A Qualitative Exploration of Young People and Prison Officers' Experiences of Empathy within a Young Offenders' Institution

Journal:	*Journal of Criminological Research, Policy and Practice*
Manuscript ID	JCRPP-01-2021-0001.R2
Manuscript Type:	Research Paper
Keywords:	Empathy, Juvenile offenders, Prisons, Forensic psychology, Qualitative methods, Offenders

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MANUSCRIPT DETAILS

TITLE: A Qualitative Exploration of Young People and Prison Officersâ€™ Experiences of Empathy within a Young Offendersâ€™ Institution

ABSTRACT:

This study explores the ways in which young people and prison staff (Prison Officers) within a youth custodial establishment experience empathy. Previous research tends to view empathy as a stable trait and one which people can develop through individual-centred therapy. There has been little consideration of the impact of relationship factors and context in relation to empathy experience and expression. The current study aims to address this by exploring the role of the custodial context in shaping empathy, including the potential impact of relationships, environmental factors and culture.

A qualitative approach was used to enable breadth and depth in the exploration of this area. Individual, semi-structured interviews were carried out with a purposive sample of three young people and three Prison Officers. Data was analysed using inductive thematic analysis informed by the guidelines of Braun and Clarke (2006) and King and Horrocks (2010).

Constructed themes included â€˜constructions of empathyâ€™, â€˜recipe for empathyâ€™, â€˜institutional investmentâ€™, 'the value of empathy' and â€˜doing empathyâ€™. Together, they provide detailed insight into the interplay of personal and wider contextual factors influencing the experience of empathy in a custodial setting.The findings suggest that the way in which young people and staff experience empathy in the custodial environment is unique. The findings suggest that empathy takes place within the context of relationships and is influenced by the nature of those relationships, along with the wider social context within which it occurs.

CUST_RESEARCH_LIMITATIONS/IMPLICATIONS__(LIMIT_100_WORDS) :No data available.

The findings of the current study support a move away from understanding empathy as an individual personality trait and instead viewing it as a dynamic experience that is changeable based upon the relationship and the context within which it occurs. The findings suggest that interventions aiming to develop empathy should look beyond the level of the individual and the relationship and focus upon developing environments that are supportive of empathy.

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This study provides unique insights into the subjective experience of empathy in a custodial setting, presenting as one of the first to take a more holistic approach to understanding this phenomenon.

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Empathy Experience in Young People and Prison Staff: A Qualitative Exploration of Young People and Prison Officers' Experiences of Empathy on a Specialist Unit within a Young Offenders' Institution

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Abstract

This study explores the ways in which young people and prison staff (Prison Officers) within a youth custodial establishment experience empathy. Previous research tends to view empathy as a stable trait and one which people can develop through individual-centred therapy. There has been little consideration of the impact of relationship factors and context in relation to empathy experience and expression. The current study aims to address this by exploring the role of the custodial context in shaping empathy, including the potential impact of relationships, environmental factors and culture. A qualitative approach was used to enable breadth and depth in the exploration of this area. Individual, semi-structured interviews were carried out with a purposive sample of three young people and three Prison Officers. Data was analysed using inductive thematic analysis informed by the guidelines of Braun and Clarke (2006) and King and Horrocks (2010). Constructed themes included 'constructions of empathy', 'recipe for empathy', 'institutional investment', 'the value of empathy' and 'doing empathy'. Together, they provide detailed insight into the interplay of personal and wider contextual factors influencing the experience of empathy in a custodial setting. The findings suggest that the way in which young people and staff experience empathy in the custodial environment is unique. The findings suggest that empathy takes place within the context of relationships and is influenced by the nature of those relationships, along with the wider social context within which it occurs. The findings of the current study support a move away from understanding empathy as an individual personality trait and instead viewing it as a dynamic experience that is changeable based upon the relationship and the context within which it occurs. The findings suggest that interventions aiming to develop empathy should look beyond the level of the individual and the relationship and focus upon developing environments that are supportive of empathy. This study provides unique insights into the subjective experience of empathy in a

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custodial setting, presenting as one of the first to take a more holistic approach to understanding this phenomenon.

Introduction

The current study was conducted within t~~T~~he Youth Custody Service (YCS). The YCS was established in September 2017 as a distinct section of Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS). The YCS is responsible for all children and young people under the age of 18 held in custody across England and Wales. Children and young people are accommodated in one of five Young Offender's Institutions (YOIs), three Secure Training Centres (STCs) or eight Secure Children's Homes (SCHs). The current study is focused upon the topic of empathy in custodial settings. The primary aim of the current study was to explore how prison staff and young people experience empathy in a custodial setting, using qualitative methods. The primary research question, therefore, was: How do young people and prison staff experience empathy in a custodial setting? A secondary research question included: What is the impact of relational, environmental and cultural factors on the experience of empathy in a custodial setting? The following sections discuss relevant literature relating to the prison context, the link between empathy and violence, models and theoretical perspectives relating to empathy and approaches to the measurement of empathy.

Literature Review

Prisons present as complex and challenging environments for those who live and work within them. One such complexity relates to the apparent conflict between the role of prisons as providing care for prisoners and maintaining authority/administering punishment (e.g. Hannah-Moffat, 1995; Cheek & Miller, 1983). Prison culture has been the subject of much study. Literature suggests that prisons present as hyper-masculine environments that encourage

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displays of stoicism, bravery, physical prowess and aggression (Ricciardelli, Maier & Hannah-Moffat, 2015). Research has revealed prison cultures characterised by cynicism, 'us' and 'them' thinking and authoritarianism (Tate, 2011). These characteristics appear inconsistent with the ethic of care promoted within HMPPS, which attempts to emphasise the role of prison and Prison Officers as providing care and rehabilitation for prisoners.

Relationships between staff and prisoners have been the attention of much research and have been shown to significantly impact upon prisoners' wellbeing, ability to cope in prison and willingness to comply with staff requests (Tait, 2008; Tait, 2011). McDermott and King (1988) conducted an ethnographic study of five prisons in the Midlands region of the prison system of England and Wales. They found that relationships between staff and prisoners were highly complex, describing interactions between them as a series of "game-like tactical moves to ensure survival" (p.357). Their study found that both staff and prisoners described prison life as a game and that staff utilised interpersonal skills in order to avoid assault or wider indiscipline amongst prisoners. This suggests that survival was a key priority for both staff and prisoners and that positive behaviour from staff towards prisoners may have been motivated primarily by the desire to survive by encouraging compliance and avoiding becoming the victim of violence, rather than by a genuine care for prisoners.

Tait (2011) sought to explore the meaning of 'care' from the perspective of Prison Officers and how they applied this in their work with prisoners. Five approaches to care were identified including 'true carer', 'limited carer', 'old school', 'conflicted' and 'damaged'. These distinct caring styles were characterised by different levels of empathy for prisoners and different amounts of caring behaviour shown towards them. They also influenced the way in which power operated within their relationships. The issue of power in the prison environment is another complex issue and research suggests that the way in which it is used significantly impacts upon the culture within the prison (Crewe, Liebling & Hulley, 2011). Both the over

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and under use of power have been shown to be problematic, with the appropriate use of power resulting in prisoners feeling as if they "knew where they stood" (Crewe, Liebling & Hulley, 2011, p.109).

One of the key priorities of the YCS is violence reduction. Recent statistics indicate that there were approximately 2,400 assaults by young people in YOIs between March 2018 and March 2019. The average monthly rate of assaults per 100 young people was 32.5 and there were 1.3 assaults per young person involved (Youth Justice Board & Ministry of Justice, 2020). Due to recent changes in reporting systems, it is not possible to compare these figures to previous years; however statistics from earlier years indicate an upward trend. For example, between March 2017 and March 2018, the number of assaults increased by 29% to just over 3,500 incidents. This represents the highest number of assaults seen in the preceding five years (Youth Justice Board and Ministry of Justice, 2019). Upward trends in violence may be due, in part, to the significant reduction in the number of young people and children receiving sentences in recent years. This means that those in custody represent a greater concentration of those with the most challenging behaviour and most complex needs (Wood, Bailey & Butler, 2017). For example, offences of violence against the person have gradually increased from 19% of the total number of proven offences amongst children and young people in the year ending March 2009 to 30% in the year ending March 2019 (Youth Justice Board and Ministry of Justice, 2020).

A factor that has been found to increase a young person's risk of violence is a lack of empathy (Goodman, 1999; Rubinetti, 1997). It is reported that deficits in empathy are often found amongst young people who use violence (Cohen & Strayer, 1996; Marcus & Gray, 1998; Jolliffe & Farrington, 2003) and research also suggests that increased empathy mitigates against the risk of violence (Miller & Eisenberg, 1998). The apparent link between empathy and violence means that developing a comprehensive understanding of the area of empathy

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experience and expression in young people in custody could prove invaluable in supporting violence reduction in youth custodial settings.

~~Literature Review~~

The concept of empathy is somewhat difficult to define, with multiple definitions existing within the literature. Earlier definitions tended to view it as either a cognitive process, specifically the ability to perspective take (e.g. Hogan, 1969), or as an emotional experience, that is, the experience of an emotion similar to that of an observed individual (e.g. Miller & Eisenberg, 1988). More recent definitions tend to view empathy as a multidimensional construct, that is, a combination of cognitive, affective and behavioural elements. An example is that provided by Marshall et al. (1995) who define empathy as "a staged process involving: (1) emotion recognition, (2) perspective taking, (3) emotion replication and (4) response decision" (p. 101). Here, the chosen response is important as well as the emotional congruence and the ability to appreciate the individual's perspective. Given the broad focus of the current study, along with the common understanding that both cognitive and emotional aspects are not mutually exclusive (Fagiano, 2016), the current study adopted a multidimensional definition of empathy including cognitive, affective and behavioural elements.

A number of theoretical approaches exist which attempt to explain empathy and empathy deficits. Incorporating biological, psychological and social perspectives, the literature on trauma attempts to explain how exposure to traumatic events during childhood can impact negatively upon an individual's ability to empathise with others. Studies suggest a link between exposure to trauma and changes to the neural circuits involved in empathy. For example, Pratt et al. (2016) found that adolescents who experienced parental depression during their early years demonstrated disruptions in the neural basis of empathy. In their longitudinal study, Levy, Goldstein and Feldman (2019) explored the impact of early life stress on the neural basis of empathy. They found that early life stress exerts several indirect effects on the neural

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empathic response that result in an altered response for some children, but not others. Eidelman-Rothman et al. (2016) also found that veterans exposed to war-related trauma demonstrated disrupted neural empathic responses to negative emotional stimuli.

Stern and Cassidy (2018) developed an attachment based theoretical model of individual differences in empathy. They propose various mechanisms by which secure attachment in childhood facilitates empathy. The first of these relates to the development of a 'secure base script'. This is an implicit set of instructions about how caregiving events typically proceed, which result from consistent experiences of a responsive caregiver. This 'script' is activated in times of threat to provide the bearer with a set of instructions about how to respond to someone in distress, enabling the individual to act with the same sensitive and empathic response that was shown to them during their childhood. Stern and Cassidy (2018) also report that securely attached adults tend to view others with greater esteem and acceptance, tend to trust others more readily and attribute positive intentions to their behaviour. They are also reported to hold less hostile attitudes towards those perceived as belonging to the 'out-group' and to perceive themselves as more capable of giving care. These positive internal models of themselves and others are thought to explain why adult secure attachment has been linked with greater empathy and reduced personal distress (e.g. Mikulincer & Shaver, 2001; Mikulincer et al., 2005). Stern and Cassidy (2018) also suggest that language and emotional self-regulation act as mechanisms by which secure attachments facilitate empathy. Regarding language, they suggest that securely attached children talk more with their caregivers about their feelings. This has been linked with children's care for others (e.g. Garner, 2003).

Various models of empathy exist within the literature. Models of empathy tend to view it as a multicomponent response, consisting of various stages that follow on from one another (e.g. Davis, 1983; Marshall et al., 1995). More recently, models of empathy have attempted to account for incidents where empathy does not appear to occur. Marshall and Marshall's model

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of empathy (Marshall & Marshall, 2011) has 'emotion recognition' as its first stage. Prior to the second stage of their model, 'perspective taking', it is suggested that three possible responses to the emotion recognition might occur, leading to different outcomes. The first response is a feeling of care for the individual which leads to the second stage of the model, 'perspective taking', and ultimately to an empathic response. Two alternative responses are proposed which do not lead on to the 'perspective taking' stage of the model. These are: (1) the generation of excessive distress in the observer and (2) the observer disliking or being hostile towards the observed person. The generation of excessive emotional distress is thought to result in the individual attempting to escape from the situation or reduce their own distress. This might include them blocking their recognition of the harm they have brought about or using cognitive distortions about the consequences of their behaviour. This ultimately intervenes in the empathic process. The second alternative possible response to emotion recognition, the observer disliking or being hostile towards the observed person, is thought to intervene in the empathic process by resulting in indifference or pleasure from the observed person's suffering. This model, therefore, suggests that it should not be assumed that an individual who does not express an empathic response is not experiencing emotional distress in response to observing suffering. It also suggests that the lack of an empathic response may be the result of relational characteristics with a particular individual, rather than a global deficit in empathy across different contexts. This model, therefore, places more emphasis on the relationship within which the empathy occurs than previous models.

Within the prison context, expressing empathy and care for prisoners is not without risks for prison staff. Compassion fatigue is defined by Stebnicki (2000) as the emotional secondary stress and grief reactions that occur during helping interactions. It is suggested that caring about traumatised others may result in the 'carer' becoming emotionally drained and therefore adversely affected by their own efforts to empathise. This can result in the person

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becoming a 'victim' as well because of their emotional connection with the victimised person (Figley, 1995). Alkema, Linton and Randall (2008) found various factors that mediate the relationship between empathy and compassion fatigue and burnout. They found that healthcare professionals with better self-care strategies had lower levels of burnout and compassion fatigue. This therefore suggests a relationship between wellbeing and empathy and highlights the need for appropriate support for prison staff.

The measurement of empathy has long been problematic for researchers, largely due to the lack of a clear definition of empathy (Neumann, et al., 2015). Numerous measures exist which profess to measure empathy, or at least one or more specific aspect of it. Broadly speaking, these measures can be categorised into three types; self-report psychometric questionnaires, behavioural measures and neuroscientific measures. Psychometric questionnaires appear to be the most commonly used type of measure with various psychometric measures of empathy existing (e.g. the Interpersonal Reactivity Index; IRI, Davis, 1980 and the Empathy Quotient; EQ, Baron-Cohen & Wheelwright, 2004). Whilst having some strengths, psychometric measures of empathy do not consider the impact of the relationship between the giver and receiver of empathy, or the context in which the empathy is taking place. Assigning respondents a 'score' for empathy implies a view of empathy as a fixed personality trait, rather than as a fluid experience that is influenced by context. Such measures lack the ability to provide an in depth insight into an individual's subjective experience of empathy, with consideration of the relationship and context within which it occurs. Measures that acknowledge relationship and contextual factors would enable the identification of a broader range of factors which facilitate or hinder empathy for individuals, thus providing a more holistic and meaningful understanding of their experience of empathy and a clear pathway for treatment of the individual and/or their context.

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It is evident within the literature that empathy tends to be understood as an individual trait that remains relatively stable across time and place. The impact of relationships and social context is rarely considered and the measurement of empathy usually exists at the individual level only. There is a lack of understanding relating to the subjective experience of empathy, along with the potential role of relationships and context in the experience and expression of empathy. Whilst some studies do exist, there remains a paucity of research focusing on empathy in custodial settings. The current study aims to address these gaps by exploring in detail individuals' subjective experiences of empathy in a custodial setting, including the potential role of relationships and context in influencing these. This will enable a more holistic understanding of the phenomenon of empathy, which is lacking in previous research. Given the apparent link between empathy and violence (e.g. Cohen & Strayer, 1996; Marcus & Gray, 1998), there is a need for this phenomenon to be further understood in relation to custodial contexts.

~~**Aim of the Current Study**~~

~~The primary aim of the current study was to explore how prison staff and young people experience empathy in a custodial setting, using qualitative methods. The primary research question, therefore, was: How do young people and prison staff experience empathy in a custodial setting? A secondary research question included: What is the impact of relational, environmental and cultural factors on the experience of empathy in a custodial setting?~~

Method

Setting

The current study was carried out at a male Young Offenders' Institution (YOI) in England. The institution is one of four establishments housing boys (referred to as young people from here onwards) aged 15-18 years who have been sentenced to custodial sentences

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by the courts. The establishment houses young people on a series of standard custodial units or on a specialist unit (Beech Unit). The name of the unit and of the participants have been changed to protect anonymity. Beech Unit provides a more therapeutic environment with enhanced support for young people with complex needs. The establishment holds both remand and convicted young people serving a variety of sentence lengths, ranging from four month Detention and Training Orders (DTOs) to life imprisonment. The current study was carried out on Beech Unit.

Impact of the Researcher

The researcher in the current study is a Forensic Psychologist employed by HMPPS. At the time of this study she worked full time at the establishment where the study took place. Her interest in empathy developed whilst working within the YCS through her experiences of facilitating individual interventions with young people in custody. Whilst carrying out therapeutic work with them, she became interested in how young people experience empathy and how this relates to the conceptualisation of empathy amongst psychologists and other professionals. In the setting she worked in, empathy was viewed as something that young people should be encouraged to develop and something that could possibly reduce their risk of committing further offences. Attempts were made by professionals to assess the level of empathy a young person experiences, often utilising psychometric questionnaires, and recommendations made in psychological reports for them to 'develop' their empathy skills. The researcher's therapeutic work with young people led to the realisation that young people appear to experience empathy in different ways within different contexts and different relationships. For example, it appeared to her that young people experienced empathy more readily during therapeutic sessions and that her experience of them in relation to empathy was different to that of some of the Prison Officers who worked with them on the prison residential

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units. This led her to question the nature of empathy and those factors that may facilitate it. These reflections raised ethical questions for her as they prompted her to consider whether it is in fact possible for young people to 'develop' their empathy in the prison environment and thus meet the targets that had been outlined for them in psychological reports. She also wondered about the apparent view of empathy as 'fixed', evidenced by attempts to measure the young people's levels of empathy using psychometric questionnaires. She began to question whether this is in fact the case and what the implications may be for young people and staff of accepting this view. These experiences, along with the researcher's philosophical position (described below), impacted upon her approach to this study and may have impacted upon the researcher's interpretations of the data.

The researcher's role as a Forensic Psychologist at the establishment meant that she was required to work with some of the young people residing there in a different role (i.e. as a psychologist carrying out assessments and interventions with them), thus raising the ethical issue of dual roles. Working with the young people as both a researcher and a psychologist could have caused a conflict of interest. An already existing relationship between a young person and the researcher could also have resulted in the young person being more likely to agree to take part in the study out of a desire to please the researcher, thus compromising true informed consent. To eliminate this risk, the researcher did not invite young people to take part in the study whom she was working with in her role as a psychologist, or whom she was likely to work with in the future. This worked well in that none of the participants in the current study had previously worked with the researcher or needed to in the future.

Participants

Participants in the current study were three young people located on Beech Unit at the YOI and three male Prison Officers who worked on the unit. The young people had been

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resident on the unit for between six and eight months and the Prison Officers had worked on the unit for between approximately two and six years. Since empathy is a relational phenomenon, both prison staff and young people were included as participants. This enabled a more holistic insight into the phenomenon of empathy in the custodial environment and allowed for the potential impact of the relationship to be explored.

Data Collection Methods

The current study utilised qualitative methods. This allowed for a broad and in depth exploration of the phenomenon under investigation, which was an important starting point given the lack of previous research in this area. In-depth individual, semi-structured interviews (SSIs) were carried out in order to explore young people and Prison Officers' subjective experiences of empathy on the unit. A pre-prepared interview schedule was utilised consisting of a number of key questions and prompt questions aiming to elicit a detailed account of the participants' experiences. The interview schedule was applied flexibly, with participants' responses being further explored where this was felt to provide useful information in relation to the research question. Interviews were audio-recorded and lasted an average of 60 minutes.

Ethics and Procedure

The current study was approved by a University ethics committee and by the National Research Committee of Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS). The young people invited to take part in the study were selected using a purposive sampling method. Their participation was entirely voluntary and they provided informed consent to take part using a pre-prepared consent form. This included reassurance that, should the young person decline to take part, their time in custody or relationship with the researcher would not be affected in any way. Young people were invited to take part who were thought to be able to verbally articulate

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their exercises of empathy relatively well, determined through conversations with multi-disciplinary staff working with them. Exclusion criteria included current symptoms of mental illness or distress. Young people were approached by the researcher (first author) who discussed the study with them using a pre-developed consent form outlining the requirements of the study, that participation was voluntary and the right to withdraw. Staff members were invited to take part in the study by the same researcher and were selected on a first come first served basis. There was no exclusion criteria for staff. The researcher invited staff members to take part in the research by attending staff briefings on the unit and sending an e-mail to all staff containing an advert for the study. In order to encourage participants to think carefully about their decision to participate, they were encouraged to spend a week following their initial contact with the researcher considering the study before making a final decision.

Once recruited, participants were asked to sign a consent form and were given a copy of this to take away with them. The researcher then arranged a convenient time with the participant to carry out the interview. Interviews were held in a private room on Beech Unit, following which participants were de-briefed using a pre-prepared de-brief form.

Data Analysis

Interview data was analysed using inductive thematic analysis informed by the guidelines of Braun and Clarke (2006) and King and Horrocks (2010). An inductive thematic analysis was carried out whereby the themes identified were strongly linked to the data themselves rather than being driven by the literature (Paton, 1990). The first phase of analysis involved verbatim transcription of the interviews. Pauses, laughter and interruptions were included as these can be used to help infer meaning. Following transcription, the researcher read and re-read the data in order to increase familiarisation with the material and to become immersed in the experience of participants. Initial codes (both descriptive and interpretative)

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were constructed through re-reading of the data. The process of interpreting and identifying themes was approached by clustering codes that related to each other. This involved writing the codes on post-it notes and physically clustering them into groups of related codes. These groups of related codes were named by identifying and naming the common theme or idea within them. Codes were re-organised at this stage if there appeared to be more than one common theme or idea amongst them, ensuring that each theme captured a distinct line of argument. When developing themes, the researcher attempted to go beyond simply describing what the participants had said, to adopting a more interpretative approach. Themes were checked against the data, then refined if necessary and overarching themes were identified. Final themes were selected on the basis that they either re-occurred across the data set or appeared particularly significant within one or more data items.

Philosophical Position

Critical realism underpins the current study. Critical realism views reality as diverse, multifaceted and as something that exists independently of those who observe it, but is only accessible through the perceptions and interpretations of individuals (O'Reilly, 2012). This approach, therefore, does not assume that research data constitutes a direct reflection of what is going on in the world. It is therefore understood that in order to gain knowledge about the world, data needs to be interpreted to further knowledge about the underlying structures which influence the phenomenon of interest (Willig, 2013). The current study aimed not to take participants' accounts of their experiences of empathy at face value, but to 'dig deeper' and interpret the data to identify underlying influences beyond participants' knowledge or consciousness which may influence their experience of empathy in the custodial context.

Results

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Staff Participants

Through thematic analysis of the data from staff participants, four overarching themes were constructed. These included: (1) constructions of empathy, (2) recipe for empathy, (3) institutional investment and (4) doing empathy. Table 1 presents the overarching themes, the related sub-themes and the meanings associated with each sub-theme.

The first overarching theme, constructions of empathy, captures the different ways in which staff understood the concept of empathy in the prison environment and how this may impact their practice. The second theme, recipe for empathy, encompasses those factors that participants felt were necessary for empathy to occur. The third theme, institutional investment, refers to the impact of wider investment on the wellbeing of staff and their ability and motivation to empathise with the young people. The final theme, doing empathy, represents everyday examples of empathic behaviour by both staff and young people on the specialist unit. Table 2 presents each overarching theme, the related sub-themes and illustrative quotes relating to each sub-theme.

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Table 1

Themes, Subthemes and Meanings

Themes	Subthemes	Meaning
Constructions of empathy	Shared experience	Empathy is based upon the 'giver' and 'receiver' having shared experiences
	Reciprocal	Empathy is a reciprocal process; when you give it, you get it back
	Instrumental	Empathy is an instrumental tool that can be used in a planned way in order to achieve a particular end goal
	Malleable	Empathy as fixed or changeable
Recipe for empathy	Rapport building	Building rapport and getting to know people facilitates empathic relationships
	Trust	Trust enables open communication which facilitates empathic relationships
	Humanising	Seeing people as 'human' is necessary for empathy to occur
Institutional investment	Safety	Experiencing assaults resulted in anger and reduced motivation to empathise with young people
	Environment	Aspects of the physical environment impacted on the potential for empathy
	Financial	Lack of financial investment leaves staff feeling undervalued and less likely to engage in challenging aspects of the job (empathy)
	Support	Feeling uncared for makes staff less able to care for others
Doing empathy	Emotion recognition and sharing	Examples of participants recognising and sharing the emotions of others
	Perspective taking	Examples of participants attempting to understand young people's perspectives and of young people attempting to understand theirs
	Caring behaviour	Examples of participants demonstrating caring behaviour towards young people and of young people demonstrating caring behaviour towards them

Table 2

Themes, Subthemes and Illustrative Quotations

Themes	Subthemes	Illustrative Quotations
Constructions of empathy	Shared experience	I think you might find that maybe more empathic people are the older ones like myself because we've seen lots and lots through our lifetime and we've had situations thrown at us whereas maybe the younger ones, they're still going through that sort of learning curve, life's traumas and stuff like that and they maybe don't have anything to relate back to it when they're dealing with dealing with the kids. (Tony, p.4, lines 142-146)
	Reciprocal	It's good that we promote that [empathy] and we see it in return coming back. A cycle, so yeah it's good. (Craig, p.2, lines 45-46)
	Instrumental	I've always wanted to try and talk to the boys but once you get boys squirting pee at you and all sorts and trying to assault you or threatening you, your empathy (pfff) you don't give a s**t, you've had enough. (Paul, p.6, lines 200-202).
		It's a good tool to have……. [to] defuse the situations. When a lad's banging on his door at 10 o'clock at a night time I'm missing my parents whatever you say look I've been through this myself, I know how you feel……. and if you show that little bit of understanding it can it can bring the situation down a little bit. (Tony, p.5, lines 166-177)
	Malleable	Can they be trained to become empathic? I don't know if you can. (Tony, p.4, line 133)
Recipe for empathy	Rapport building	They are let down quite a number of times and I'm not one for making excuses but I think if (.) the quality is there, the time is there and you make someone feel (.) you know (.) that they're not just another person. That they're actually er there to be listened to. (Craig, p.7, lines 255-258)
	Trust	to me it feels like they've built up like I say that element of trust and that rapport….. And they'll come and speak to you if they have a problem without you know feeling a little bit inhibited to do so. (Tony, p.2, lines 44-48)
	Humanising	I always say to lads that underneath the uniform there is a human being that gets upset that get moody we get tired we get frustrated. We have all them emotions that you have. I think people think that this makes us some sort of superhero and I always say it really doesn't. (Craig, p.6, lines 221-224).
Institutional investment	Safety	I got my nose broke about 6 months ago….. so it's difficult to show any empathy towards these when things that that, bad things are happening to you. (Paul, p.6, lines 223-226)
	Environment	I've always been quite a good advocate of how this runs in terms of [the specialist unit]….. and I know it'd never happen because it'd be the funding and everything else like that but if every er unit C, D, E and F was all run where leg one was in isolation, leg two was in isolation and we could do more individual work I think it would I think it would come full circle. (Craig, p.7, lines 245-248)
	Financial	When you've got sixty boys, bad boys, who are in for bad crimes with four, five members of staff who've got two years' experience getting paid twenty two thousand pound a year. How much empathy are you going to have? I'm not going to have much. (Paul, p.5, lines 173-176)
	Support	I was off for five weeks and nobody phoned me. I had to phone them up and say I'm depressed. Help me. And people were like I don't really know what to do here to help you. Here's a helpline, ring that. It's like you know and you expect me to come into work and show empathy towards the boys when you're not even when you don't even know how to show it to me. (Paul, p.7, lines 234-238)
Doing empathy	Emotion recognition and sharing	Whenever I bring them up from visits, you can see it on their faces that er as nice as the visit was you can see that little bit of sadness. (Tony, p.3-4, lines 114-115)

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	I remember being there like I say to the point of where I did, it reduced me to tears. I was upset. (Craig, p.5, lines 174-175)
Perspective taking	Some of the lads actually when you speak to them one on one do show a level of empathy towards the job that we have to do and the things that we have to do and they do understand erm the you know the position that we're in. (Craig, p.1, lines 11-13)
Caring behaviour	I find that if you get on well with like 75 percent of them when one of the 25 percent says something against you you'll find sometimes that the other lot will say oh don't you say that to sir or miss or whatever and they'll sort of back you up. (Tony, p.1, lines 23-25)

Constructions of Empathy

The way in which participants understood empathy was fluid in that it changed in response to different situations. They sometimes understood it as something based upon shared experiences, in that they felt that it was either necessary or advantageous to have experienced negative events yourself in order to empathise with someone currently experiencing negative events. They sometimes perceived it as a reciprocal process in that they felt that, when they gave empathy to the young people, they received it back in return. This was viewed as a natural consequence of the empathy shown to the young people. It was also sometimes understood as an instrumental tool that could and was used in a planned way in order to achieve a particular end goal. For example, participants felt that empathy can be used, or that they had indeed used it themselves, in a pre-planned way in order to defuse situations or to demonstrate pro-social modelling to help encourage positive behaviour change. Empathy was also viewed as malleable. This sub-theme comprised the most inconsistency in the data, with participants expressing uncertainty as to whether empathy is a fixed construct, or something that could be changed over time, or as a result of intervention.

Recipe for Empathy

Participants viewed three key factors as necessary for empathy to occur in the prison environment. These three factors were closely related to one another. The first factor was

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rapport building. Participants felt that investing time to get to know both the young people and fellow staff members by "working closely" with them was important for empathic relationships to develop. They also felt that trust was necessary for empathic relationships to occur. Trust was seen as key to enable young people to communicate openly and honestly with participants, which was seen as crucial in the development of empathic relationships. Participants also felt that it was important for both young people and staff to be seen as 'human' in order for empathic relationships to occur. For example, they felt that humanising themselves to young people by encouraging them to look beyond their prison officer uniform made them closer and created greater opportunities for empathy.

Institutional Investment

There was consistency amongst participants in the view that the prison environment had become less safe than it was in previous years. Participants had experienced assaults from young people and, in some cases, this had left them angry and with a lack of motivation to empathise with the young people. Aspects of the psychical environment were seen as impacting on the potential for empathy. For example, the small nature of Beech Unit was seen as positive in encouraging empathy as there was the potential for staff to get to know young people and spend more "quality time" with them. Participants' responses also suggested that a lack of financial investment, in terms of poor pay and conditions, impacted on the way they felt at work and about the job, which impacted on their interactions with the young people. Participants also described a perceived lack of support from managers and this seemed to impact upon their emotional wellbeing and their ability to empathise with the young people. For example, participants felt that if they are not taken care of themselves then they are less able to take care of the young people.

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Doing Empathy

The data revealed a number of examples of participants recognising and sharing the emotions of other staff members and of the young people. There were also a number of examples of participants attempting to understand the perspectives of young people and of the young people attempting to understand the perspectives of participants. There were also examples of caring behaviour, both from the young people towards the participants and vice versa.

Young People Participants

Through thematic analysis of the data from young people participants, four over-arching themes were constructed. These included: (1) constructions of empathy, (2) recipe for empathy, (3) the value of empathy and (4) doing empathy. Table 3 presents the overarching themes, the related sub-themes and the meanings associated with each sub-theme.

Similarly to the staff participants, the first overarching theme within the data from the young people participants was 'constructions of empathy'. This theme captures the different ways in which young people understood the concept of empathy in the custodial environment and how this may impact their relationships with each other and staff. The second theme, recipe for empathy, encompasses those factors that participants felt were necessary for empathy to occur. The third theme, empathy is valuable, captures the impact of both giving and receiving empathy in the prison environment. The final theme, doing empathy, represents everyday examples of empathic behaviour by both young people and staff on the specialist custodial unit. Table 4 presents each overarching theme, the related sub-themes and illustrative quotes relating to each sub-theme.

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Table 3

Themes, Subthemes and Meanings

Themes	Subthemes	Meaning
Constructions of empathy	Shared experience	The 'giver' and 'receiver' having shared experiences helps them to relate to each other and this facilitated empathy
	Reciprocal	Empathy is a reciprocal process; when you get it, you give it back
	Unconditional	Empathy from staff is unconditional
	Limited pool	Empathy from staff can 'run out' after bad behaviour
	Empathy as positive	Empathy was viewed as something positive – "mature", "good" and "healthy"
	Genuine	Empathy can be genuine or false
Recipe for empathy	Connectedness	Building a 'connection' or 'bond' facilitates empathic relationships
	Perceived similarity	Perceived similarity helps to build relationships, which facilitates empathy
	Culture	Displaying empathy can be seen as weak, but is more acceptable on Beech Unit
Empathy is valuable	Challenges your view of others	Receiving empathy results in a more positive view of people
	Challenges your view of yourself	Experiencing empathy for others results in a positive view of self
	Impacts time in prison	Empathy helps you to live together, provides support comfort and a stimulus
	Encourages positive behaviour	Receiving empathy from staff results in more positive behaviour
Doing empathy	Emotion recognition	Examples of participants recognising the emotions of staff and other young people
	Feeling for others	Examples of participants feeling for others (Prison Officers and other young people)
	Perspective taking	Examples of participants attempting to understand others' perspectives
	Caring behaviour	Examples of participants and Prison Officers demonstrating caring behaviour towards one another

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Table 4

Themes, Subthemes and Illustrative Quotations

Themes	Subthemes	Illustrative Quotations
Constructions of empathy	Shared experience	I felt bad because like I tend to have like arguments with my family over the phone as well like misunderstandings and everything so I felt yeah. (Ali, p.9, lines 283-284)
	Reciprocal	I care about the staff members because obviously they're the ones I get on with and they're the ones that I respect and I think I'm duty bound to care for them and look out for them because they help me so I'd feel wrong, I don't think it'd be equal if I didn't look out for them (Carlton, p.5, lines 165-167)
	Unconditional	I think probably the staff but because you always know it's there but maybe you don't always take take it and use it but it's always there and you know that you can turn to them, yeah (Harry, p.4, lines 118-119).
	Limited pool	sometimes I feel like I've exhausted officers through different things that I've done previously and (.) they're very reluctant to help me. I think that would be a good way to say. Or very reluctant to listen. They may understand but they don't want to do anything about it or listen or try and follow things up. It's just very erm (.) I just sometimes feel like I've burnt a lot of bridges I think is the easiest way to describe it (Carlton, p.1, lines 18-22).
	Empathy as positive	Erm I think that it's good and healthy because you treat others how you want to be treated and like I said it's just healthy to have that mutual understanding. (Harry, p.9, lines 274-275)
	Genuine	Obviously I think it's part of her job but I do also think there's a level that they care about everyone as well or they wouldn't really be doing this job would they? I think although it is part of what they need to do they also do it because they do genuinely care. (Harry, p.5, lines 163-165)
Recipe for empathy	Connectedness	I felt a bit angry and sympathetic towards the man and like because he was just doing his job and it was like just out of the blue….. I don't know I think because we had the connection and I had a good relationship. (Ali, p.9, pages 304-307)
	Perceived similarity	I find it easier to speak to people who are more similar to me and have the same interests and things like that. (Harry, p.2, lines 33-34)
	Culture	Some of them would look at me as erm a bit like erm an idiot in a way for speaking to staff in such a polite way or a respectful manner because I'm in prison but I just think at the end of the day if you do speak to them in a polite, respectful manner then as long as you're courteous to them, they're going to be right to you. (Carlton, p.6, lines 220-223)
Empathy is valuable	Challenges your view of others	It made me feel a bit surprised and happy as well….. That there's a staff here that cares about me like they there's random people that cares about you as well. (Ali, p.5, lines 159-162)
	Challenges your view of yourself	It shows that I've got a caring side I guess, yeah…. It gives me confidence. It gives me a lot of confidence when talking to people and stuff because I feel like I've, I'm not just erm putting on a show. I can actually, I feel like I can talk to somebody because I kind of know that I will feel those those things I'm saying. (Carlton, p.6, lines 202-206)
	Impacts time in prison	Erm it's good to have the support even in a place like this (.) maybe where you wouldn't expect it as much, yeah. (Harry, p.2, lines 38-39)
	Encourages positive behaviour	I've noticed when those staff do work with me I have more positive days, I have better times, I feel like things are just better and then sometimes when those staff come around me that I've exhausted it just goes down hill. (Carlton, p.3, lines 94-96)
Doing empathy	Emotion recognition	Because obviously with your friends, you don't all live in the same building (laughs)….. So you kind of get a feel for when other people need to be left alone or when they need to be helped or something, yeah. (Harry, p.6, lines 197-200)
	Feeling for others	I was on exercise one day erm and I watched another young person. I was on exercise

	with (name of wing) and (name of wing) because we go on exercise together a couple of months back and I watched a young person take another young person's erm rosary beads. Erm and that upset me so I said to the young person, I was bigger than the young person, why don't you pic on me or pick on someone your own size. (Carlton, p.5, lines 183-187)
Perspective taking	if they're having a bad day it could affect us as well a bit so we just need to like understand them a bit more and put us in their shoes like the job they're doing could be harder sometimes, stressful. (Ali, p.8, lines 274-276)
Caring behaviour	I think they show like most of the time like the staff I work with on (name of unit) and that they show they care a bit like everyday like. They ask how you're doing, they say do you want to go on the phone, do you want to do this, do that. So they show that they care most of the time. (Ali, p.4, lines 113-115)

Constructions of Empathy

Similarly to the staff data, the young people understood empathy in a number of different ways, indicating that the way in which they understood empathy was fluid in that it appeared to change in different situations. The young people's constructions were sometimes contradictory. For example, empathy was seen as 'unconditional' in that it was always present from staff and also as a 'limited pool' in that it could run out if they demonstrated negative behaviour towards staff. Similarly to the staff participants, it was sometimes seen as a reciprocal process and as something based upon shared experiences. Empathy was also constructed as positive and as something that could either be genuine or fake.

Recipe for Empathy

Three factors were seen as facilitative of empathy in the custodial environment. The first was 'connectedness'. This sub-theme is very similar to the sub-theme of 'rapport' that was identified within the staff data, however it has been termed 'connectedness' as there appeared to be more of an emphasis on the "connection" or "bond", rather than on simply getting to know one another as in the staff data. This was a strong theme within the data, with all participants indicating that getting to know someone helped them to develop a bond and that this made it easier to care about them. It appeared that the ability to be open and genuine acted as a vehicle in facilitating relationships, which resulted in connectedness. Participants also felt

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that perceived similarities with others helped them to build relationships with them, which resulted in empathy. This seemed to occur in a number of ways. For example, the perceived similarity acted as a stimulus for conversation, which facilitated the development of a relationship. It also gave participants the sense of having a connection or bond with the other person. Finally, it gave participants the impression of the other person as in some way safer or less threatening, resulting in more open communication and therefore the development of a relationship. Finally, participants felt that the culture on Beech Unit, which accepted and encouraged expressions of empathy, helped to enable this.

The Value of Empathy

Giving and receiving empathy impacted participants in a number of ways. There was a clear sense within the data that receiving empathy challenged negative views of others, resulting in others being seen as more helpful and trustworthy. Both giving and receiving empathy also challenged participants' view of themselves, giving them a sense of themselves as caring, and providing a way of achieving retribution for past wrongdoing. Empathic relationships in the YOI also positively impacted on their experience of custody by helping young people to live together successfully, acting as a support, comfort and a stimulus, which made their time in custody pass more quickly. Finally, empathy from staff had a direct impact upon the behaviour of young people, resulting in more positive behaviour.

Doing Empathy

Similarly to the staff data, there were a number of examples of participants recognising the emotions of other young people and staff. There were also a number of examples of participants 'feeling for' others. For example, they described times when they had felt "sad", "sorry", "bad", "angry" and "upset" for other young people or Prison Officers in response to

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different situations that they had observed, including when Prison Officers and young people had been assaulted. There were also examples of participants attempting to understand the perspectives of both staff and other young people and of caring behaviour between participants and members of staff. Interestingly, one of the participants had demonstrated higher levels of challenging behaviour whilst on Beech Unit, including staff assaults, and he reported fewer incidents of receiving caring behaviour from staff. This perhaps provides support for the construction of empathy described previously as a 'limited pool', which can be exhausted by negative behaviour.

Discussion

The current study aimed to explore how staff (Prison Officers) and young people experience empathy on a specialist unit in a Young Offenders' Institution (YOI) and the factors that impact upon this. The current discussion will provide a summary of the key findings, including discussion of these in relation to previous research and their implications for practice. Limitations relating to the study will be considered, along with suggestions for future research.

The findings of the current study indicate that the way in which young people and staff experience empathy in the custodial environment is unique. For example, their perceptions of empathy appear to be influenced by their experiences, relationships and behaviour in custody. The findings situate empathy within reciprocity and relationship. They indicate that empathy takes place within the context of relationships, rather than at the individual level, and that the experience of empathy is influenced by the nature of the relationship within which it occurs. The current study indicates that staff and young people's understanding of the nature of empathy is fluid in that it changes within different contexts. These different understandings of empathy can be conflicting. For example, it can be seen as both 'unconditional' and as a 'limited pool' which can run out in response to negative behaviour. The findings from the

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current study also indicate that the way in which empathy is experienced and expressed is influenced by context, that is, the environment within which it occurs. The environment needs to be one in which the wellbeing of Prison Officers is supported, since improved wellbeing appeared to increase their ability to engage in empathic relationships with the young people. Increased wellbeing can be achieved by ensuring that Prison Officers feel safe, valued and supported. The environment also needs to be one that is accepting and encouraging of expressions of care and empathy for others. The current study also found that there are many examples of empathic interactions in the custodial environment. These occurred between staff and young people, staff and other staff members, and young people and other young people. The impact of these interactions further developed the relationship between the giver and receiver of empathy, thus creating greater opportunities for subsequent expressions of empathy.

Models of empathy tend to view empathy as a staged process consisting of different components that follow on from one another. These components tend to include emotion recognition, perspective taking (the ability to put oneself in the shoes of the other person and appreciate the world as they do), emotion sharing and a response directed towards the target of the empathy (e.g. Davis, 1983; Marshall et al., 1995). Such models tend to view 'deficits' in empathy as resulting from an individual's lack of ability to achieve any of these stages, such as to recognise the emotions of another or to appreciate their perspective (Miller & Eisenberg, 1988; Hudson et al., 1993; Gery et al., 2009). This has resulted in an individual centred understanding of empathy, with traditional treatment approaches to empathy focusing on attempting to teach these 'skills' at the individual level. Models of empathy have not tended to view empathy as a reciprocal process, nor have they focused upon the impact of the relationship between the giver and the receiver of empathy. This has been the case up until the development of Marshall's modified model of empathy (Marshall & Marshall, 2011). Marshall's modified model of empathy is the first model to consider the impact of the relationship between the giver

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and the receiver of empathy on the empathic response. This model suggests that the observer disliking or feeling hostile towards the observed person intervenes in the empathic process by resulting in indifference or pleasure from the observed person's suffering. The findings from the current study provide a strong argument for situating empathy within the context of relationships and suggest that the impact of the relationship between the giver and receiver of empathy is important in influencing their experience of empathy. The findings, therefore, concur with Marshall's modified model of empathy in that they place clear emphasis on the role of the relationship in the experience of empathy.

Building upon traditional models of empathy, the findings from the current study highlight additional factors that may be important in influencing the experience of empathy. These factors go beyond the individual's ability and the role of the relationship, focused upon in traditional models, and begin to consider factors relating to the wider context within which the empathic interaction occurs. For example, the findings suggest that the culture of the environment is important and needs to be one that is supportive and encouraging of empathic expression. It is also suggested that the environment needs to be one in which the wellbeing of those engaging in empathic interactions is supported, achieved in the setting of the current study by ensuring that staff feel supported, valued and safe. Figure 1 illustrates those factors found to be important in the experience and expression of empathy in the custodial environment, identified from the findings of the current study.

The findings therefore suggest that a more comprehensive model of empathy could be achieved by integrating factors relating to the context, as well as those relating to the relationship. Figure 2 represents a proposed revised version of Marshall's modified model of empathy (Marshall & Marshall, 2011) with the integration of the additional contextual factors identified as being important in the current study.

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The addition of contextual factors to models of empathy has important implications for the understanding of empathy, expanding it beyond individual centred conceptualisations to a more systemic understanding, which acknowledges the role of context, social relationships and culture. This has important implications for treatment approaches to empathy in prison environments. The addition of contextual factors to our understanding of empathy suggests that interventions aiming to develop empathy should look beyond the level of the individual and the relationship and focus upon developing environments that are supportive of empathy. The findings from the current study suggest that this could be achieved by developing prison cultures that encourage expressions of empathy and environments where the wellbeing of those expected to engage in empathic relationships is supported. Alkema, Linton and Randall (2008) found that healthcare professionals with better self-care strategies had lower levels of burnout and compassion fatigue. This therefore suggests that prison officers should be encouraged to maintain their wellbeing by being supported to develop their own self-care strategies. This could be done by providing relevant training, or by focusing on self-care strategies during regular meetings with their line managers.

The findings, therefore, suggest that those in custody should not be held personally responsible for increasing their ability to empathise. Instead, a collective response is required whereby there is an increased focus on facilitating relationships between staff and young people, creating a culture that supports and values empathy expression and improving staff wellbeing. This provides support for the use of trauma informed care in custodial settings, which places emphasis on creating therapeutic environments that are respectful, safe, accepting, and characterised by mutual trust and respect (e.g. Earles, 2018; Elliott et al., 2005; Bateman et al., 2014; Levenson & Willis, 2019). In 2013, the Five Minute Intervention (FMI) was piloted in HMPPS. This involved prison officers being trained to turn everyday conversations into rehabilitative opportunities using skills such as Socratic questioning, active

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listening and affirmation. An evaluation of the pilot indicated that prisoners reported greater self-efficacy and feeling that officers showed them greater humanity and care after the introduction of FMI. It also found improved relationships between prisoners and officers (Tate, Blagden & Mann, 2017). This suggests that the skills utilised as part of the FMI are likely to provide a useful resource for achieving more therapeutic environments in prisons. The findings of the current study support a move away from understanding empathy as an individual personality trait and instead viewing it as a dynamic experience that is changeable based upon the relationship and the context within which it occurs. It is important to note that these additional factors have been generated from data collected within a custodial environment and so the extent to which they may apply to other settings is currently unclear.

The findings from the current study support the integration of relational and contextual factors into models of empathy. As mentioned previously, the current study was carried out on Beech Unit, a specialist unit housing young people with complex needs, within a larger YOI. Beech Unit is characterised by an increased ratio of staff to young people, a greater emphasis on the relationships between staff and young people, specific training for staff who work on the unit and a staff selection process whereby staff are selected to work on the unit who demonstrate particular skills and competencies. Staff training aims to help staff to understand and meet the needs of the young people on the unit and includes training focusing on mental health, psychologically informed behaviour management and pro-social modelling. Pro-social modelling refers to the ability to encourage positive, socially considerate behaviour by acting as a 'model' of the behaviour expected from others (Trotter, 2009). The data revealed that staff on Beech Unit felt that the increased ratio of staff to young people meant that they had more opportunities to develop personal relationships with them. This was supported in the data when one of the participants, Craig, talked about how he was able to get to know the young people and work more closely with them on Beech Unit. The training that Prison Officers receive on

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Beech Unit might also contribute to the development of a different culture on the unit. For example, one of the participants, Paul, talked about how the culture on Beech Unit encourages open communication and is more accepting of staff wellbeing difficulties than it is on the standard custodial units. This is in contrast to literature on prison culture which has suggested that prison environments can be hyper-masculine and encouraging of displays of stoicism, bravery, physical prowess and aggression (Ricciardelli, Maier & Hannah-Moffat, 2015). Given this, it would be useful to further explore what it is about the culture on Beech Unit that makes it more accepting and whether this could be expanded onto the other units within the YOI.

Regarding the way in which the young people and staff constructed empathy, this was fluid in that it appeared to change in response to different contexts. This reflects the literature in that there does not appear to be a consensus as to how to define the construct, with multiple different ways of understanding and defining it existing (e.g. Hogan, 1969; Miller & Eisenberg, 1988; Eisenberg & Strayer, 1987). Batson (2011) suggests that the word 'empathy' is currently used to describe more than half a dozen psychologically distinct phenomena. Batson suggests that, although these phenomena are related to one another, they do not appear to be aspects, facets or components of a single thing. Constructions of empathy across the staff and young people data overlapped in part, but also demonstrated some differences. For example, it was evident that the staff participants constructed empathy as a 'tool' that could be used in a planned way to encourage positive behaviour. This sub-theme was named 'instrumental' in data analysis. They also constructed it as 'malleable', however were unsure as to whether it was fixed or something that can be changed. These two constructions were not present in the young people's data. It is possible that staff participants understood empathy as an instrumental tool due to training they may have completed, which encourages Prison Officers to use empathy in order to diffuse emotionally charged situations and build relationships with the young people they work with. There were also some constructions of empathy present in the young people's

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data that were not present in the staff data. These included those of empathy as 'genuine', 'unconditional' and 'positive'. The construction of empathy as 'genuine' relates to the young people viewing empathy as something that could be either genuine or fake. This conception perhaps relates to the construction by the staff participants of empathy as 'instrumental'. The use of empathy in an instrumental way in order to gain compliance appeared to be pre-planned and to have less emotion attached to it. This could perhaps be perceived by the young people as less genuine empathy. The notion of empathy as being used in an instrumental way in prison environments is supported in the literature. In their ethnographic study, McDermott and King (1988) found that the behaviour of both staff and prisoners was primarily motivated by the need to survive the prison environment. Staff utilised interpersonal skills in order to avoid assault or concerted indiscipline amongst prisoners and both prisoners and staff described prison life as a game. This supports the notion that positive behaviour from staff towards prisoners may be utilised in order to encourage compliance and avoid becoming the victim of violence, rather than due to a genuine care for prisoners.

The construction of empathy as 'reciprocal' was the strongest construction within the data for both groups (staff and young people). Various theoretical perspectives provide insight in relation to this theme, two of which include theories of reciprocity and equity theory of relationships. Theories of reciprocity are based upon the idea of reciprocating kindness. They suggest that we are motivated to repay a kind action and punish an unkind action, even when punishing the unkind action might result in some cost (Pelligra, 2011). Falk and Fischbacher (2001) present a theory of reciprocity which states that "a reciprocal action is modelled as the behavioural response to an action that is perceived as either kind or unkind" (p.3). It is suggested that the action will be rewarded or punished to a greater extent the more the action is evaluated as being either kind or unkind. They suggest that the action is judged as either kind or unkind based upon the consequences of the action and the underlying motivation for the

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action, that is, the intentions of the person involved. It is possible that empathy is utilised in a reciprocal manner in the custodial setting in that both staff and young people withdraw empathy when they feel they have been treated without empathy and, therefore unkindly, and give empathy in return for receiving empathic, or kind, behaviour. Another theory that appears relevant in relation to this finding is equity theory. Equity theory of relationships (Adams, 1963; 1965) suggests that individuals evaluate their relationships by assessing the ratio of their inputs to, and outcomes from, the relationship in comparison to the other person. If the input/output ratios are perceived as being unequal, the individual experiences distress. Equity theory suggests that individuals are motivated to reduce this distress by seeking to restore balance by making certain behavioural changes. It is possible that participants use empathy as a means of maintaining the perception of equity in their relationships, withdrawing it if they feel that they are not receiving what they should from the other person in terms of investment in the relationship. These ideas warrant further research.

The findings from current study highlight some interesting avenues for further research. The findings suggest that the culture and the environment in which empathy occurs are important and they need to be one that is supportive and encouraging of empathic expression. It is also suggested that the environment needs to be one in which the wellbeing of those expected to engage in empathic interactions is supported. Future research should focus on further exploring the role of the environment in the experience and expression of empathy. For example, it is not currently known whether environmental factors must be in place in order for empathy to occur or whether empathy can take place without them and these factors simply act to facilitate the process. Further research in this area will help to develop this understanding and may strengthen the argument for including environmental factors in models of empathy. An important avenue for further research related to this area involves the exploration of *how* cultures that support empathy are developed in custodial and/or other settings. This may

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provide useful direction for therapeutic settings attempting to implement cultures supportive of empathy. In addition, it may be useful to explore further the role of reciprocity in the experience and expression of empathy in the custodial setting. This was an important theme within the data from both participant groups, however the role of reciprocity is not yet fully understood. Further unpicking this construction of empathy may help to develop a greater insight into the role of reciprocity, including the implications for staff and young people of empathy being experienced in this way in the custodial setting. Finally, it would be beneficial for future research to focus on further exploring the phenomenon of empathy in the custodial environment utilising alternative research methods. This may include methods such as observation and creative methods, which are likely to provide a rich data source. The use of such methods for further study would facilitate a deeper understanding of the phenomenon, whilst being responsive to the needs of the young people held in custody. This idea is discussed further in the paragraph below.

The current study is not without limitations. The current study was conducted in a YOI in England, housing 15-18 year old boys, and utilised a small sample size. Caution needs to be taken, therefore, when attempting to generalise the findings and when applying them to other settings. Furthermore, whilst some evidence has emerged to suggest that relational and contextual factors are important in facilitating the experience and expression of empathy, this idea requires further exploration and testing in order to strengthen the argument for including these factors in models of empathy. The current study utilised interviews in order to collect data. Whilst the use of interviews provided a good opportunity for in depth exploration of the area of interest, they relied heavily on the participants' abilities to communicate their thoughts, feelings and experiences using words. It is well documented that people with learning difficulties are over-represented in the criminal justice system (Hellenbach, Karatzias & Brown, 2017). This is thought to be the case regarding young people in custody specifically.

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For example, in their systematic review, Harrington et al. (2005) found that 23% of young people in custody had learning difficulties (evidenced by IQs of below 70) and a further 36% had borderline learning difficulties (IQs of between 70 and 80). A likely consequence of this is that young people in custody may demonstrate difficulties with reading and comprehension and may be less able to articulate themselves using words. Whilst the researcher made attempts to select young people participants who she felt would be able to participate in the interviews, no formal assessment of their ability took place. The topic under investigation could also be considered complex. It is therefore possible that the ability of participants to communicate using words restricted the quality of the data collected in the current study. It is therefore recommended that future research explores the possibility of utilising alternative methods, such as observation or creative methods, to address this limitation. The use of such methods in future research would also enable the participant pool to be widened by enabling young people who demonstrate difficulties communicating with words to be included, thus providing a more holistic understanding of the phenomenon.

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Figure 1

Factors Important for Empathy to Occur in the Custodial Environment

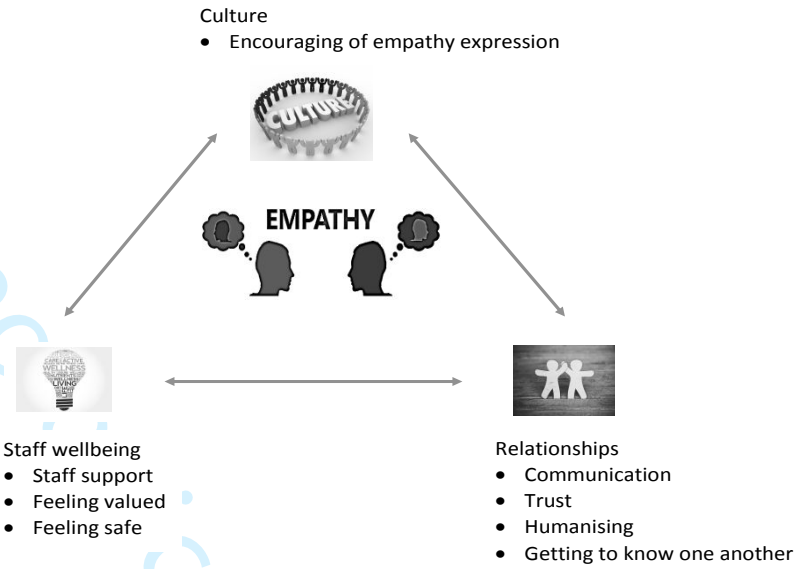

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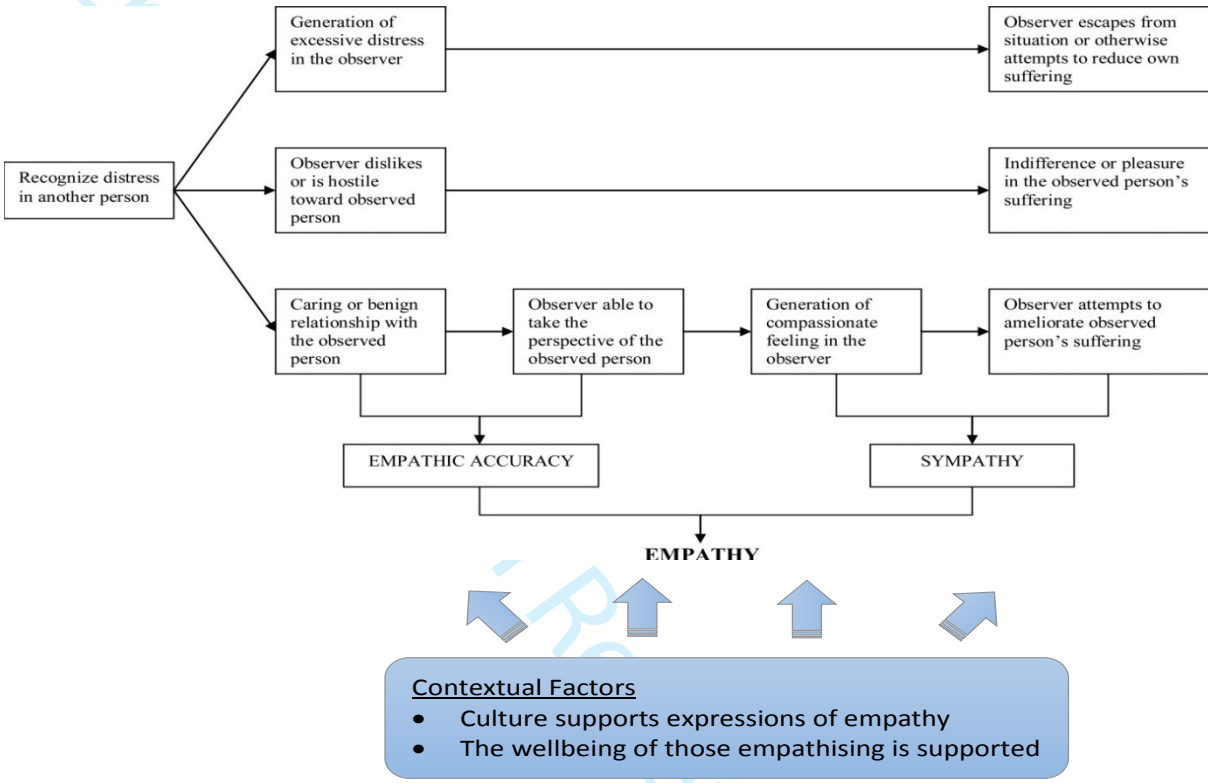
Figure 2

Revised Version of Marshall's Modified Model of Empathy with the Integration of Contextual Factors Identified from the Current Study



Note. Adapted from "Empathy and antisocial behaviour" by L. E. Marshall & W. L. Marshall, 2011. *Journal of Forensic Psychiatry & Psychology*, 22(5), p.748. (http://doi.org/fszbcd).

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