



Insecurity and Fragility: The Perpetual Duo of Precarity for 'Convict Criminologists' in a Risk Averse Academy

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Abstract

Risk management in the criminal justice system reflects a wider societal risk consciousness. People with criminal records are seen as risks requiring governance. Despite the recent interest in embedding lived experience in academic practice, for Convict Criminologists, the collateral and informal pains of imprisonment follow them into university and underpin their precarity, leading to an ingrained 'Status Fragility' (Tietjen and Kavish 2021). This article adopts an auto-ethnographic approach, drawing upon two pivotal junctures in the author's journey, from prison to university and identifying as a Convict Criminologist. It considers how risk aversion and (mis)management are operationalised in a university to extend the experience of punishment after release from prison.

Introduction

Risk and, more acutely, risk management, remain a prominent institutional consideration in the criminal justice system. Following the decline of the welfarist ethos in late-modern society, there has been a political focus on forms of governance driven by crime rates and cultural change (Maguire et al. 2007). This does not mean the welfare state was abolished, rather its composition was changed, creating a more austere version based on neo-liberal styles of governance and social policy (Garland 2016). As such, the 'social question' was mediated through the dual pronged implementation of social welfare (e.g., pensions, health care) and of penal-welfare institutions and regulations to ensure that new citizens were 'good' through responsabilising techniques and strategies (Rose 1996). These neo-liberal conditions extend into a variety of societal institutions, including the educational setting, with the associated managerialism delivering differential outcomes at the level of the individual.

Garland (1985) emphasises that the punishment/welfare nexus is not neatly exclusive, and furthermore, that there is always a gap between "a strategy's potential and its practical success" (ibid.: 257). The enduring legacy of penal-welfare strategy has not been the reform of offenders and the prevention of deviance but rather "its ability to administer and

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manage criminality in an efficient and extensive manner” (Garland 1985: 260), without ostracising the public or penal-welfare agents. This article considers the implications of this administration and management not from the perspective of a disembodied ‘public’ or anonymously imagined penal-welfare agents but from direct personal experience.

Emphasis on risk in society exposes people with criminal records to constant and explicit forms of governance. For those who have also been imprisoned, these forms of governance are even more acute, extending long after release into their day-to-day life, especially the workplace; once released, individuals often remain captives in society (Gunder and Kavish 2022). This process of “extending punishment into an indefinite future after release from prison...[and] making unbearable the lives of former offenders” (O’Malley 2010: 3) is regularly the subject of criminological analysis. Less common are accounts that combine abstract theorisation and direct personal experience of this phenomena. Arguably, criminological understanding of such experiences can be enhanced by those who are directly embedded within them and ‘Convict Criminology’ (CC) is the name given to this potential (Earle 2018).

This article begins by briefly introducing the concept of Convict Criminology, before moving onto the relationship between identity, insecurity, and fragility. It then considers the consequences of the afterlife of criminal conviction, so central to the process of punishment, yet long remaining in the shadow of mainstream criminal justice scholarship. In doing so, it introduces and applies the concept of Status Fragility, developed by Convict Criminologists (Tietjen and Kavish 2021) to signify structural impediments steeped in practices of discrimination, stigmatisation, and dehumanisation. These are features of an academic career and occupational habitus unique to criminological scholars with criminal records. The article takes an auto-ethnographic approach, drawing upon two pivotal junctures in the author’s experience of identifying as a Convict Criminologist in the British university system. It uses these as a scaffold in order to consider how risk aversion and risk management are operationalised in the name of student safety and institutional reputational protection.

Convict Criminology

A key criticism of criminology is that “it analyses crime from the sterile viewpoint of the middle class academic” (Newbold et al. 2014: 440). In doing so, marginalised and working-class communities are often misrepresented, pathologised, or implicitly problematised. A key feature of Convict Criminology is that richer, more authentic understandings of group life can be achieved by those who are embedded within it. Lived expertise results from insights gathered through personal experience of criminal justice processing. The key premise of a Convict Criminologist is their unique position of being able to tap into reservoirs of firsthand experience of the criminal justice system’s most visceral institution—the prison. Despite the nuanced criminological inquiry that this new perspective brings, academic life for those identifying as a Convict Criminologist is often fraught with insecurity (Tietjen and Kavish 2020). People falling under the umbrella of Convict Criminology include: other system-impacted scholars, those that were imprisoned, the families of those imprisoned, and ‘non-con’ allies that openly align with Convict Criminology. As such, the ‘stain of imprisonment’ is never far away. A prison sentence’s ‘tightness’ (Crewe 2011) is always interacting with our ability to both function and thrive in society. In this context of constraint, Convict Criminology operates as a community of current, ex-convict, and

non-convict academics, supporting each other to develop critical perspectives on crime and prison.

Identity, Insecurity, and Fragility

As people who have been encouraged through imprisonment to recognise that our sense of ‘self’ is a complex phenomenon, we have often encountered the fear of ‘psychological annihilation’ that accompanies the force of penal categorisation, the imposition of its master status – an offender, a criminal (Becker 1963; Tietjen 2019). Insecurity is deeply entangled with the notion of a personal identity. Every facet of life, including identity, is influenced by the imposition of a master status over which one has such limited control, even as the question of one’s identity turns from a straightforward difference into an evaluative hierarchy. Becker (1963) suggests that labelling an individual as deviant can create a self-fulfilling prophecy, as it isolates them from participation in conventional activities. Goffman (1963) suggests stigma is an attribute that deeply discredits its bearer, obtruding on social interaction. Stigma theories justify the negative response by emphasising the dangerousness of the individual who is different. For those so marked, stigma is a problem of shame, as they acknowledge that others view them as not quite human and acknowledge that this evaluation is warranted. This is not limited to individuals with criminal convictions and is especially profound when considering intersectional marginalisation and discrimination than what people with multiple oppressed statuses face, such as those who are positioned as being historically oppressed minorities, women or LGBTQ (Tietjen and Kavish 2021). When combined with the history of a criminal record, the layers of fragility become more pronounced.

Knights and Willmott (1999: 56) suggest our existence is “filled with a desire for security” and the goal of “being ‘this’ or ‘that’ kind of person”. Everyday life is filled with “multiple insecurities—existential, social, economic, and psychological” that make identity fragile and unstable, both inside and outside of the workplace (Thornborrow and Brown 2009: 37). The idea of identity is closely related to insecurity in that it is always precarious and uncertain because it depends on the validations of others, which can never be fully anticipated, let alone controlled (Becker 1971; Luckmann and Berger 1964). The creation and maintenance of identities, thus, involves “complex, recursive, [and] reflexive” processes (Ybema et al. 2009: 301). “Organizationally based discursive regimes” (Clarke et al. 2009: 325) are places where individuals put together and take apart their identities. Participants in these frameworks must choose between several competing discourses that are frequently adversarial, incongruent, or confusing.

In the context of higher education, a diverse body of literature offers commentary on academic careers as ones where competitiveness, intellectualism, achievement-orientation, hierarchy, and evaluativeness may give rise to all manner of high emotions: anxieties, defences, deceptions, self-deceptions, insecurities, and vulnerabilities. The academic self is highly exposed, “because the real or imagined demands of others invariably exceed the capacity of ordinary human beings to meet them” (Knights and Willmott 1999: 72). Gabriel (1999) argues that there are idealised expectations of what it is to be an academic. There are “winners and losers in a game of academic prestige” (Adler and Harzing 2009: 74) because of the pressure to perform that exists within a neo-liberal market-oriented environment (Clarke et al. 2012). The competitive and elite nature of such performative demands (Macdonald and Kam 2007) reflect and reproduce a normalised, yet elusive

academic identity, making others feel inferior or “insecure and peripheral” (Harding et al. 2010: 165). I doubt that there are many professions whose members are as relentlessly measured, criticised, and rejected as academics, exposing them to deep insecurities regarding their worth, identity, and standing. These demands subject all academics to close and constant scrutiny, which is further amplified in the case of those with a pre-given ‘deviant’ identity and “not distributed equally across race, gender and geographic locations” (Gundur and Kavish 2022: 243).

For example, in the academy, black scholars suffer the hardships of their marginalised position against a backdrop of supposedly progressive agendas of diversity and inclusion that frequently lack traction and authenticity (Brunson and Stewart 2021; Griffin et al. 2011). In UK universities, BME groups are still less likely to hold senior managerial positions, attain professorships, achieve the highest salaries, and are underrepresented in the highest contract levels and overrepresented in the lowest (AdvanceHE 2018; Bhopal and Pitkin 2020).

Within the UK’s ‘new universities’ sector, often perceived as less prestigious, levels of BME staff and students are higher, whilst across the sector, there is a racial hierarchy with BME staff over-represented in low-level, precarious roles. The influence of ‘race’ on job possibilities in academics is further complicated by gender (Bhopal and Pitkin 2020; Puwar and Raghuram 2003). Whilst academic work’s promise of creativity and productivity might be seductive, the effects of insecurity can be quite unpleasant. It is this fragility that is now explored.

Status Fragility, Criminal Stigma, and Convictions

The “collateral consequences of criminal conviction today are central to the process of punishment” (Corda and Kaspar 2022: 394). The proliferation of post-sentence completion barriers to employment represent a problematic terrain from a criminal justice perspective. They lack tidy alignment within the traditional frameworks of the criminal justice system (Corda and Kaspar 2022). Criminal convictions invariably attract collateral consequences (*ibid.*) but, for Convict Criminologists, these (e.g., restrictions, disqualifications, travel limitations) impact particularly on academic trajectory and expectations. These additional sanctions are not part of the original sentence, but rather, punishments that function beyond the court’s legislatively mandated sanctions (Corda and Kaspar 2022). As ‘justice-impacted scholars’ endeavour to progress along the academic career path next to conventional, unconvicted colleagues, they are faced with enduring impediments deriving from their conviction (Tietjen and Kavish 2021).

Goffman (1963) perceived stigma as being a shameful attribute that discredits individuals based on stereotypes, transforming stigma into a method for categorising a wide range of discriminating social attitudes and behaviours. Goffman made four key assertions: first, that stigma is a perspective that is “generated in social contexts” (1963: 138); second, that people learn to manage the potentially devastating effects of being socially stigmatised by utilising identity management strategies, such as passing and concealment; third, and this remains more implicit in his account, that stigmatisation is historically specific in the forms it takes; and fourth, that stigma functions “as a weapon” against those who are stigmatised. While the third and fourth assertions have been addressed more recently by Tyler (2018), the first two of these statements have largely come to dominate and serve as the foundation for research, policymaking, and anti-stigma programmes. For the ex-convict scholar, they

are part of a vicious cycle of “labelling, stereotyping, separation, status loss, and discrimination” (Link and Phelan 2001: 367).

Building on the work of Goffman, ‘Status Fragility’, as described by Tietjen and Kavish (2021: 69) “is a social-structural impediment within the criminology academy that can marginalize and threaten the academic legitimacy of scholars/faculty with past convictions.” They argue that those without convictions within the academic setting can ‘reasonably assume’ that their status and employment will be viewed as being more legitimate when compared to those with convictions. Convict Criminologists, therefore, are recognised as working on a more precarious footing within the criminological academy with the omnipresent bias, marginalisation, and delegitimisation arising from their criminal conviction.

Tietjen and Kavish (2021) propose a five-fold componential model of Status Fragility comprising:

1. *Possession of stigma identifying qualities* means that criminologists working under the stigma of convictions are often perceived as possessing stigma-identifying qualities that function in a destructive capacity;
2. *Individual definitions of self* whereby the degree of the Status Fragility’s harm may vary depending on how Convict Criminologists define and position themselves;
3. *Personal perceptions of the impact of the pains of imprisonment* which recognises that the damage rendered by the pains of imprisonment is variable amongst the Convict Criminologist and will alter their view or reality and belief of perception;
4. *The varying magnitudes of stigma attached to criminal convictions* whereby the type of crime a Convict Criminologist is convicted of will carry differing levels of stigmatisation; and
5. *Status anxiety’s relationship to the meritocratic ideal*- whereby Convict Criminologists demonstrate a hyper-awareness of their colleagues’ and peers’ potential adherence to meritocratic belief systems that are ingrained in social institutions like the university.

It is not the case that all Convict Criminologists will inevitably face these conditions and consequences, but Tietjen and Kavish’s (2021) framework offers a powerful analytical approach for exploring this area.

Auto-ethnographic Methodology

The study of academic insecurity amongst professional academics is limited, although they are articulated in some autoethnographic accounts (Knights and Clarke 2014; Learmonth and Humphreys, 2012). Rarer in the field are firsthand accounts of those Convict Criminologists currently in academic employment.

Autoethnography is a form of scholarship that draws upon, analyses, and/or interprets the author’s lived experience, and connects those reflective insights to notions of self-identity, cultural norms, and socio-political issues (Adams 2017). As part of a movement emphasising participatory research and experimental writing, autoethnography allows marginalised people, who would have previously been the subject of more conventional ethnographies, to now be able to share their own tales (Earle 2018). Although rare, autoethnographic insights of professional academics have recently conveyed powerful accounts of insecurity and stigmatisation in relation to the core notions of race and gender bias

(Brunson and Stewart 2021). Against a backdrop of the intersections of race and gender, there have also been further powerful accounts of personal experiences in the academy of tokenism (Mitchell 2021), as well as microaggressions and macro aggressions (Sykes 2021). Developing a ‘criminological narrative’ in respect of one’s lived experience of imprisonment, or other related involvement with carceral systems, is a critical component of Convict Criminology.

In autoethnography, writing reflectively drives the process rather than being included as a ‘mopping up’ activity after research is conducted (Richardson and St. Pierre 2005). As a Convict Criminologist, you become both “the convict with the prison story and the criminologist with the academic telling” (Earle 2021: 87). The insertion of the author as a primary character of the story offers the possibility of a more encompassing and layered evocation of cultural experience. As such, “autoethnography confronts dominant forms of representation and power in an attempt to reclaim, through self-reflective response, representational spaces that have marginalized those of us at the borders” (Tierney 1998: 66). This article uses two autoethnographic vignettes to capture pivotal moments of my experience of ‘Status Fragility’ as a Convict Criminologist in the academy. These involved the university’s media strategy and contact restrictions placed around the fulfilment of my academic duties. Such vignettes are used as a way of presenting “a snapshot of a larger picture and also tries to evoke some dimensions of that larger picture” (Earle 2021: 87). They provide some insight into my experience and the barriers I faced within the academy, both during and after serving my prison sentence.

Context, Foundations, and Backgrounds

I had studied for my master’s degree in criminology on day-release whilst serving a prison sentence at an open prison, in order to gain entry onto the master’s programme. I went through the traditional admissions process that all other students go through, and the only deviation was that the prison had to meet with the university to provide disclosure of my offending and discuss the practicalities. I experienced this as being fair and appropriate procedurally. No restrictions or impositions were made on my involvement in the curricula and campus life by either the university or prison, except for the standard license conditions for release on temporary license (ROTL). These included maintaining good behaviour and not engaging with social media, not contacting victims or their family or travelling to any excluded areas, nor engaging in any activities or establishments (such as pubs/bars) that were not permitted, and observing the timeframes of my license each day.

I was able to mix and interact with university staff and students freely with disclosure of my circumstances being at my discretion. As well as being successful academically, I also had an exemplary attendance and disciplinary record. I was subsequently offered a scholarship by the university to study for my PhD. This part of my journey was supported by my module, programme leaders, and dissertation supervisors, who were a source of great encouragement, both academically and personally.

The PhD was to be started whilst serving my sentence in an open prison. I had not anticipated how much elevation onto the PhD programme would entail a different approach to the institution’s engagement with me. I was told there were now to be restrictions, and that my status shifted subtly but clearly into a risk management spectrum I had not previously encountered. It was clear that my ‘roles, opportunities, and status’ had changed due to my imprisonment (Gundur and Kavish 2022; Mbuba 2012).

The Media Strategy Episode—Risks of Reality, the Reality of Risk

When I was due to start lecturing at the university as part of my doctoral programme commitments, I was informed that there would be a delay. The reason was at first shrouded in secrecy. No-one seemed to know or would tell me what was behind the delay. I had been preparing to deliver lectures and seminars and thinking about what and who I would be teaching...other PhD students were teaching tutorials and presenting lectures, but not me... My PhD supervision team assured me all would be well; however, they were also largely kept in the dark and it was a colleague who eventually informed me that the senior management had reservations about me teaching students. I was told that the university management wanted to ensure there was a media strategy in place should there be complaints that I was teaching at the university, given my prison background. There was a concern that members of the student body, parents, or members of the local community might alert journalists, leading to negative stories in local or national media. I was told that this media strategy was put in place in order to protect the institution and its reputation. At no point did it seem to occur to anyone that, I, myself, might have a say in such a strategy, even though it was presented to me as a mutually protective endeavour. I felt, however, that this was a massaging of the reality.

The reality was that the university's media strategy was tangled in a range of other shifts in my status as I rose up the academic hierarchy toward the more elevated position of a PhD student, as I became more than a simple customer, an academic agent in my own right. For me, the very presence of this media strategy served to emphasise and prioritise my former criminal identity and status. It felt like I was being returned to a position of being "othered" by a power beyond and above me. My chosen identity as a Convict Criminologist might have had a twin component of being an academic with a criminal past, but one seemed to matter much more than the other, and I was deemed to pose as a potential reputational risk to the institution.

On Being Managed as a Danger Presenting Threats Unspecified

Another repercussion of the university's new interest in my presence on their PhD programme was the imposition of a condition of my teaching being that I was not allowed to have 1-to-1 contact with students in any closed office space. In addition, I was told any student interaction with me needed to happen in public view. I was informed that Student Support Services had expressed reservations about me teaching, as they had a duty to protect students. The restrictions were purported and ensured their safety as if this would not radically alter my sense of identity. There was also a failure to recognise me as a student. They were imposed on me, despite there being nothing to indicate in my offending history that this would be appropriate or necessary and even though I had been assessed by the probation and prison risk assessment system as having no 'breach of trust' issues and posed no risk to vulnerable groups. It was a decision made by the university management with seemingly no appreciation of the consequences to me and no penological understanding of convictions and risk.

The restriction on contact was deeply and personally stigmatising, undermining and overshadowing my emerging status and identity as an academic. In the eyes of the university management, I was a potential hazard, a risk that required management. Anyone who has been in prison knows that those most segregated are widely regarded as those who are

most deviant by the prisoner themselves. A prisoner not allowed to have contact with other prisoners and only allowed to receive visitors in a closed and supervised environment is often perceived and labelled amongst the prisoner population as being an especially deviant person, someone seen as a threat or predator to vulnerable people. Such segregated prisoners are often suspected as being some form of sexual offender and are viewed with extreme suspicion. So, when such a similar sanction was spuriously applied to me, it triggered all those prison memories and challenged my sense of self. I was concerned how people would look at me—did they think the same as the prison who put such prisoners on special restrictions? I was very distressed and concerned about how staff and students would perceive me if I was subject to such restrictions. What if they questioned why I was not allowed to meet them in an office like the other lecturers were? How would I answer that?! How could I do my job effectively when my ability to do so was being restricted?

For me, the unfounded, unexpected, and unnecessary sanction was deeply stigmatising and it felt like my identity and status as an academic was being undermined and overshadowed by the misappropriation and misinterpretation of my lived experience of prison. It was an intensely dehumanising and autonomy-reducing process. Meetings were called and held without my involvement with people unknown to me. It was a process of exclusion, hidden in a process of inclusion, the exact opposite of the gains I had expected from entry onto a PhD programme. Entering the highest level of academic training for the highest possible educational qualification (a doctorate), I had hoped that I might have been seen for what I am, not what some people thought I was.

On Being Marked as Something You Are Not

I was released on temporary licence (ROTL) from my Category D Open Prison to attend university. Conditions in Category D prisons are designed to be aligned with that of the outside world, to allow those who are imprisoned to adjust and acculturate towards regaining independence and day-to-day functioning outside of the walls (Statham et al. 2021). Release on temporary license (ROTLs) are a key provision allowing prisoner releases to undertake employment, education, medical appointments, and home visits with family (Danks and Bradley 2018; Statham et al. 2021). No prisoners are allowed to engage in ROTL unless the risk assessment process is satisfied that they do not pose an unmanageable risk in the community. Both the probation service and the prison had completed mandatory Offender Assessment System (OASys) reports that confirmed I posed no risk by attending university to study or to teach, and no restrictions were attached by them to these activities. I was surprised and upset to discover that the university had a different perspective, based largely on ignorance and prejudice.

One of the key issues amongst many social institutions is the fear that ex-offenders may re-offend and, in some way, bring reputational damage to the institution (Ross et al. 2010). This risk does not prevent universities from being keen to benefit from their inclusion. Resonating with the autoethnographic accounts of black scholars (Brunson and Stewart 2021; Mitchell 2021; Sykes 2021), Buck et al. (2022: 824) identify that, although lived experience is often embraced by academic institutions, there is a “significant risk of tokenization, performative inclusion and exploitation”. They identify this practice as similar to a consumerist approach that opportunistically capitalises on lived experience in the pursuit of market efficiency, economy, and effectiveness.

Since the early 1990s, higher education has been increasingly promoted as a marketable commodity. Underpinned by the neo-liberal resurgence, expenditure, and investment on public services declined whilst the “discourse on education changed...to one focused on markets and choices” (Lynch 2015: 192). Lynch (2015) highlights new ‘mechanisms of control and governance’ of university productivity being developed to support this. These are symbolic of new managerialism, a dominant modality of governance that involves institutionalising market principles. Here, outputs measured through performance indicators and rankings dominate, with control exercised through competition and surveillance (Braun 1999; Clarke et al. 2000; Lynch 2015).

Universities are always looking for new USP’s to attract the consumer/student. Custer et al. (2020) consider the ‘gifts’ that people with lived experience can bestow on institutions. Such gifts include tapping into trends and subcultures that harness the apparent authenticity of system impacted staff. Their vivid approach to teaching criminal justice system modules is seen to generate student success and enhance recruitment strategies (Custer et al. 2020; Turner and Husman 2008). One area of emphasis is in the neo-liberal context where there “is a significant emphasis upon managing all aspects of human endeavour” (Hardy 2012: 275). Shore (2008: 284) discusses people reduced to “units of economic resource” requiring monitoring, which exists within a vacuum of economism and relegates social and political practices to a lesser consideration (Hardy 2012). The desire to measure and manage is part of the risk society, seeking to control and manage (Beck 1999) that is dominant within institutions (Hardy 2012).

An overarching theme documented in the vignettes is the institutional failure to recognise a “thinking, feeling subject” (Gabriel 1999: 179). Such dehumanisation is a form of moral exclusion that withholds or denies human attributes to those deemed to be underserving, undesirable, or lacking a pro-social ethos. University social science departments across the UK will have programmes dedicated to the teaching of these themes. Indeed, I was engaged in one myself, so it was ironic to feel the force of these academic arguments in a place where I had assumed I might be protected from them. My exclusions from meetings and discussions surrounding self-impacting conditions were more akin to the prison discourse of ‘being done to’ rather than ‘participating in’ higher education.

As someone who identified as a Convict Criminologist, I was an unknown entity. My academic colleagues provided humanisation in abundance; they welcomed me to the team without judgment by giving me a sociable environment in which to flourish. They offered support academically, helping me to develop and grow in my scholarly endeavour. Yet, the university struggled to accommodate this because of their institutional fixation on my criminal past. I was seen as a receptacle teeming with risk factors that needed to be counted, added up, and assessed, to see if I was prone to dangerous behaviours. Just as Foucault (1977) identified, this reflected the extent and reach of governance. Simon (2007) also argues that governing through crime is not restricted to political institutions and extends into educational institutions and workplaces—two areas that converge in the auto-ethnographic experiences of the author. Simon (2007) points toward the crime theme in educational institutions, eroding their educational ethos whereas when considering the workplace, the crime theme is also present as organisations seek to govern their workers. Monitoring and surveillance are core themes, given the concern of the institution being ‘liable’ for employee actions as well as other derived wrongful behaviour. There is the presence of “victimization, of abuse of power, of dangerous calls for exclusion, and for punishment” (ibid.: 255), exacerbating Status Fragility given the ambiguity that these co-exist alongside notions of egalitarianism, freedom, and choice in the workplace. The

convergence of institutions acts as a ‘double whammy’ in the case of my experience as a person with convictions in the educational setting in which I was also employed.

The Recurring Shocks of Stigma, the Haunting Character of Shame

When considering restricting my contact with students in closed spaces, I do not think the university authorities appreciated how their actions might have triggered a range of powerful thoughts that took me back to a carceral mindset and perception that I had tried so hard to leave behind. The main reason for this was the implicit assumption of dangerousness and personal threat that this restriction of contact would inevitably produce. I was experiencing a labelling effect, one that positioned me as the ‘other’, with a negatively marked identity—different unwelcome (Gundur and Kavish 2022; Kavish et al. 2016). Nor would they appreciate how I would be propelled back toward the feelings I had on the prison landings. There are a variety of status hierarchies among prisoners. Certain crimes have historically been viewed with greater respect than others. There are some crimes (and their implications) that are more prestigious than others. Organised crime and certain types of murder have historically occupied the highest positions in the kudos hierarchy, with minor acts and sexual offences at the bottom, both in the criminal society and in the prison environment (Crewe 2009).

When I was in prison, I was aware of the deleterious impacts of this potential labelling and remained free of their effects. It was, therefore, particularly upsetting to encounter them only on my release and in an institution tasked not with my punishment or risk management but with my education. Having my contacts with students restricted, I felt not only was I being seen primarily as a risk to be managed, but also, I was propelled back into a form of hyper-sensitive self-management I thought I had left behind. In this sense, the transformative educational institution was, instead, becoming an extension of the penal institution and complicit in its regime of punishment. I was propelled into a transient status, where I was not restored to full participation and immersion in a pro-social and free society, instead remaining captive to the labels and status that I carry, whilst for those who are not white, these barriers to reintegration are much more profound (Gundur and Kavish 2022). Stigmatisation “operates as a form of governance which legitimises the reproduction and entrenchment of inequalities and injustices” (Tyler 2013; 8). As such, whilst not the intent of my former institution, a stigmatising process emerged from its pre-occupation with risk, as I became the subject of a form of ‘punitive panopticism’ (Foucault 1977; Wacquant 2009). Simon (2007) advances the work of Holmes (1881) and the institutional law of the ‘bad man’, “who must be constantly monitored and penalized” (ibid.: 257); in the eyes of the institution, I was very much this bad man to be governed.

Management of the Self

The question of how I am positioned as a Convict Criminologist, and how I should act, involves consideration of the interplay between the ‘multiple, dynamic and potential self’ (Knights and Clarke 2013). In the neo-liberal context, insecurity is perpetuated by the transitioning into an institution and “what authorities and moral entrepreneurs conceive to be socially acceptable knowledge and skills of citizenship” (Stenson 1998: 120). In addition to the institutional governance I was subjected to, I also found myself operationalising a

form of self-governance, choosing from a range of intersecting discourses, often ‘antagonistic, contradictory’ and, at times, ambiguous (Knights and Clarke 2013). In Knights and Clarke’s (2014) research on academics’ sense of self-worth, for some, entering academia late and carrying the baggage of a previous career outside the discipline gave rise to feelings of inadequacy (Knights and Clarke 2014; Learmonth and Humphreys 2012). Whilst the study of academic insecurity amongst academics is limited, Hearn (2008: 190) captures the occupation as one where “competitiveness, intellectualism, achievement orientation, hierarchy and evaluativeness give rise to all manner of high emotions, anxieties, insecurities, threats, vulnerabilities”. The pressure from these factors is further compounded if you have a criminal history and experiences of imprisonment (Tietjen and Kavish 2021).

The notion of the ‘master status’ is especially relevant in the case of a Convict Criminologist. It refers to a perceived social position that is extremely important for a person’s identity, shaping their entire social experience. Each person has various status positions, some ascribed and others attained. An individual’s master status will prevail over other statuses in most social settings. When significant status positions conflict with prevailing roles and prejudices, these factors can lead to social difficulties. In these circumstances, social actors must make judgments about their status, which may include denial, exclusion, or accepting a new master status. Just as Goffman (1963) introduced utilising identity management strategies, I also adopted this broad approach, such that whom I interacted with influenced what stigma management strategy that I employed. Three categories of stigma management fall under the banner of Modified Labelling Theory (Link et al. 1989): secrecy, withdrawal, and preventative telling. I operationalised a hybrid of all three categories, dependent on context, and influenced further by the setting, context, and my judgment of how my character, trustworthiness, and demeanour could be perceived through the eyes of others (Dollar and Tietjen 2023; Park and Tietjen 2021).

My master status as a former convicted prisoner was one that dominated my academic treatment and shaped restrictions imposed on me by my university. Academic ability and practice remained secondary to a master status recognised by the university as requiring specific forms of management (Kavish et al. 2016). The seminal work of Sykes (1958) is often invoked to elucidate the pain of imprisonment, yet this pain is not confined to prison (Gundur and Kavish 2022). As Warr (2016: 599) recognises, “getting out can be just as painful as being in” and as Gundur and Kavish (2022: 249) advance: “do the crime, do the time has little currency; the time never stops”. As a victim of my history, I am constantly scrutinised by others and yet constantly scrutinise myself.

Summary: ‘Risk is in the Eye of the Beholder’

The vignettes and their associated discussion demonstrate how some of my experiences of being a Convict Criminologist at the university where I completed my PhD were harmful to my sense of self. Risk management drives the identification, control, and minimisation of the impact of uncertain events. It involves the systematic application of management policies, procedures, and practices to the tasks of identifying, analysing, evaluating, treating, and monitoring risk (Feeley and Simon 1994; Haggerty 2003; O’Malley 2009). Risk management practices have proliferated since the mid-1990s across a vast array of organisations and institutions (Power 2004). Internal control has emerged from being a private matter to being at the heart of organisational governance; internal control and risk management have become increasingly co-defined. As such, categories such as ‘reputation’ have

emerged to characterise a new kind of threat to organisations. There is a governing focus regulating through risk-management techniques. These intervene in everyday life and are more sensitive to ‘risky’ behaviour than previous ways of governing. In such an environment, served so thoroughly by mass media hungry for spectacle and ready to report new ‘shocks and horrors’, everyone becomes more risk conscious (O’Malley 2010: 10).

Underpinning the rise of risk management is a simple idea that it is an efficient response to the fact that the world has become a dangerous place (Beck 1999; Hardy 2012). Societies are more conscious of issues that demand organisational control, intervention, and management. Risk management responses are delivered by forms of managerialism, and this is particularly clear when considering the implementation of the media strategy—a consumer-focused endeavour. The requirement to manage intangibles has led to an increase in reputational risk management. Universities are ‘brand rich’, so managerially it is completely rational to manage reputation. The consequences of an obsession with risk management are potentially profound—often apparent through hyper-internal control (Hardy 2012; Lynch 2015; Power 2004).

The internalisation of risk management is closely linked to the defence mechanisms of many organisations becoming “hard-wired” due to their responses to risk and the way they frequently utilise responsibilising strategies to govern individuals within them (Garland 1985; Rose 1996; Simon 2007). This risk management and the growth of hyper-internal control are signs of a deep crisis in our faith in well-informed but inevitably flawed judgment. According to Klein (2007: 17), “the policy trinity” of neoliberalism—“the elimination of the public sphere, total liberation for corporations, and skeletal social spending”—has been made possible by the development and/or exploitation of crises. Public fears and hostilities are directed against groups within the population that are thought to be a parasitic drain on limited resources in such a setting (Tyler 2013: 211). People with criminal convictions are not an exception to this rule.

Tyler (2013: 210) contends that “the daily, pervasive production and mediation of stigma” is how neoliberal political systems operate. This argument is in line with Wacquant’s (2008) assertion that a central tenet of neoliberalism is the heightened stigmatisation of minority subjects in both everyday life and in public discourse that is symbolic of a violence from above. Under neoliberal conditions, the intensity of this stigma has grown stronger and more potent. The stigmatisation tendencies that persist in modern times are not novel. This production and mediation of stigma is accomplished through neoliberal policies and ideologies, which serve as “a core organ” of “neoliberal governmentality” (Tyler 2013: 212). These serve to underpin the fragility of status experienced in the academy for those with negatively marked identities or characteristics (Tietjen and Kavish 2021).

Restrictions on study and teaching activities are evidence of this institutional culture of control, with “a reformist and socially inclusive optimism of modernist penal policies that has been submerged beneath an exclusionary and punitive approach” (O’Malley 2010: 4). Synonymous with a culture of control, the approach is extended to the management of the individual in the educational institution rather than in relation to crime. The challenges generated by the nature of risk management have been in flux in recent years, which has, in turn, created a range of challenges for those involved in the management of risk. Some actively find themselves deficient in respect of the capabilities to cope with this change. When considering the ‘post-modern’ nature of risk, there are further challenges surrounding the entanglement of public perception, media amplification, and distortion of risk—all of which then infuse the policy making field, the cumulative product fuelling the outcome of fragility at the level of the individual (Smith and Fischbacher 2009; Tietjen and Kavish 2021; Wacquant 2010). Risks, such as ‘new’ typologies of terrorism, or illness as

pandemic, are symbolic of the now borderless nature of risk. Arguably, my circumstances placed me into this categorisation, as rather than being incarcerated within the penal borders of the prison, there was no containment of my risk. This rendered me as an emergent risk, someone ‘ill understood and ill defined’ (Smith and Fischbacher 2009). As such, a risky person becomes something that fails to fit the parameters of conventional risk assessment and management at the institutional level (Hardy 2012). That the boundaries and borders are permeable, highlights risk as becoming a ‘borderless phenomenon’ and, as such, one that perpetuates a cycle of captivity (Gundur and Kavish 2022; Smith and Fischbacher 2009).

As a Convict Criminologist in the academy, my experiences demonstrate that elements of risk generate some interesting issues for organisations to deal with. The implementation and justification of a preventative course of action often precludes what the discussion has shown are, in fact, burdensome intentions and outcomes, deeply stigmatising and dehumanising in nature. Considering the Convict Criminologist through the lens of Status Fragility demonstrates that, while not being explicitly categorised as punishment, the consequences of taking up an academic identity can be stigmatising and excluding (Tietjen and Kavish 2021). Being subjected to risk management by a risk averse university is potentially profoundly troubling for the Convict Criminologist because they see themselves being seen not only as a threat to the safety and security of students but to the university as well. Just like the pain of prison transcends the prison walls, so too do the pains of risk, risk aversion, and risk management (Gundur and Kavish 2022; Simon 2007; Tietjen and Kavish 2021).

After the end of a sentence, the collateral and informal consequences may continue to both ‘weigh down’ and ‘smother’ (Crewe 2011) individuals long afterwards, and, in some cases, dwarf the main punishment imposed for a criminal offence (Corda and Kaspar 2022; Gundur and Kavish 2022; Tietjen and Kavish 2021). This expansion of the reach of penal control over an individual such as myself created feelings of precarity and fragility (Tietjen and Kavish 2021). Such conditions are intertwined with criminal convictions and the exercise of penal power but spread insidiously across other more ‘innocent’ institutions. As Crewe (2011: 524) observes “there are more levers of compliance and regulation, and therefore, more points where the weight [of imprisonment] is felt” in alternate forms and different contexts in other institutions. It rarely disappears in my experience. With a criminal identity comes a ‘punitive continuum’ that resists the efforts of a Convict Criminologist to convert the stain of conviction into a mark of respect. Even at a university, an institution guided by non-penal principles, the pre-occupation with risk and cultures of risk creates an obsession with control. This can lead to the educational institution being experienced as an extension of the prison institution and the ‘cycle of captivity’ continuing (Gundur and Kavish 2022). My former criminal identity and status was reissued, and my release postponed.

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