

Does the prison serve its purpose



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The environments that we are surrounded by on a daily basis have a huge influence on our psychological frame of mind as well as our behavior. Things such as noise, light, temperature, physical structures etc. all have huge role on to play on the experience that we have in a certain space and can either be positive or negative. When analyzing the Constitution Hill male prison, certain factors need to be taken into consideration when analyzing the environment, factors that influence people's behavior and allows each person to have a different experience from the other. These factors are; Behavioral, Sociocultural and Biological. A lot of things influence the type of people we become and those very behavioral traits can depict who we turn into after certain experiences in life.

When one has been put into a prison environment due to breaking the law in some way, does the person walk out being a better person that has learned their lesson or do they walk out being an even bigger danger to themselves and society than what they were ever before? This all depends on the 3 physiological factors listed below.

Kopec (2012: 1) explains that:

“ The human environment relationship is symbiotic in that the environment influences our behaviors and we in turn influence the environment. Whether due to fear, necessity, or naturally occurring challenges such as droughts, floods and extreme temperatures, we have adapted to a variety of environmental conditions that then lead to changes within the environment.”

Behavioral Psychology is influenced by each person's personal experience. By experiencing positive or negative reactions, we learn what actions are

desirable to others and these condition us to be the way that we are today. If we do something that gets a negative response, we will automatically avoid doing it again because we desire positive responses and will rather reinforce the positive response triggers than the negative response triggers. It's much like a reward system; our actions are influenced much more by what gives us the reward than by what causes the punishment.

Biological psychology is based on responses that are genetic and instinctive, acting a certain way without giving it thought, it is based on our 5 senses; what we see, smell, touch, hear and taste. These actions come in play when we are anxious or have feelings caused by the excretion adrenaline. When the sun shines in our eyes, without thinking, we will automatically look away from the sun or close our eyes. We have very little control over our biological responses.

Socio cultural psychology is very environmental orientated. Things such as our culture, religion, nationality and so forth, are very influential factors in our behavior. We act a certain way out of the expectations that others have for us, eventually leading us to have the same morals/beliefs that our social environment has. The queen of England will expect her children to behave in a certain way and will believe that sitting on the floor is simply unacceptable, whereas a lot of cultures will sit on the floor to eat dinner, no matter how rich or poor they might be.

The Constitution Hill male prison has several spaces that the inmates are exposed to. This environment, not only due to its physical characteristics,

but also it's due to the experiences associated with each space, has an impact on the inmates.

By analyzing figure 1, the visiting room comes across as a very stressful environment for the reason that it is a narrow room that was often over crowded with prisoners, the prisoner's guests and the prison guards, therefore excessive stimulation and arousal occurred in the space, with all the ranges of emotions and excitement. The space was a very dull area with grey finishes and concrete flooring. A lot of natural light is let into the room, artificial light is kept to a minimal and tables and seating was provided. The table arrangement was set up in such a way that there would be an aisle for the guards to walk through, in between the guests and the prisoners to prevent any undetected activity.

Tour guide Mulaudizi (2015) described the visiting center to be a small long room that was over crowded by visitors, prisoners and wardens. Because the small room was overcrowded and a passage separated the prisoners from the guests, it got extremely loud and unbearably noisy in the room, making it impossible to have a private conversation. The visitors would bring the prisoners gifts that were generally taken apart by the wardens to supposedly check that any weapons were not being smuggled in, but in most cases, the gifts were not returned after being searched, using another method to dehumanize and humiliate the inmates, but in this case, in front of their guests.

The prisoners where most likely to experience a variety of emotions when they first saw their guests, emotions such as excitement, anxiety, arousal or

sadness, all depending on the relationship. As soon as the that moment has passed, it will sink in that they are visiting under very bad circumstances and sadness or shame might occur because awareness of the inmate being in prison has now sunk in. This initial reaction will depend on the socio-cultural relationship that they might have with one another and will differ from person to person. If a person was sent to prison because he was protecting his family, he might have a feeling of pride when his family comes to visit, were as if a rapists family member had come to visit, he was not likely to share same positive emotion. Because of the way that the guards humiliated them in front of their guests when they received gifts, they could start dreading receiving gifts and unlike our everyday society, they could start resenting it and once they have been released from prison, they would always relate gifts to the negative feelings that occurred when they received gifts in prison.

Kopec (2012: 4) states “[...] and a host of other public places experience high levels of crowding, which leads to inadequate care, substandard services, and negative personal experiences.” All humiliation aside, once somebody gets used to the visiting rooms circumstances, they will learn to adapt to the behavior that occurs in the environment, and appreciate that the space has the most positive behavioral aspects, compared to the rest of the prison environment.

The kitchen is a very big space that s located outside. It has a corigated iron roof to prevent them from getting rained on. The floor is concrete, like all the other flooring throughout the prison. Because the kitchen is outside, you can smell the fresh air and get to experience natural light. The kitchen is

separated into two sections, the one section is where you collect your food (fig. 2) and the other section is where you sit and eat your meal (fig. 3). It is the only type of social activity where they get to be exposed to the sun, fresh air and get to see some other colours besides grey and red.

The controllers of the prison were raised to be against certain races and cultures and their socio cultural attitudes was brought into the way food was distributed to the prisoners. Some prisoners received good meals with desert, where other prisoners would receive the scraps of the other prisoner's food and would receive it on extremely unhygienic plates that have not been washed in weeks, resulting into a lot of ill inmates. If these inmates wanted better food, they could only receive it by doing sexual favors to the prison guards. One would become desperate for a good meal and would put their morals aside and do things that they would never imagine doing. Once they have done this, they start relating a good meal to sexual favors, and instead of having a negative relation to sexual trade, they start relating it to actions that end with a rewarding result (the good meal), and less health risks.

Bootzin (1980: 61) explains that:

Our friends and families control us with their approval or disapproval. Our jobs control us by offering or withdrawing money. Our schools control us by passing us or failing us and thus affecting our access to jobs and therefore to money. In short, in all the areas of our lives, our actions are determined by their connection with pleasant or unpleasant consequences.

In my opinion, the kitchen area is one of the most humane spaces. It gives them the opportunity to have private conversations and it allows the prisoners to socialize with whoever they want to. This would be determined by the type of person that they are, finding people they can socially relate to or get along with, people that share a similar background on some aspect.

According to Bootzin (1980: 62):

“ Just as botanists can predict that a cactus will grow only in warm, dry weather, and can control the development of a sickly cactus by moving it out of a cold, rainy garden into a hothouse, so the behaviorists attempts to predict how human beings will respond under different sets on environmental conditions and to control those responses by controlling the environmental stimuli that affect them.”

Bootzin discusses how we can change and control our environment. As mentioned earlier, certain inmates would be required to provide sexual favors for the prison guards, in exchange for a good a meal. Ironically the isolation cells were often used when inmates tried to lie about their race to get a better meal and were caught out. They were sentenced to 30 days of isolation. The isolation cell is a very small room that had very little ventilation, it was quiet, cold, very dark, excluded from everything, no bathroom facilities inside and the walls were painted red and white. (Fig 4 and Fig. 5).

Prisoners feared going into isolation. Without giving it any thought, the idea of the cell immediately triggered fear. One had absolutely no control over anything. If they wanted to go to the bathroom, they needed permission. The

environment was traumatic. Tour guide Mulaudizi (2015) explains that “ they would be tortured by being hosed down with cold water every three hours; the lights would be left on for 23 hours and then switched off for 23 hours, leaving the inmates with no regard for time.” The mental state that this left the inmates in, were so bad that it often lead to mental break downs and suicide. They were stripped away from all their rights and identity and were treated like animals, changing their behavior into anything that would help them survive. At this point they started acting out of the ordinary and instinctively.

The emotional damage that it did to them created such a harsh impact on their mental state because the environment targeted all their 5 senses in a very negative way. Anything that triggered one of these 5 senses would cause an automatic defensive response, which, on the one hand made them more dangerous than what they ever were before but on the other hand, it prevented them from ever repeating the behavior that caused them to go into isolation in the first place, this is if they were still mentally healthy.

Figure 6 is a demonstration of the communal cells layout, it is a big space; however they were rather over crowded the walls were painted red and white and the floors had red tiles. No windows are in the cell, therefor no natural light in the space, making the room very dark. As illustrated in Figure 7, the toilet has a very low wall around it giving the inmates no privacy on the toilet and also nothing preventing the smell spreading across the room. Seeing that there was barely any ventilation either, it just made matters worse. The overcrowded room caused the space to be very noisy, there are no materials used in the design of this space that absorbs sound, in fact the <https://assignbuster.com/does-the-prison-serve-its-purpose/>

tiles, high walls and enamel painted walls just creates a stronger acoustic effect. Some inmates had to sleep next to the toilet and used their hands to clean it. This created a very unhealthy environment.

“ Overcrowding was a constant Problem in number four. These communal cells often housed twice the number of prisoners they were designed for. [...] The Gubudweni was the most overcrowded and cramped space in the cell. Prisoners slept head to toe ‘ like sardines’. These underlings did not have anything to trade for comfort or privilege or they were simply the newcomers in the cell. They could only be promoted by proving they were part of a prison gang or by fighting on behalf of the Sakabams or fighting the Sakabams themselves.”(Constitution Hill, 2015).

Such an overcrowded, noisy space can be very stressful to somebody, especially the lack of personal space that is given to them. Kopec(2012: 128)states that, “ Stress can occur from objects or events that we encounter or other individuals. The result of stress on individuals can range from shortened gestation periods to alterations in the brain’s chemistry and function, which contribute to lower disease resistance.” The Gubudweni group are pressurized to use violence to be able to get into a gang that will offer them safety and better living conditions. Being able to fight or having goods to trade is what leads to a safer, more comfortable life when one is in prison. The inmate learns to associate bad behavior with a positive outcome, adapting to the socio-cultural environment that has become their ‘ new world’. One’s behavior eventually leads to the socio-cultural aspect of their life to change completely. Their morals adapt, their beliefs change and they become a whole different person.

The impact that imprisonment had on inmates, from a psychological point of view, is far reaching. Over and above the personal factors, the environmental impact from a Biological, Behavioral and Socio Cultural psychology perspective, had a major effect. This reaches beyond the prison walls, as inmates that leave the prison are forever changed by these environmental factors, especially if they were in for an extended period of time or experience was particularly traumatic for them.

Goleman (2006: 152) mentions that:

The human brain is designed to change itself in response to accumulated experience. Possessing the consistency of butter at room temperature and locked into its bony cage, the brain is as fragile as it is complex. Part of this fragility results from an exquisite attunement to its surroundings.”

Even though the biological and socio cultural influences may technically have ceased when they left prison, the behavioral impact remains, as they have been conditioned to behave in different ways, in response to certain stimuli that were associated with punishment and reward in the prison environment. A prison that has had impacts like this on inmates, have no released them into the world, making our environment more dangerous.

Rehabilitation programs of ex-convicts should pay special attention to the environmental psychology research, and try design the system to help the people to re-adapt to what is now to them, in some ways a foreign world.