Isolation and Segregation: Cam-era

Rebecca Morton-Rowe, Sociology

The idea of prison seems so unfamiliar to many in society. Most people will never have the unpleasant experience of visiting a prison, and even less will experience living in one. Most people will never know or meet anyone that has been incarcerated but does this mean our 'free' experience is all that different? This critical reflection will draw parallels between prison and free society through themes such as isolation and segregation, consumerism, autonomy over identity and Jeremy Bentham's idea of 'panopticon' surveillance.

In the early seventies American psychologist Philip Zimbardo created a prison experiment to try and understand the human psyche. This Stanford prison experiment was created to examine predefined roles within a controlled area using prisoners and prison guards as models of power and the panoptic, thus conflicting with ideas of morals and judgements (The Stanford Prison Experiment Website, 2014). The research team created a mock prison within the basement of Stanford University and, whilst offering a daily cash incentive of $15, chose 24 undergraduate students out of 70 willing volunteers to take on

the roles of both prison guards and prisoners. Initially, the experiment was planned to last two weeks but was stopped after only six days due to the voluntary prison guards inflicting violence towards those who were participating as the prisoners. Not only were those who were labelled as the 'prisoners' negatively affected in regards to their self-worth but also the label changed the behaviour of the 'guards' in the way they saw themselves which ultimately allowed dehumanisation of the self. The 'prisoners' began to recognise the differing attitudes of the guards' treatment towards them which resulted in rioting within the experiment. Consequently, the label created a self-fulfilling prophecy among them; those labelled as 'guards' became power hungry whilst those labelled as 'prisoners' felt powerless. This can therefore demonstrate how the experiment became out of control very quickly.

As appears above the prison system is a fascinating subject of study where the isolating and segregated measures that characterise prison systems are used fundamentally to separate those that are deemed as 'bad' in society in order to protect those who are 'good'. Similar such divisions can also be seen

within free society, with hierarchal differences in social status being reinforced by poverty. The Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission have previously described the United Kingdom (UK) as a nation permanently divided between the rich and the poor (Wintour 2014). This can be seen within Britain with the rise in the number of people using food banks which has risen to nearly one million people in 2014 (The Trussel Trust, 2014) with, at the same time, the most powerful people in the UK becoming richer. As well as segregation between groups within the prison system and society, isolation is also a theme within both systems due to the fact that if individuals don't fit into a group they are subsequently isolated. Isolation in the UK affects the lives of 700,000 men and 1.1million women over the age of 50 (Monbiot, 2014) showing that the majority of those isolated

within society are the elderly, showing the rise in both isolation and segregation within the free society.

Furthermore a reason behind segregation and isolation can be explained as being triggered by the Neoliberal promotion of individuality. Within Neoliberal societies, such as the UK, consumerism can be seen as an insidious method of controlling and furthermore isolating the population, in which Johnson (2008) posits the notion that fundamental ideals of capitalism cause people to view their 'labour power' as a commodity. This therefore results in a devaluation of the worker and a shift towards wanting 'things' instead as a

means of self-worth. We do not see this as control but we are literally buying into consumerism, a distraction that allows capitalist ideals to prosper in society.

Work is seen as almost a chore but capitalism legitimises the work process by allowing individuals to 'buy' into consumerism but consequently we always want more. People have been taught to love consumerism but don't understand the relationship it holds with capitalism which allows it to continue to rule society. The dominant idea of consumerism and consumption within capitalism is the selling of goods and services, which becomes the model of the body. We sell our labour power which becomes a commodity in the exchange of work, which in the words of Johnson (2008) allows humans to have 'exchange values' Furthermore consumerism not only allows the worker to become isolated from their labour power but they also become segregated from other workers where people value consumer products more than the their peers. Johnson (2008) proposes that individuals are deceived into lusting after the perceived magic in consumer products instead of creating bonds with other people, which is due to the worker's labour conditions that are established in capitalism. In the contemporary world people are literally buying into consumerism.

As well as the recognition of the isolating aspect of consumerism and work, the work place has also been recognised through Bentham's 'panopticon' theory which is perceived to be a prominent theme within prisons. The panopticon has a design that places a singular watchtower within a circular prison enabling guards to watch over the convicts performances (Brunon-Ernst, 2008). This inspector acts as an all-seeing eye, which in turn changes the inmate's behaviour. If you believe you are always being watched, your behaviour will change to the way in which society deems it 'acceptable'. Foucault argues that self-discipline is promoted through the panopticon (Brunon-Ernst, 2008), in which people change their behaviour when they are watched and this was also confirmed in a Goldman's (2014) article, titled *How being watched changes you – without you knowing*, showed evidence towards changes in human behaviour from being observed. By examining an experiment into watching ones-self and using a mirror, researchers discovered that individuals are more likely to act in ways deemed to be 'good' if they could see themselves in a reflection.

Visual surveillance such as CCTV 'provides a superficial image of an individual and their outward behaviour, in contrast to the depth and personality sought by traditional disciplinary observation' (Jones, 2000: 8) If we are always watched do we truly have freedom of identity? Or are we always acting in a way we deem is the norm within society, in case someone is watching us? The difference between prison and societal life is that we are fooled into thinking we have autonomy. We are controlled by cameras, what people think of us, what we think of ourselves, which creates a self-surveillance society. Foucault (1977) states the panoptic has become a transparent building in which the exercise of power may be supervised by society as a whole.

This idea that we are being 'deceived' is addressed by Stephen Luke in his essay Power: A Radical View (1974), in which he defines power in three dimensions. The first of these, being the most basic and certainly most visible in prisons, is the ability to modify the behaviour of others when there is a difference of interests (Luke, 1974). For example this can be seen in prisons where inmates are forced to have set bed times, perhaps against their will. The second and third dimensions are more visible in wider society. The second idea is less observable: the shaping of the political agenda reinforcing barriers stopping the public airing of conflict (Luke, 1974). It is the third and most manipulative exercise of power that is relevant to this critical reflection. Power is retained without coercion or restraint through the creation of a system of false consciousness or ideology (Luke, 1974). The fact that people think they are acting autonomously, when they are more than likely influenced by tools such as the mass media, is what makes this conception of power so strong. We can illustrate this with the example of children's toys reinforcing gender stereotypes: all of the 'girly' toys seem to be pink and feminine whereas the boys play with Action Men, etc. On face value this seems innocuous but the repercussion – a distinct

division between genders – serves to form the 'Barbie,' make-up wearing identity that is more than evident in lots of women. A person who influenced Luke's theory of power was Pierre Bourdieu who holds the belief that power takes the form of 'fields' of resources: social, academic and economic capital (Swartz, 2012).

Ultimately the least powerful individuals of society are isolated and segregated from a free society in which the consumer-ridden society of today fuels the creation and want of technological goods, but also the banning of books in prisons challenges what those deemed as 'bad' have access to, removing the privilege of reading which is a very overt exhibition of power. As well only recently has autonomy once more been diminished through porn laws that have been put into place which is again limiting what we can see, with censorship laws deciding where and what we can access. Constructed power allows the constant establishment of hegemonic powers which the Neoliberal society is built on and furthermore results in the consumer society. But unfortunately we are too distracted to challenge the norm, so we accept them.

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Picture 1:
http://sharmilachowdhury.com/2014/11/22/there-were-hundreds-of-us-crying-for-help-the-afterlife-of-the-whistleblower/(accessed 30/4/2015)

Picture 2:
http://www.polyp.org.uk/cartoons/consumerism/polyp_cartoon_Rat_Race_BW.jpg (accessed 30/4/2015)

Picture 3:
http://inlpcenter.org/independence/(accessed 30/4/2015)