prisoners can "reflect upon their own self" (p.50). As mentioned earlier, information needs may be unrecognised because they are misunderstood or misinterpreted (Derr, 1983), they are deemed less important than others (Johnson *et al.* 2001), and/or they appear complex and overwhelming (Case, 2002). With this in mind, it seems plausible that, in coming to better understand their own situations through cultural engagement, prisoners may also come to recognise and better understand their information needs, including those which may be previously repressed because they are not well understood, not viewed as significant, and/or seem overwhelming. It is also possible that new needs may be identified as a result of this self-reflection.

Cultural activities are attractive to explore as an intervention for supporting prisoners to recognise and articulate sensitive information needs for a number of reasons. For example, one beneficial aspect is that, despite often being delivered in group settings, the benefits for self-understanding resulting from engagement may support prisoners to recognise sensitive information needs privately, without the need to formally articulate them to others. Evidence of this can be seen in Billington and Robinson's (2012) finding that reading has the potential to trigger "autobiographical" moments of recognition (p.5); a term which suggests that this can be an independent process, as opposed to one facilitated through interactions with others. Another beneficial aspect is that evidence also suggests that engagement with cultural activity encourages self-expression among participants (Anderson *et al.* 2011; Hurry *et al.* 2014), and as such, may also encourage prisoners to articulate *sensitive* information needs to others (thereby, increasingly the likelihood of needs being met). However further research, preferably of an empirical nature, is required to investigate benefits in this area. It is also important to note that despite associated benefits cultural activities may not be widely available in the prison context. For example, Goffman (1961) notes that while access to cultural activities is relatively unrestricted to members of normal society, the insufficiency of such activities forms "an important derivational effect" of prison life (p.67-68). Demonstrating on the ongoing relevance of Goffman's proposition nearly 60 years on, Thorpe (2015, 2017) argues that there is room to expand upon the current level of cultural and arts activities available in Scottish prisons, and that this is justified given proven benefits, not solely for rehabilitation but also prisoners' wellbeing.

In summary, engagement with cultural activity in the prison context can be viewed as a vehicle putting individuals on a journey, during which they are encouraged to reflect upon themselves and to come to terms with their imprisonment. This process facilitates greater self-awareness, self-reflection, and the potential for self-improvement, and such outcomes are of benefit to the rehabilitation process. It is also noted that cultural activities can be useful in engaging prisoners who would normally be disengaged from formal prison programmes. However, it is important to note that Burt (1977) argues

that prisoner disengagement can extend from formal programmes to also include non-formal interventions, explaining, "There is a tendency for inmates to suspect ulterior motives when new programs, etc., are initiated because the inmates feel vulnerable" (p.32). Bilby *et al*. (2013) also point out that in order for prisoners to fully benefit from their participation in cultural activities, participants must view the location in which such activity occurs as a "safe environment" (p.55). As such, cultural activities in the prison context may be subject to similar issues of prisoner disengagement if they are not delivered in a suitable setting. There is also the important question of what happens following recognition of sensitive needs, as it is not only important for prisoners' to be supported to recognise needs but also to be able to address them. In light of this, the following section explores the suitability of the prison library as a setting for cultural activity and also, to subsequently support prisoners to meet information needs which are recognised and/or triggered as a result of cultural engagement (i.e. further supporting the journey of reflection, understanding, and development).

IV.   The prison library

Coyle (1987) questions, "After two centuries, an old question begs for a new and better answer than has generally been available: What are prison libraries for, and how can they best accomplish their purpose?" (p.1). Fyfe (1992) notes that prison libraries have existed in the UK since the early 18th century, often beginning as collections of religious texts designed to encourage the reformation of prisoners, which have slowly expanded over many years to include secular and recreational reading materials. In the EU context, the most recent edition of the 'European Prison Rules' published by the Council of Europe (2006) states, "Every institution shall have a library for the use of all prisoners, adequately stocked with a wide range of both recreational and educational resources, books and other media" (p.15). In the US context, Lehmann and Locke's (2005) 'Guidelines for library services to prisoners' states that the prison library should reflect the shift in focus of prisons worldwide from punishment to rehabilitation. The authors explain, "The prison library then becomes an important part of the entire prison environment in its support for educational, recreational, and rehabilitative programs" (p.4). In the UK context, the most recent edition of 'Guidelines for Prison Libraries', the UK Library Association (1997) asserts that the purpose of the prison library is to "provide the resources necessary to meet the information, cultural and recreational needs of the prison community" and adds that it should also "support all forms of education and training, formal classes, practical training, working parties, open and distance learning, and informal self-education" (p.11). Therefore, the prison library has a responsibility to meet the informational, cultural, recreational, and educational needs of the prison population. Vogel (2009) argues that in supporting these needs, the prison library plays a fundamental role in supporting the rehabilitation process, and should be recognised as a "valuable and indispensable resource in an offender's preparation for re-entry" (p.182).

This section explores the various roles attributed to the prison library to better understand how they contribute to the rehabilitation process (forming the wider rehabilitative role of the prison library), while also evaluating the suitability of the prison library as a setting for cultural activity and also, to subsequently support prisoners to meet information needs which are recognised and/or triggered as a result of cultural engagement.

(a) The information role of the prison library

Lehmann (2011) explains that, "Incarcerated persons have a large number of unmet needs, which translate into a high demand for information, learning materials, and self-improvement resources", and argues that the prison library "can play a vital role in meeting these needs" (p.494). Therefore, the information role of the prison library refers to its responsibility to meet the information needs of the prisoner community it serves (Burt 1977). Bowe (2011) stresses, "The library should be a neutral

space where prisoners can feel safe and where their informational needs are dealt with in an effective and professional manner" (p.442). Beyond adhering to general guidance which states that prison libraries should stock a range of recreational, education, and legal materials (Council of Europe, 2006), there is a need for prison libraries to identify the needs of the specific prison population they serve to ensure that these needs are met. As Burt (1977) explains, "selection of materials cannot be separated from information needs, because the materials which meet those needs must obviously be made available" (p.34).It is recognised that this often presents a challenge for prison libraries who have a responsibility to meet the needs of often diverse and dynamic prison populations. For example, the UK Library Association (1997) state, "The population in any prison is inevitably diverse, and particularly in local prisons, may fluctuate rapidly" and go on to explain that this understandably has "implications for the library, the selection and provision of stock, the organization and presentation of the library, and the level of instruction and assistance provided. (p.20-21). In recognition of this, Reese, in Rubin and Suvak (2001), argues, "collection development must be systematic and continuous" (p.69) if a prison library is to ensure that it continues to effectively service its prisoner community, while Clark and MacCreaigh (2006) recommend that prison libraries utilise patron requests, surveys, community forums or focus groups, and interviews to assess the prison community's needs because "user needs and tastes differ from community to community" (p.124).

Alluding to the rehabilitative aspects of the prison library's information role, Stevens and Usherwood (1995) state that prison libraries have a responsibility to provide prisoners' access to information which will help them to "cope with prison life" and to "begin to address their own offending behaviour and prepare for their eventual return to society" (p.33). Similarly, Zybert (2011) argues that, "The most useful books are those that not only help the inmates survive their time in prison, but also help them deal with anger and other negative feelings that may have contributed to their commitment of crimes" (p.413). However, it is recognised that prison libraries are reported as often failing to meet prisoners' information needs (Bajić, 2015; Eze, 2014; Omagbemi and Odunewu, 2008; Tarzaan *et al*. 2015; Emasealu and Popoola, 2016; Sambo *et al*. 2017), due to issues such as "Grossly inadequate and outdated collections […] tight schedule in the prisons, censorship and emphasis on security" (Eze 2014, p.248). Therefore, there is a need for prison libraries to better ensure that stock development and service design is informed by the actual needs of the prison community, as it is important to not only support prisoners to recognise needs, but to also be able to address needs.

(b) The educational role of the prison library

The prison library is viewed as a having a key role in supporting formal prison education programmes. For example, the European Prison Rules state that the prison library has a "key place in the provision of education in prison" (Council of Europe, 2006, p.57), and supporting this, Bowe (2011) argues that the prison library "plays an important role to underpin work of the education department" (p.442). To accomplish this, the UK Library Association (1997) states that prison libraries should stock materials which help prisoners to develop basic literacy, numeracy, communication and life skills (p.12). The value of the prison library in supporting prisoners' education is often attributed to the unique atmosphere of the library within the wider prison establishment. For example, Piascik, in Rubin and Suvak (2001), points out that prisoners who have literacy issues may be reluctant to engage with formal educational programmes because they view institutions such as schools and prisons as "representative of what's gone wrong in their lives" (p.127). She explains that the "neutral territory of the library" is conducive to engagement with prisoners because it is "an unbiased place for learning where inmates get to select learning materials of their own choice" (p.127). This sentiment is echoed by Nason (1981) who states that the prison library offers prisoners "an informal, alternative approach to education" (p.8). Expanding upon this, Stevens and Usherwood (1995) states that the library plays a crucial role in supporting prisoners' education by giving prisoners with literacy issues the opportunity to seek "informal assistance with their problems from library staff rather than to risk embarrassment by making a more formal approach to other sources" (p.58). Further highlighting the value of

prisoners' engagement with informal and independent learning in the library, Brosens *et al.* (2014) explain that participation in library activities can act "as a bridge to other life long learning programmes" (p.1499), potentially supporting prisoners to subsequently engage with formal education programmes who would not normally do so.

The UK charity Shannon Trust (2012) draw attention to the fact that almost half of the total UK prison population are functionally illiterate (i.e. lack the reading and writing skills normally required for successful employment), and point out that many prisoners cannot read at all. Clark and MacCreaigh (2006) state that prison libraries can support the development of prisoners' functional literacy by providing "a good solid literacy collection for learners, both as a supplement to literacy classes and to support independent learners" (p.133). Bowe (2011) argues that in addition to improving prisoners' reading and writing skills, the library can support the development of information literacy skills; "the ability to make efficient and effective use of information sources" (Julien, 2001, p.1054); as interaction with prison library services can help prisoners to better understand when and why they need information, where to find it, and how to assess, use and articulate it (p.432). Piascik, in Rubin and Suvak (2001) explains that these skills are essential to enable prisoners to successfully reintegrate into society following release from prison, because they need to not only be able to read to access information, but to think critically and made good decisions about the types of information they seek and/or encounter in order to make informed decisions about their actions (p.121).

(c) The recreational role of the prison library

The recreational role of the prison library is highlighted in the European Prison Rules which state that, "The library should be seen as a facility for all prisoners and as an important recreational resource" (Council of Europe, 2006, p.57), and this is reflected in recommendations that prison libraries stock a wide range of "reading for leisure" materials in addition to more formal information sources relating to prisoners' education and legal rights (Library Association, 1997, p.23). The recreational role is related to the library's inherent role in providing materials and reader development activities which support reading for pleasure (Fowler, 2001), and Coyle (1987) states that by offering prisoners the opportunity to engage in these recreational pursuits, the prison library can help make prisons "more humane" while also making prison populations "more manageable" (p.2). In regards to the 'humane' aspects of the recreational role of the prison, insight can be obtained by looking at prison library studies which suggest that recreational reading has therapeutic benefits in the prison context. For example, Ljødal and Ra (2011) explain that, "For many prisoners, the library functions as a window to the world in an otherwise monotonous existence behind the walls. The library and the librarian bring mental stimulation from the outside into the prisons" (p.73). Cleeves, in Fowler (2001), explains that recreational reading supports prisoners' psychological wellbeing by offering them the opportunity "escape" real world problems (p.37). Clark and MacCreaigh (2006) highlight the valuable role the prison library plays in light of these arguments, explaining, "Inmates desperately need psychological escape and emotional enrichment, needs found at all levels of incarceration. And no one is better equipment to provide constructive ways of doing that than a library!" (p.132).

Stevens and Usherwood (1995) also acknowledge the benefits of the mental stimulation offered by recreational reading but add that it can also have a "calming effect" on prisoners which can lead to more positive behaviour (p.59); this offers insight into how recreational activities supported by the prison library can make prison populations "more manageable" as proposed by Coyle (1987, p.2). Bowe (2011) states that reading for pleasure can also help prisoners to develop 'emotional literacy'; "the ability to manage one's own emotions and to understand what other people are thinking and feeling"; which can in turn also raise prisoners' self-esteem (p.432). Expanding upon this, Bowe also adds that recreational reading is associated with a number of outcomes which benefit prisoners' rehabilitation; such as helping prisoners to reconnect with their families, to learn key skills, address personal issues, and even change their attitudes towards learning (p.438). However, Nason (1981)

cautions that recreational reading and associated activities provided by the prison library should not be viewed as having the sole purpose of meeting overarching institutional rehabilitative goals, and that such activities should be justifiable regardless given the benefits to prisoners' wellbeing (p.6-7).

(d) The cultural role the prison library

Zybert (2011) notes that prisoners are often culturally deprived due to their pre-prison impoverished backgrounds, and argues that the prison library can play an important role in introducing prisoners to new cultural experiences to help them pass time during imprisonment and to enrich their lives following release (p.419). Reflecting this role, UK Library Association (1997) states that prison libraries should stock materials which meet the cultural needs of the prison community (p.20), and Peschers (2011) states that prison libraries offer prisoners "cultural enrichment" by providing access to such resources (p.534). However, beyond providing information and resources which help to meet prisoners' cultural needs, the prison library plays a wider cultural role by acting as a setting for prisoners' engagement with cultural activities. For example, Cramard (2011) argues that the prison library is often "the only area specifically designated as a "cultural space" inside the prison" (p.551), and notes that cultural activities focused on books, literature, and writing are normally held in the prison library, and are often so popular that they are oversubscribed, with long waiting lists (p.555-556). Piascik, in Rubin and Suvak (2001), states that by hosting cultural activities such as reading groups, the prison library can support a number of outcomes which are beneficial to prisoners' wellbeing and rehabilitation (p.130):

> *Involvement in library book discussion groups can increase self-esteem inmates. […] Inmates with literacy problems who join a group discussion refine social interaction skills as well as gain literacy skills. […] Prison routines can easily bury an inmate's feelings and emotions. Prison library programs such as the new-read book discussions can reverse this damage and foster an inmate's personal growth.*

In addition to reading and creative writing groups which are most commonly associated with the prison library, Pitts, in Rubin and Suvak (2001), explains that prison libraries can support a range of other cultural activities including offering movie screenings, running arts and crafts workshops, and inviting in guest speakers, such as local authors (p.110-114). Cramard (2011) highlights that one benefit of hosting such activities in the prison library is that prisoners who might not normally otherwise visit the library become exposed to the material and services offered there as a result of their participation in cultural activities held there (p.555-556). Building upon this, Bowe (2011) argues that hosting cultural activities in prison libraries can help to "add value to the library service and engage an often-disaffected prison population" (p.438). Therefore, hosting cultural activities may be another way for the prison library to justify its existence within the wider prison establishment, while also helping to spread awareness of its services among the prisoner community.

In earlier discussion it was noted that prisoners tend to suspect "ulterior motives" when new programmes in the prison are initiated and this extends to non-formal interventions (Burt, 1977, p.32), and that prisoners must view the location in which cultural activities occur as a "safe environment" in order to fully benefit from their participation (Bilby *et al.* 2013, p.55). This is where the prison library has a potential role to play in supporting prisoners' engagement with cultural activity given that it is frequently reported as presenting an environment which more conducive to prisoner engagement than other areas in the prison. For example, Nason (1981) explains the library setting can offer prisoners much needed relief from the "tense environment" often found elsewhere in the prison establishment (p.3), and similarly, Lehmann and Locke (2006) explain that, "The prison library also provides a level of "normalcy" in a highly regulated environment as a place where individuals are free to make their own choices and engage in self-directed pursuits" (p.4). Bowe (2011) states that the prison library has the ability to engage normally 'disaffected' prisoners because "The library is one of

the few places they [prisoners] can feel human again and where they are not just a number. In the library they are free to make their own choices and do not have the follow orders." (p.422). While engagement with cultural activity is recognised as having the potential to encourage self-expression among participants (Anderson *et al.* 2011; Hurry *et al.* 2014), beyond simply engaging prisoners, the relaxed and informal atmosphere may similarly encourage self-expression which is suitable for the exploration and discussion of discuss difficult and sensitive issues. Therefore, the prison library has the potential to act as a suitable 'space' in which to ground cultural activities aimed at supporting prisoners to recognise sensitive information needs. However, despite the benefits of hosting cultural activities in the prison library, it is recognised that not all prison libraries will have the required staffing or facilities to do so. For example, discussing the potential difficulties of delivering reading groups in the prison library, Fowler (2001) explains that, "Limited staff time, lack of space for sessions, lack of suitable reading material in sufficient quantity, the rapid turnover of potential members, all conspire to push reading groups into the category of 'a good idea but not really feasible here'" (p.59).

Even in instance where prison libraries cannot directly facilitate cultural activities, they have the potential to support prisoners to address needs triggered and/or recognised as a result of engagement with cultural activities by providing follow-up information and resources. To achieve this, the prison librarian could take up an outreach role by becoming involved in cultural activities and making prisoners aware that follow-up information and support can be found in the library. Even in instances where the prison librarian may not directly be involved in the design and delivery of cultural activities, by collaborating with the individuals and creative agencies who are, the prison library can ensure stock is available which reflects the themes covered in such activities and thereby, support prisoners to address these needs. It may be useful to design book displays with such themes in mind and to actively promote third-party resources which may also be of benefit (e.g. leaflets on mental health and accessing associated healthcare services). Currently, there is little evidence in the literature of continued support following prisoners' engagement with cultural activity, and even less evidence regarding the extent to which the prison library is involved in providing this. Despite recommendations that prison libraries stock information and resources which may serve as a follow-up from formal rehabilitative programmes (Lehmann and Locke, 2006, p.6; Stearns, 2004, p.72), no evidence is provided as to whether or not this occurs. Therefore, further research is required in this area.

Discussion and summary

A review of literature demonstrates that the prison library plays four roles. The *information role* refers to the responsibility for prison libraries to meet the information needs of the prisoner community it serves (Burt 1977), and it is recognised that the prison library can support prisoners' rehabilitation through this role by providing information which can help prisoners cope with prison life and address their offending behaviour (Stevens and Usherwood, 1995; Zybert, 2011). The *educational role* refers to the responsibility for prison libraries to provide resources which support prisoners' education, by supporting the work of formal education programmes (Bowe, 2011), and prisoners' independent learning outside of such programmes (Piascik, in Rubin and Suvak, 2011; Nason, 1981). The prison library is recognised as contributing to the development of prisoners' functional literacy (Clark and MacCreaigh, 2006), and information literacy (Bowe, 2011); both recognised as supporting prisoners' reintegration into society following release from prison (Piascik, in Rubin and Suvak, 2001). It is also argued that engagement with learning in the prison library can encourage prisoners to engage with other life-long learning programmes (Brosens et al. 2014). The *recreational role* refers to the responsibility for prison libraries to provide materials and which support reading for pleasure (Fowler, 2001), which is recognised as having a number of benefits linked to prisoners' wellbeing (Clark and MacCreaigh, 2006; Cleeves, in Fowler, 2001; Ljødal and Ra 2011), and their rehabilitation (Bowe, 2011). The *cultural role* refers to the responsibility of prison libraries to support prisoners' cultural engagement by providing access to culturally-enriching sources of information (Library Association, 1997; Peschers, 2011), and offering prisoners' the opportunity to participate in cultural activities, such

as reading and creative writing groups (Cramard, 2011; Pitts, in Rubin and Suvak, 2001). The relaxed and informal atmosphere of the prison library is viewed as useful in engaging normally disengaged prisoners (Bowe, 2011; Lehmann and Locke, 2006; Nason, 1981), and therefore also viewed as a suitable setting to explore the potential for cultural activity to support prisoners to recognise and address sensitive information needs.

It is important to point out that the discrete manner in which these roles are discussed serves only to provide clarity for the reader, and one need only scrutinize the overarching nature of the information role to note that the relationships between the roles are more complex and interwoven than presented. For example, it can be argued that the information role is the overarching umbrella of the various other roles given arguments that prison libraries should provide information to meet the cultural, recreational and educational needs of the prison library. Also, it is recognised that the cultural role of the prison library could also arguably be considered 'recreational' to some extent, but an important distinction qualifies both roles for dedicated discussion; the cultural enrichment offered by the library implies that prisoners gain something as a result of their engagement, such as a better understanding of themselves of their cultural history; whereas recreation can be viewed as having no intended gains or outcomes.

Overall, there is evidence that the various roles (i.e. information, education, recreation, and cultural) played by the prison library contribute to a wide range of benefits for prisoners, many of which are recognised a having wider rehabilitative value within the prison context. As such, it is perhaps unsurprising that a number of authors have recently attempted to draw greater attention to the wider rehabilitative role of the prison library (e.g. Ings and Joslin, 2011; Šimunić *et al.* 2014; Zybert, 2011). Offering a useful summary of how the various roles attributed to the prison library help support the rehabilitation process, Ings and Joslin (2011, p.407) explain:

> *Prison libraries continue to contribute to public safety by supporting the Correctional Services mandate to provide safe and secure control of offenders, while preparing them for reintegration into the community. Specifically, the prison libraries support this mandate by providing information and materials that help the offenders equip themselves for useful occupations, increase their competence to form sound judgements, increase their understanding and appreciation of their cultural heritage, and enhance their personal and social well-being. In doing so, the prison library is a vital resource for offenders, as they prepare to re-enter society as law-abiding citizens.*

In summary, for the purposes of this chapter in exploring ways in which prisoners can be supported to recognise and address sensitive information needs, attention is drawn to the fact that prison library is tasked with supporting prisoners' information needs whilst providing an environment where individuals can explore creativity and culture (Stevens and Usherwood, 1995). Consequently, the prison library is considered the ideal setting in which to explore the role of cultural activities (such as reading and creative writing groups) in supporting prisoners to recognise and address sensitive information needs. Further justification for this argument can be seen in reports that the library as often being the only specifically designated "cultural space" within the prison and is the standard setting for cultural activities such as reading and creative writing groups (Cramard, 2011, p.551-555), and descriptions of the atmosphere of the prison library which suggest it is more conducive to engagement than other prison settings (Bowe, 2011; Lehmann and Locke, 2006; Nason, 1981). The prison library is also recognised as having the potential to support sensitive information needs triggered and/or recognised as a result of engagement with cultural activities due to its recognised role as an information-provider (e.g. Burt, 1977; Campbell, 2005; Canning and Buchanan, 2018; Rafedzi and Abrizah, 2014). However, given that prison library design and provision vary greatly between establishments, a number of questions remain regarding the suitability for prison libraries to support cultural activity aimed at supporting recognition and addressing of sensitive information

needs, including; Will all prison libraries have the space required to support cultural activity? Will all prisons have staff available to escort prisoners to and from these activities? Who will facilitate these activities; librarians, teachers, prison officers, or perhaps external visitors? Such questions warrant investigation and highlight the need for further research into this area in order to ascertain the feasibility and practicalities of such an providing cultural interventions in the prison library to support prisoners to recognise and address sensitive information needs.

V. Conclusion and recommendations for further research

In conclusion, this chapter presents a new perspective on the enduring problem of how prisons can support prisoners' rehabilitation. There is evidence that prisoners' sensitive information needs (e.g. remorse, mental health, relationships) are often unmet and this appears to stem from recognition issues and a range of access and behavioural barriers which hinder prisoners' information seeking. These unmet sensitive needs present a significant issue as they are recognised as having the potential to negatively impact on prisoners' coping and rehabilitation, and as such, it is essential that prisoners are supported to recognise, understand, and address these needs. Cultural activities, often delivered by external organisations, are identified as suitable intervention methods given evidence that they encourage self-reflection amongst participants, and can prompt recognition of new needs and/or better understanding of existing needs, and importantly, do so in non-confrontational indirect ways. In relation, the prison library, as the cultural hub of the prison, has a key partnership role to play, and in particular, is well positioned to act as a source of ongoing support following prisoners' engagement with visiting cultural events and activities (i.e. helping prisoners to address information needs triggered by the cultural activity), but there is currently limited evidence of explicit collaboration and follow-on activity in practice.

Given the identified lack of research (and collaboration) in this area, delivering cultural projects designed around sensitive 'core-issues' and aimed at encouraging confrontation and discussion of difficult topics in prisons could act as a suitable starting point for further progress. For example, a series of creative writing workshops exploring the theme of fatherhood could be offered to male prisoners who have children, as a means of encouraging recognition and discussion of common challenges, such as parent-child roles and relationships. However, it is crucial that prisoners are not only supported to recognise information needs, but are also able to address them, and this is where the prison library can play an important role, by offering participants direct access to tailored information if required following their cultural engagement. To achieve this, prison libraries could collaborate with the organisations responsible for delivering cultural activities to ensure that prisoners have access to follow-up information and support required to address needs typically explored or potentially surfacing during particular activities. To ensure such information is accessible, prison libraries could target book displays and promotions around the themes of such projects to permit prisoners to independently address needs, and the librarian could be prepared in advance should prisoners request assistance in seeking information on these topics.

In summary, the chapter presents evidence that suggests that there is potential for cultural activity to assist prisoners with recognising and addressing sensitive information needs. However, whilst appearing a promising method for initial attention to needs, there is limited evidence of continued support post cultural activity either through cultural agency follow-up or library support. Therefore, this chapter sets an important agenda for further collaboration between arts and culture organisations and prison libraries to provide continuity of support to prisoners, and to further develop the library as a key change agent in the progressive rehabilitation of prisoners.

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