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STICKING AND MAKING: TECHNOLOGY AS GLUE FOR FAMILIES SEPARATED BY PRISON

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Abstract

Everydayness links the histories and crescendos of our lives. Once we lose this "glue", many of our reference points for linking these histories are lost and the structure and patterns of our lives start to unravel. For families separated by prison, telephone calls and letters offer a form of glue, but punitive structures place many constraints on this type of communication. These constraints result in a transformation of technology, often resulting in re-configuration to the point where it plays a different role in the prison context. The analysis presented in this paper points to the need for developing both technologies that support the sharing of everyday experiences and that have functionality to help families re-establish and adjust family relationships and roles. In this analysis we consider how the punitive climate impacts on communication technology design and how to balance this climate with the objective of strengthening family ties.

Keywords: Communication Technology, Families, Technology Practices, Imprisonment

1.0 Introduction

“ICT must not be allowed to replace face to face contact”, (Participant at Digital Inclusion for Prisoners and Families Inquiry reported in “Through the Gateway: How Computers Can Transform Rehabilitation” published by Prison Reform Trust, London, England.).

ICT is often positioned as a means of saving costs in the delivery of services, but should rather be seen as an “adding to” or a “re-assembling” of support and delivery of services to

families separated by prison. This is because families of prisoners have complex support needs and use a variety of support tools (Coles-Kemp, Stang and Angus 2013). Research has shown a correlation between healthy, stable family relationships and positive resettlement outcomes for prisoners (*e.g.* Cambridge, University of 2012). Therefore, it is to society's benefit, as well as to the benefit of individuals and their families, to find ways in which ICT can help families maintain and strengthen relationship bonds during periods of separation through imprisonment. Notably, imposing one form of communication, (*e.g.* video chat), over another (*e.g.* prison visiting) is unlikely to result in positive resettlement outcomes. This is because families blend multiple forms of communication in a wide variety of ways to build and maintain family ties during separation. Hence, ICT offers the possibility of augmentation of existing support approaches and the potential for offering the opportunity of additional family communication rather than a means of replacing one face-to-face communication with technology mediated communication.

Technologically mediated communication may help in creating and maintaining a sense of the 'everyday' in family communication during imprisonment. The everyday is the mundane, repetitive and cyclical events that bind together family life. It could be argued that promoting different forms of ICT-mediated communication that help nurture and share the senses of everyday potentially increases the likelihood of family bonds surviving the stresses of imprisonment. For families separated by prison, it is telephone calls and letters that offer a form of glue and create a sense of the everyday. However, many constraints are placed on these types of communication and the practices that connect actions, thoughts and feelings, are often surveilled and curtailed. These constraints are grounded in the punitive climate that governs not only prisoners but also stretches to the manner in which society often conceptualises the families of those offenders. It follows, therefore, that if technology is to be used to extend the ways in which families can share the everyday, then the design process needs to at least be aware of the existence of the punitive climate and explore ways in which the expectations of this

climate can be balanced with the communication needs of the family. This paper explores the relevance of the everyday in the development, maintenance and strengthening of these bonds and considers how technology might be designed and its use re-assembled in the support of families separated by prison. The research is situated in the UK and refers to the UK socio-political climate when framing the research.

1.1 Punitive Climate and Methodological Contribution

When considering technology in the context of prisons, any theory of design needs to be framed in the context of the punitive climate. The socio-political climate in the UK is a punitive one, with prisons no longer deemed to be places of rehabilitation but of punishment (Loader 2006). Prisons are seen as one of the natural responses to wrongdoing, and society rarely questions the negative consequences arising out of imprisonment (Brown 2009) – even when the overwhelmingly negative social, financial and emotional consequences are extended to the families of prisoners (Condry 2007). The punitive disposition in the UK towards families of prisoners was clearly demonstrated when actress Catherine Tyldesley received strong public backlash after she donated money to a prisoners' families charity (York Press 2013). Many of the responses to the incident reflects how a vocal section of the UK public perceives families of prisoners to be guilty by association and highlights the difficult balancing act that policymakers and prison authorities must make when exploring the extended use of ICT for prisoner-family communications.

This punitive discourse, it is argued, translates into the micro-level practices in individual prisons (see Carrabine 2000) and affects the discourse related to the use of ICT in prisons. For example, the recent Prison Reform Trust report on computers in prisons (Champion and Edgar 2013) demonstrates how discussion on the role of ICT in prisons often focuses on technological functions. In such reports the recommendations for these functions are carefully framed to avoid the charge that prisoners might reclaim their

liberty through using ICT from within prison walls. Typically recommendations in this area therefore focus on functions such as education and training and the practicalities of communication. However, such a functional discussion, where ICT has a practical and task-oriented focus, does not address the role of communication in the emotional wellbeing of those communicating and how existing ICT may be re-assembled or new ICT designed to support this outcome. The silence on such topics occurs perhaps because such a discourse could be perceived as moving ICT out of the punitive frame and granting privileges to prisoners.

This paper contributes to our understanding of relationship building and maintenance within the punitive context. If we explore the findings through the lens of theories of design in use (Ehn 2008) we can gain insights into the roles of boundary objects in the on-going design of communication tools and processes used by families separated by prison.

1.2 Technology – but Not as We Know It

The punitive context completely re-arranges the lives of prisoners and those of many of their families and many of the relationship building and maintenance technologies that we take for granted outside of the prison environment can no longer be used in its default form. Design in use is therefore likely to be carried out both by prisoners and the prison authorities. This re-design occurs because the removal of liberty is not simply a case of incarceration but it is the complete re-arrangement of day-to-day life and strikes right at the heart of how people's everyday are constructed. For prisoners, imprisonment shapes all aspects of their everyday, including communication with their families. For families, it constrains all aspects of their communication with the imprisoned including control of when they can communicate, how they can communicate and the removal of the right to private conversations. As a result use of communication media is assembled within a very different regime than would be found outside the prison context.

Imprisonment affects what support families can give the prisoner and how and when they give that support. To a large extent, the punitive context also shapes what can be said and how it is said. Even technology usages that we take for granted, such as making a call using the telephone, are re-assembled within the prison regime, changing how the telephone can be used and what can be communicated with it. Whilst you can still make telephone calls from within prison, the numbers that can be called and the length of time the call can take are all controlled as are the times when telephone calls can take place. These controls directly influence what can be said and the emotions that can be communicated. As a result of these controls, an underground market of illicit mobile phone use is present within prisons (Crewe 2009), which in turn results in different ways of appropriating, assembling and using the telephone to avoid detection by prison authorities.

As can be seen from the example above, a functional discussion about ICT in this context is typically tempered with the constraints of the context where security, accessibility, financial costs and the restriction of liberty affect the form of technology placed before prisoners and their families. Inevitably, these constraints mean that not only is the technology deployed in prisons re-assembled, but is also re-scripted – *i.e.* the interaction that users have with the technology will be proceduralised to adjust to the constraints. This means that even commonplace technology such as the telephone has a different status and modes of use within prison than it does outside. In response users will adjust their communication practices to take the specifics of the prison environment into account as well as to respond to the emotional challenges that imprisonment and separation of families bring.

Therefore, whenever we think of technologies to support communication between family members separated by prison we need to think of the technology in terms of its punitive

context and consider its use in terms of assembly, practices, scripting as well as its functional form. This analysis requires us to think about technology design in its context of use in order to tease out the nuances of difference between technologies in and outside of the prison context. In order to better understand design in use in the punitive context requires a framework that enables us to reflect on both the scripting of technology use and the manner in which communication practices are assembled. Ingram, Shove and Watson (2007) proposed a framework for this type of design exploration that separates notions of assembly, technology appropriation and scripting. Through this framework we are able to look at particular types of scripting that are designed to constrain the type of information shared and the period of time during which information can be shared. Through this framework we are able to explore the material we have gathered and consider the use boundary objects might play in stimulating communication between families separated by prison.

1.3 Paper Structure

This paper sets out the importance of thinking about the everyday and what everydayness means in the context of relationships. It then briefly outlines existing research on prison technology. Following this, the methodologies and findings of two studies on families separated by prison are set out. Finally, a common narrative is drawn out of these two studies and the implications of the findings for technologies that could enhance communication between family members separated by prison are presented.

2.0 The Importance of the Everyday

Sharing the everyday in a meaningful and timely manner from behind prison walls is difficult. Technology potentially offers a range of means to enhance the “glue” of the everyday that could supplement the infrequent, short visits.

Everydayness can be conceptualised as the cycles and routines of our lives and the mundane, repetitive tasks that we do without any specific intent. Sociological works on the everyday have described it as a phenomenon characterised by recurrent practices (Lefebvre 1971) which are used to claim autonomy from technologies and systems and to give both the individual and the community identity (De Certeau 1984). Moran (2004) defines the everyday as a dialectical process that links our pasts and gives examples from the literature of space and place where so-called "non-spaces" are linked to spaces in which history takes place. A similar notion of linkage can be found in theories of relationship building and maintenance where relationships are bonded and strengthened through a sharing of life's cycles and repetitive actions performed habitually and without the direct intention of using them to maintain the given relationship (Sigman 1991).

Literature on prisoners' families typically focuses on the action of visiting (*e.g.* Comfort 2007); however, our research indicates that we should also think about the everyday that links these visits. The everyday is characterised by the mundane, routine interactions that play an important role in maintaining and strengthening family ties, gluing together the lives of family members separated through imprisonment. Carefully designed technological interventions could potentially be a means for families to generate such glue.

2.1 Relationships and the Everyday

Academic literature on relationships maintenance shows that routine everyday behaviour - as opposed to intentional, strategic behaviour - is often used to keep relationships going (Stafford, Dainton and Haas 2000). Everyday talk has a symbolic force for maintaining relationships: relationships are maintained via everyday talk by creating a sense of continuance (Duck and Pond 1989). Although this literature does not explore specific behaviours, it draws attention to the importance of the everyday.

Sigman's (1991) concept of relational continuity construction discusses the fact that relationships do not equal physical interaction, but are maintained before and after physical interactions. Since prisoners and their partners are usually separated and have few opportunities to interact in person, the content of that emotional "space" in-between physical (and often very emotionally charged) interactions may become very important to them. Yet this content may be sparse, since the prisoner may feel that he has nothing to share and because the couple essentially lives two different lives: this indicates that everyday-sharing and everyday-building could both be important.

Literature on long-distance couples has discussed how such couples use numerous tools to creating the "glue" of the everyday that keeps their relationships going between visits. Tools such as tokens (*e.g.* a photograph) are used, as well as mediated communication (*e.g.* e-mail, Skype) and post-meeting interactions such as getting each other "up to speed" as to what went on after the last meeting (Merolla 2010). The possibility of using these tools is very limited in prison: prisoners do not have access to e-mail/Skype and can usually use phones for a short time only. Therefore it is necessary to explore how families attempt to create the everyday within these constraints and then re-visit mainstream communication technologies to explore how they may be re-designed and their use may be re-assembled for the prison context.

3.0 Technology and Prisons

There are very few studies specifically focusing on the design and use of technology within prisons. In particular there is relatively little research in the area of the use of technology to support long-distance relationships separated by prison. This is partly because research access to prisons is highly restricted, and access to ex-prisoners is fraught with numerous difficulties.

Currently, there is relatively little communication technology available to prisoners: exceptions are telephones and in some prisons access to the Email a Prisoner system. Telephones may be on the prison wing or, in some private prisons, may be in a cell. Access to the telephone often depends on the ability of the family to be able to bear the comparatively expensive cost of the call.

Outside of the prison context, a large range of technologies has been developed to help partners living apart to share their everyday lives. These technologies include a device that can be used to transfer "touch", thus adding a tactile aspect to a Skype conversation (Kontaris *et al.* 2012). These innovations have engaged with the everyday (the need to share and create a shared, emotional experience), but have not yet filtered into prison technology discussion. In the context of prison, technology for communication and relationship maintenance remains narrowly defined as video-links and e-mails, and even this is discussed from a narrow task-oriented angle, omitting the emotional communication angle.

There are, however, a few research studies on ICT-mediated communication in prisons. These studies analyse communication from the perspective of the function and form and not from the perspective of usage or from the perspective of relationship maintenance. For example, a study of video-visits in the US by Mederson (2011) explored the use of video-links for the purposes of prison visitation. It found that inmates were generally satisfied with video-visits. However, family members did not participate in this study, and its scope was limited to video-links. Neither did this work seek to engage with the nuances of the everyday - it addressed practical issues such as technological problems with video-links and the advantages of video-visits in comparison with face-to-face visits (lack of prison visiting journey, no time spend on security searches prior to visiting, *etc.*). The participants were not asked about the topics of their conversations or whether/how they shared their everyday with the family member on the outside. This study also does

not focus on the re-scripting of practices to adapt to the constraints of the prison environment. Similarly, Phillips (2012), in her US paper on video visits for children of incarcerated parents, also focuses on practical issues (fees, time-saving, *etc.*) rather than the more complex issues of helping prisoners and their families share their everyday.

In contrast, the *Between the Bars* project from MIT Center for Civic Media (MIT 2012) developed a blogging platform for prisoners and has explored the emotional aspects of using such a platform in the prison context. The blogging platform is used for many forms of expression and each blog post originates from a letter, which itself forms part of the everyday dimension to relationship maintenance. The blog posts include letters to their families and is an example of providing a platform for emotional expression. It is also an example of a technology that is commonplace on the outside of prison but whose use has to be re-assembled and re-scripted in the prison context. As a study it has explored the practices of prisoners when using the platform and how these practices embody not only actions and tasks but also emotions and feelings of the individual.

This paper extends the concepts visible in the *Between the Bars* project and considers what other technology use might be re-assembled in this way to support the everydayness of family communication in the prison context.

4.0 Method and Findings

This research is composed of two separate studies: one that produced a meta-narrative of life as families separated by prison and one that produced a series of individual narratives. A nine month field study at a visitors' centre for a Category A prison in the UK produced a meta-narrative that articulated how families feel about the process of visiting and maintaining a relationship with a long-term prisoner. In a separate study, ten in-depth interviews formed individual narratives of long-term male prisoners' female partners where the prisoners were serving sentences in prisons across the UK. Combined,

these two groups of narratives provide a multi-dimensional picture of how the everyday is an important aspect of relationship maintenance for families coping with separation through imprisonment.

The meta-narrative reflects the importance of the everyday to the maintenance of family relationships whilst a family member is in prison. In addition, the meta-narrative clearly articulates how the experience of the everyday connects the daily mundane tasks with the internal and intense realm of personal feelings. The individual narratives from the second study illustrate and reflect the diversity of ways in which families assemble the everyday in the given context.

4.1 Methods and Analysis

A qualitative approach was used in both studies. In order to explore the meta-narrative, a participative narrative-building research approach was deployed in a prison visitors' centre. In order to explore the individual narratives, ten in-depth interviews were conducted with female partners of male prisoners serving a determinate sentence of ten years or more in the UK, or an IPP (imprisonment for public protection with indeterminate prison sentence length) or life sentence.

4.1.1 Meta Narrative

In order to construct the meta-narrative, a group of families visiting long-term Category A prisoners was recruited. Participants were recruited through a third sector agency providing support services for families separated by prison and were primarily members of the Visitors' Voice group. A participative approach was selected so that families could create the narrative as a community activity, while controlling the pace, content and presentation of the narrative. The importance of participant control is identified in previous studies (Coles-Kemp and Ashenden, 2012).

The narrative was developed on a wall collage positioned in the visitors' centre where families could contribute in any form. For example families contributed with pictures, photographs, poetry, bus and train tickets, annotated travel leaflets, timetables, written descriptions or verbal descriptions scribed by the researchers. This form of engagement was chosen because families visiting prison often feel pressurised for time, unwilling to leave the main visitors' hall while they are waiting to be called through, so the wall provided a means of contributing without distracting families from the purpose of their visit. This diversity of methods of contribution is important in an environment where participants have strongly varying levels of both confidence and literacy. The range of contributions also served to convey the complexity of the issues that families face in everyday life when supporting a family member in prison and, importantly, use mundane, everyday artefacts and images to construct and communicate this complex, rich picture of the journey and its impact on the lives of families.

A research team of three people initially visited the visitors' centre on the same day of the week for six months. The team was composed of an academic researcher, a performance artist with a background in prison work and an artist. With the permission of the visitors and the third sector organisation running the visitors' centre, the researcher and the performance artist visited the visitors' centre several times a month for six months. Initially the team simply observed and experienced the rhythm of the visitors' centre. Then, together with the visitors and the visitor centre manager, an exploration pack was produced that contained simple questions about the journey, a map and a disposable camera and an invitation to collect journey information. Families could collect a pack and use it to construct their contribution to the wall collage (Figure 1). In addition, the team talked to individual family members in the visitors' centre collecting answers to four simple prompts: "My journey is..." "My journey reminds me..." "My journey is difficult because..." "My journey is worth it because...".



Figure 1: Wall Collage

The participants were asked what everyday narrative they would like to tell, and selected the visiting journey as the topic to work on. The families wanted to reflect on their visiting journey in all its different facets – including the emotional, financial and physical facets. Approximately 20 participants aged between 18 and 65 engaged. It is important to note that the number of participants is approximate because this is a participatory activity where all participants are free to add to the wall collage at any point in time.

After six months, the research team started to assemble the wall collage from the material collected, inviting families to help and eventually assume control of the collage building process. An artist helped families illustrate the collage and family members started to arrive at the visitors' centre with pre-assembled collages that could be added to the overall narrative.

Once the collage was constructed the narrative was analysed using thematic analysis. One of the emergent categories was that of the everyday and the importance of the everyday in the maintenance of family ties. The wall collage reflected the many challenges to maintaining such ties in this context.

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The importance of time for communication and making space for that time in the everyday was reflected in many of the comments.

For example:

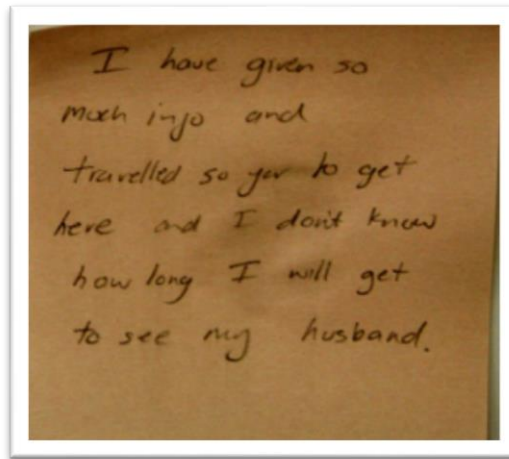
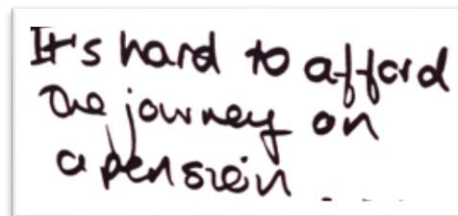


Figure 2: Extracts from Wall Collage

The theme of everyday practical problems was also frequent (Figures 2 and 3). These are problems that families previously shared but imprisonment made this sharing difficult.

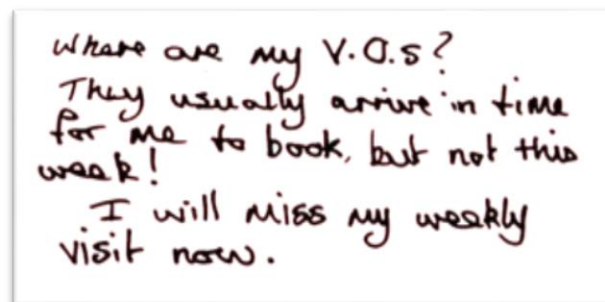


THERE ARE SO MANY
PRACTICAL PROBLEMS TO
DEAL WITH



It's hard to afford
the journey on
a pension . . .

Figure 3: Extracts on everyday problems from the wall collage



What are my V.O.S?
They usually arrive in time
for me to book, but not this
week!
I will miss my weekly
visit now.

Figure 4: Illustrations of the hurdles families face – extracts from the wall collage

Prison also places additional hurdles (Figure 4). However, the main overarching theme was that of the passing of time and the loss of time spent together, as reflected in Figure 5. As part of this overarching theme, the problems of sharing the mundane, everyday

aspects of life emerged as a significant sense of loss.

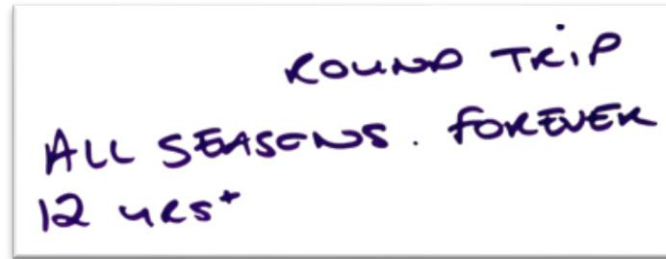


Figure 5: Illustration of the theme of time – extract from the wall collage

The individual narratives described below, show how families use communication in different forms to maintain relationships despite the hurdles described in the meta-narrative. This communication strives to form the glue that keeps these relationships functioning regardless of the prison context and the punitive climate.

4.1.2 Individual Narratives

The individual narrative data is drawn from an on-going study on the impact of long-term imprisonment on female partners of male long-term prisoners, conducted by the second author. The ten participants in the study were recruited using social media (*e.g.* Twitter), advertisements placed on Prison Chat UK, an online forum for prisoners' families, and through the help of a number of voluntary organisations working with prisoners' families (*e.g.* AFFECT, Action for Prisoners' Families).

The researcher met with each participant in quiet locations such as private function rooms in cafes and hotels. In-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted – these were either audio-recorded or recorded via handwritten notes. Questions were asked about the participant's experience of travelling to prison, visiting, receiving phone-calls and writing

letters. They were also asked about any support, formal or informal, they received and about the ways in which imprisonment had affected their lives and their relationship with the imprisoned individual.

Within the individual narratives, the theme of the everyday manifested itself in a number of ways. Firstly, many of the participants pointed out how important communication was: for example – ‘But we do talk about everything, and I think that's the thing... For any marriage, communication. Communication breaks down - you've had it’ (Anne). ‘The more we communicate, the more we...it's almost like we have an understanding. But I think communication is really-really important. And being honest and open with each other’ (Elizabeth).

The participants also discussed sharing their everyday, with Lisa saying that she and her partner spoke about ‘Everyday things, but I think we're probably not particularly chatty’ and Anne describing her letters as ‘a diary’ that covers every aspect of her life. Judy said they spoke about the kids and such mundane things as needing new socks.

Despite this, sharing the everyday was for some difficult, what with issues such as letters being delayed and phone-calls being listened to. The divide – having, in essence, two very separate everyday to share – was also a prominent theme that is discussed in some detail in the following section.

4.2 A Common Narrative

The everyday described in the meta-narrative is one that is framed by ‘waiting’ and ‘struggle’. Repeatedly the participants told researchers about waiting: waiting for visiting orders, transport, letters and phone calls. The struggle took many forms: *e.g.*, the struggle of financially supporting the imprisoned family member, the struggle of engaging with an everyday from which the life behind bars was separate. The meta-narrative also

referenced new everydays separate from the prisoner: including the physical experience of seeing seasons change. Moreover, participants referred to everydays that were no longer possible: such as the sharing of takeaways or other types of “hanging out” .

The individual narratives follow this framing to a large extent but focus more on the nature and qualities of communication between partners separated by prison. Participants recalled their attempts to ensure the imprisoned loved one retained an important role in their everyday life. The women spoke about telling their partners about the state of the roads and the garden, as well as ‘families...children...work’ (Lisa). Mary said she ‘wrote about everything’, including her ‘decorating, you know, [her] diet, [her] training, just boring, banal things, like you’d have a conversation with somebody about’.

Everyday talk was difficult – telephone conversations were usually short and some of the women struggled with the fact that neither calls nor letters were completely private. Judy found the fact that the phone-calls were listened to and that she could hear people walking around on the other end problematic. A number of other participants echoed her sentiments.

The fact that the everydays of the prisoner and their families on the outside were to varying degrees separate was also highlighted in the individual narratives. One participant recalled her partner asking her what Skype is – even though such technology was part of her everyday life, it was not part of his. Another participant suspected that her partner was writing fewer letters because he felt he had little to tell her about. Despite this divide, a number of participants mentioned various ways in which they attempted to create a common everyday with their partners: this includes watching the same television shows and discussed common interests (such as sports and fishing).

What comes out of both studies are two issues: the need to facilitate the sharing of the

everyday, but also the need to help prisoners and their families create a common everyday. We unpack this finding in the next section in order to explore how the use of common technologies may be re-assembled and technologies re-designed to respond to these two emergent needs.

5.0 Re-Assembling Technology Use as a Means to Improved Support

From the themes that emerged in the meta and individual narratives, we identify three key areas on which to focus new technology design and re-assembly of the use of existing technology. These areas are: i) technologies that support sharing of everyday events, ii) technologies that provide specific support for the additional relationship strain that separation through imprisonment brings and iii) technologies that support partners with different everyday experiences of technology use. Today, communicating routine events takes place through media such as letters, emails and telephone calls. However, these communication media are often felt to be events rather than glue because their frequency is low and the communication costs are relatively high. In monetary terms, telephone calls and travel tickets are expensive and for some families even the cost of stamps are regarded as a burden. Platforms which make possible more frequent sharing of the mundane as part of a repetitive routine potentially provide ways in which families can share in a more natural way and help to build a sense of co-existence.

These three areas of technology use and design extend the concepts that lie behind the *Between the Bars* project. It is recognised in our design directions that security and safety as well as economic issues will impact any fully-formed design. Often these issues are resolved in the deployment of the wider framework in which the tools are deployed. The wider framework includes interaction with the prison service, the supporting agencies (including family support groups) as well as additional technologies. An analysis of this framework lies outside the scope of this paper.

5.1 Design for Sharing

Long-term separation can result in prisoners having less to contribute to everyday conversation and ICT potentially can be used to help prisoners re-build this contribution. As the meta-narrative shows, families miss the simple sharing such as takeaways or common mundane experiences such as the changing of the seasons and a means of sharing these experiences. It is important to note that as the collage was being built families began to see how the wall collage might be used to communicate aspects of the everyday with prisoners. As a result of this realisation, families began to demand that a version of the wall collage went into the Category A prison. This action demonstrates how much families miss sharing the everyday. In preparing for the wall collage, one family took extensive pictures of the views from the motorway that they travelled when visiting prison because they could not easily share those views with the prisoner and did not get the chance to talk about these views that figured so prominently in their lives. As the collage was built it became particularly important for that family that the wall collage could be seen on the prison wings so that the sharing of the view could take place. This was a topic that the family did not feel able to share in the visitor sessions as it was felt to be too mundane and difficult to put into a letter. The family felt this topic was best shared with pictures and other artefacts related to the journey.

As the examples above show, technology that can help share these small everyday experiences - so that imprisoned family members can see what the families see, could be a useful capability for those separated for long periods. A noticeboard for images - a type of shared, digital wall collage - could be a response to this need. Certainly the wall collage with its free form and its ability to create pictures out of mundane, everyday artefacts resonated strongly with the families and subsequently with the prisoners. The assembly and scripting of the use of this sharing facility would be framed by the constraints of imprisonment but practices related to its use could be nurtured in different ways by the family support units operating in and outside of prison to achieve different

relationship support outcomes.

It is also important to recognise that relationships that are built on practical everyday may not always easily adjust to long-term imprisonment where it is no longer possible to share the practical through physical presence. Examples of practical everyday were given in the individual interviews and ranged from the mending of door handles to the paying of bills. During the construction of the wall collage, issues related to pensions and money management were often given as examples of areas where the prisoner had previously taken charge at home. In order to support the practical everyday, technologies such as Skype and video messaging could be re-designed to specifically support and maintain practical conversations. There are a number of ways in which this might be achieved: for example the use of remotely shared schedules and synchronized notes could be promoted. A series of icons could be developed which can be used in short conversations to represent day-to-day activities and advice on practical tasks. Of course, sharing schedules is open to abuse from partners who use this type of information to control and manipulate. One interviewee, whose interview was not used as it had not at the time of writing been transcribed, discussed receiving an abusive letter from the father of her children – which confirms that we should not assume all relationships will be stable and healthy. However, a wider support framework could manage the risks by scripting the technology use and monitoring for inappropriate re-scripting. The practices of the families could also be nurtured so that they avoided unwanted impacts of this type of technology and retained the control of when and how to use this form of communication.

5.2 Design for Communication Difficulties

Relationships encounter communication difficulties as part of everyday life but imprisonment and separation can increase the difficulties that families face placing further strain on relationships and exacerbating existing relationship problems. This effect

of imprisonment has long been recognised and, in the UK, family support organisations such as Action for Prisoners' Families and NEPACS (North East Prison After Care Society) have introduced a range of programmes to support families, including relationship counselling.

As the relationship literature illustrates, it is not enough to simply provide more opportunities for communication, such as video-links. If families feel that they have little or nothing to talk about, then the technology could be of little use to them and could result in awkwardness and discomfort for both. In particular in the individual interviews, it was indicated that there was a degree of divide between some participants and their partners. For example:

Lisa: ...because he just sort of stopped writing. He used to write all the time. He writes amazing letters, beautiful letters. But not so much anymore. No, he's a great letter writer. Amazing, brilliant.

A: Is there a particular reason why he's not writing so much at the moment?

Lisa: Um... I think he feels like he's said everything he can say. He goes through phases when he doesn't feel like writing.

Although all participants in the individual interviews described their relationships as mostly close and loving, statements such as the one above indicate that there may be a need to help couples to create common topics of conversations so that any technological innovation in this context is useful and meaningful. The wall collage also contains examples of references to family members that no longer feel able to visit, where the burden of imprisonment made communication too difficult for some. Technologies that encourage content sharing and technologies that encourage activity sharing might both be useful in helping family members to find a means of starting communication in a less emotionally intense environment than a visiting hall or the telephone.

It is possible that technologies such as Skype and video messaging could be adapted for content sharing. In the world outside prison, this type of activity is taken for granted because Internet access and freedom to choose viewing and listening material is available. However, prison places many restrictions in this area and points of sharing are not automatic or obvious as a result of these restrictions. Therefore communication technologies need to be carefully designed to include controlled points of content sharing and their use needs to be scripted in such a way that it complies with the constraints of imprisonment. Content might be music or film and might also be created by the prisoners and their families.

Sharing does not simply have to be about content but could also be activity sharing. In the individual interviews, an example was given of film sharing but watching the film was not a shared experience, the individuals watched the same film separately and then talked about it as a means of sharing everyday where the activity was as important as the content. However, this type of activity sharing is quite onerous and may be beyond those who are already struggling to cope with the impact of prison. Therefore a variety of less onerous activity sharing needs to also be considered.

One potential point of sharing that is particularly sympathetic to prison life is the shared activity of puzzling. Whilst building the meta-narratives, the researchers observed that completing puzzles was a common activity whilst waiting for the visit to start and many commented that their family members also completed puzzles as part of day to day prison life. Support for communication that enables the sharing of puzzles is one potential approach to relieving awkward silences and encouraging communication and a use for which technology is particularly well suited. Sharing puzzles via the postal service is cumbersome and visiting halls are not conducive to sharing this activity but technology that allows puzzles to be shared could be a positive step forward for some families.

Technologies that blend activity and content sharing are also a potential response to this need. A possible example is technologies to support the creating and sharing of stories about feelings and concerns. Whilst counselling may help raise these issues, finding the words to express these stories can be difficult. The pressure of imprisonment and the challenges of separation can exacerbate this. Communication platforms therefore might be extended to include a visual toolkit/library that helps partners to both construct visual narratives about how they feel and to place these feeling contexts that they can no longer share with their family members. Such technology might help to reduce the sense of family dislocation: for example, family members often commented that they could not imagine what life was like inside prison and prisoners do not want to talk about life inside but a visual toolkit that enabled the construction and sharing of pictures about life inside may be one way of overcoming this gap. Similarly, the feeling of isolation and loneliness when a family is trying to cope with financial stresses is not something that families wanted to talk about at visits but is a topic that appeared on the collage. Perhaps a communication platform that includes a visual toolkit for the expression of this type of concern might help overcome the sense of separation.

5.3 Designing for Asymmetrical Everyday

The realities of imprisonment mean that prisoners often change their role in the family. Families supporting a family member in prison often struggle not only with financial hardship, but relative poverty and do not have the time or resources to research how to improve their situation and find the help available to them. In contrast, the prisoner is often unable to help the family financial circumstances in the ways they would have undertaken before imprisonment. However, the prisoner has time and this is not a commodity that many families have. Therefore, using ICT to help a prisoner provide a supporting role in such situations is one possibility - for example, using ICT to gain knowledge about welfare support and mortgage advice to help families overcome the

financial struggles was talked about in the meta-narrative. Whilst technologies exist for this, their use would need to be re-scripted. Scripting this use of ICT is particularly difficult because misuse of such information and the potential for unwanted control from the prisoner is always present. However, re-defining the prisoner's role and developing ICT to support this role would, for some families, be of benefit.

In addition, when selecting the communication tools, consideration needs to be given to the differences in the technological everyday experienced by those inside and those outside prison. The individual narratives reflect how those undergoing long-term prison sentences may become technologically dis-enfranchised and out of touch with the technological capabilities that are available to their families on the outside. One approach is to give prisoners exposure to technological developments and this may be desirable for life skills after release. Another approach may simply be to create new technologies specifically designed for the purpose.

6.0 Conclusion

Research shows that maintaining and strengthening family ties whilst a family member is serving a prison sentence, reduces the likelihood of re-offending. In order to achieve this outcome, supporting and sustaining the sense of the everyday as part of family communication is an important aspect to building and maintaining the family bonds. Whilst many technologies exist that might help families in this respect, their use within the prison context is very different to use outside of it. In order to develop useful technologies for this purpose we must use frames of analysis that are able to pick out the subtleties of communication technology use in the prison context and understand how different communities carry out design in use within the prison context.

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