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## Adapting to isolation in prison. Concept review

**Abstract:** This article is of a review nature. It features a presentation and discussion of concepts (including typologies) of adaptation to isolation in prison, which have appeared in the literature over the years, namely concepts by: Leon Rabinowicz, Vladimir Pirozhkov, Donald Clemmer, Gresham Sykes, Erving Goffman, John Irwin, Stanley Cohen and Laurie Taylor, Roy King and Kenneth Elliot as well as Ben Crewe. The author explains the context in which they were created, presents their advantages and disadvantages, and considers the issue of universality of each of these concepts.

**Key words:** adaptation, prisonization, phases of imprisonment, typologies of adaptation

### Introduction

The curiosity about the manner a person adapts to isolation probably arose on the same day the first prison was built. Curious were both the people who felt sorry for the prisoner's deplorable conditions of isolation and those who wished the worst upon the prisoners, and considered the conditions they were staying in to be overly luxurious (Foucault 1998). The wardens were also curious – as long as the prison was only a place of serving one's sentence – whether the conditions for the convicted person weren't too good and whether the prisoners themselves were not too comfortable, and since the thought of rehabilitation appeared – whether they were good enough to foster this improvement (Machel 2003).

Over the years there have been a number of descriptions of prisons conditions in different parts of the world. These included scientific publications (Kaczyńska 1989), but also popular science publications (Christianson 2005) and even

belletristic publications (Archer 2003). They described the conditions of isolation, but also, which will be of particular interest to us in this article, the manner in which prisoners adapted to these conditions. It would not come as a surprise to find that the adaptation was not easy. If this was not the case, it was usually accompanied by a remark: despite difficult conditions, the prisoner adapted extremely well. However, I do not want to go back to the time when the reaction to imprisonment was defined only by the adjectives: bad or good. I will start from modern times, when a more elaborate reflection on how it is even possible that a person can adapt to the conditions of isolation in prison has emerged.

Attempts at describing the issue of adaptation to prison isolation into a theoretical framework, classifying its different methods, apart from obviously satisfying scientific curiosity, are of primary importance for the rehabilitation practice (not only that, of course, as it is as important for security and prison management). If we know the ways in which prisoners adapt to isolation, we can strengthen the beneficial ones and correct or eliminate the disadvantageous ones.

I shall present the typologies and concepts in chronological order (with one exception).

## **Rabinowicz's concept of the three phases of imprisonment**

One of the first classifications of the adaptation to isolation in prison was created by Leon Rabinowicz. He distinguished three phases that a prisoner goes through: depression, exaltation and immobilization.

The first phase – depression – is the despair felt by people who find themselves in a world in which they cannot perform even the simplest, most mundane activities to which they had become accustomed while living life as free men. Before incarceration they could jog, play sports, meet with friends, do lots of other things, but now their activity has come to a halt, becoming a source of great suffering.

The period of exaltation is manifested by the longing for the loved ones. Prisoners feel numerous emotions with increased intensity. But not everyone goes through this phase in the same manner. Some cry, write poems, others scream and think about revenge. Everyone is burdened by boredom, despair and sadness.

The final phase – the immobilization – consists of succumbing to the overwhelming boredom, getting used to living in a cell, performing everyday activities automatically. The incarcerated person becomes desensitized, succumbs to prison monotony. It seems that the prisoner has become an ideal charge, but in reality, this behavior is a sign of mental paralysis, indifference, lack of life energy and motivation to act.

It should be noted that Rabinowicz, when describing the successive phases, focused his attention on the prisoners who served their sentences in the separate system – in complete isolation from other prisoners (more about the separate system: Wala 2015, pp. 137–142). The author placed great emphasis in his deliberations on the effect of solitude which in his opinion is destructive (Rabinowicz 1933, pp. 137–139).

The main cause for objection that can be raised against this concept is that every prisoner would have to go through these very clearly defined phases. Probably some percentage of prisoners, maybe even a large one, will react in this way, but the weakness of this concept is that it leaves no room for exceptions, deviations, individual differences caused, for example, by the personality of the prisoner or external circumstances, all depends only on the place in the continuum of time in which the prisoner is currently serving sentence. The concept therefore overly simplifies the prison reality.

## **Pirozhkov's concept of the three phases of imprisonment**

Vladimir Pirozhkov's concept is very similar in form to Rabinowicz's classification, although it was created several decades later. He also distinguished three periods of isolation in which prisoners try to adapt to the surrounding conditions.

The first stage – the initial adaptation – consists in the newcomer getting used to the conditions of isolation. When meeting new people, talking to more experienced colleagues, it happens that the convicts become distrustful of the counselors, which leads to their negative reactions to rehabilitation.

"Incarceration syndrome" as the second phase of the sentence starts after 5 to 6 months of imprisonment. During this period, the fellow-inmates become similar to each other in the way they walk, dress, and approach their counselors. Negative changes appear in the prisoner's personality, which hinder the process of rehabilitation. The relationship between the prisoner and the sentence served changes as well.

The final step is the increase of hopes for the future as the prisoner tries to reconcile the past and the present. The convicted person adapts to the effects of imprisonment and starts thinking about the future. If the prisoner is just a few years away from prison, their mental health may degrade.

As Pirozhkov claimed, changes in the prisoner's personality occur in all these phases. In the first period, immediately after the arrest, there is fear, depression, despair, anxiety, depression, indifference to the events taking place. Prisoners still think in the same categories that a free man does. They mainly think about the past, and not about the present and future which are both unknown and alien to them. "Incarceration syndrome" is the result of the breakdown and

destruction of life plans. Changes in the psyche often depend on the extent to which the convicted person understands the meaning of the sentence, the need for restrictions, ways of alleviating their guilt, and the use of denial tactics. It is only when a prisoner begins to realize the purposefulness of serving their sentence that they become accustomed to the fact of being deprived of freedom and to this new social status (Pirozhkov 1987, pp. 127–130).

Pirozhkov can also be accused of assuming that every prisoner must go through these three unified phases. Here, too, there is no room for individual reactions or ways of adapting, the convicted person can only mitigate, as I understand it, the changes in their psyche (and these changes concern everyone) with a better understanding of the sense of incarceration.

## Clemmer's concept of prisonization

Let us go back in time a little further. In 1940, Donald Clemmer published a book which was of importance in the field of criminology, entitled "The Prison Community". He introduced the term "prisonization" which is still used today, not only by criminologists. He defined it as "accepting, to a greater or lesser extent, the customs, styles of behavior and the entirety of the prison culture" (Clemmer 1940, p. 299).

According to Clemmer, despite the fact that everyone who goes to prison has to adapt to the conditions, the course of the process depends on a number of factors: the number of convictions, previous experiences, the degree of acceptance of the prison subculture and identification with the criminal group, and the prisoner's relationship with the outside world. If the prisoner has received a short sentence, has a strong personality and is not susceptible to environmental influences, maintains close and positive relationships with family members, stays in a cell with people who are not integrated into the prison subculture, works or participates in cultural and educational activities, they are less exposed to the process of prisonization. The factors that cause the highest degree of prisonization include: a sentence of many years, unstable personality, lack of positive relations with loved ones, acceptance and adoption of the principles of prison subculture, staying in one cell with homosexual people, as well as readiness to engage in homosexual behavior and taking part in illegal entertainment. The speed of the prisonization process depends on the age of the prisoner, the type of offense committed, the intelligence and the situation in prison (Clemmer 1940, pp. 299–300).

The concept of prisonization was based on the observation that as the time of isolation passes the prisoners acquire more and more knowledge about the specific forms and values of the prisoner community and show an increasing degree of assimilation. The process of prisonization thus means assimilation of the prison subculture, mainly the norms of the existing informal prisoner code of conduct. The prisoner learns prison-specific attitudes, behaviors, rituals and habits

concerning eating, dressing, working or resting, the prison language and how the prison is organized (Ciosek 2003, p. 214).

One can have a few reservations towards Clemmer's concept. The first is that, according to the author himself, this manner of adapting to the conditions of prison isolation is unavoidable and inevitable, sooner or later it will affect every prisoner, and who gets affected sooner and who later is only decided by the above-mentioned circumstances. But there is no alternative here. However, we have examples of prisoners who, despite even serving long-term sentences, participating in the prison subculture and having no contact with the outside world, did not succumb to such a defined prisonization (Toch 1977; Zamble 1995; Miszewski 2016).

The second reservation is that prisonization, in the sense given to it by Clemmer himself, is not only an inevitable process of adaptation and without any alternative, it is also clearly negative. Colloquially speaking, one can adapt to prison in a way that is either "slightly bad" or "very bad". This author's conviction is visible in a number of aspects, but let us take the prison subculture mentioned above. According to Clemmer, every prisoner will sooner or later become involved in it, some to a greater extent, others to a smaller extent, but still participation in it is "bad by definition" and can only be harmful (according to Michael Welch 1996, p. 151, the reason for this is that Clemmer equated, in an unjustified manner, prisonization with criminalization). Of course, we cannot agree with such an assumption. There are numerous studies showing the positive features of prison subculture and the need to participate in it (see Moczydłowski 1991; Szaszkiewicz 1997; Kamiński 2004).

Thirdly, the progressing isolation in prison would, according to Clemmer, worsen the prisoners' mental capacities as well as their mental state and functioning. The results of numerous studies contradict this claim (e.g. Bukstel, Kilmann 1980; Rasch 1981; Wormith 1995; Dettbarn 2012; Leigey, Ryder 2015).

Fourthly, the negative socialization that has been progressing over the years of incarceration, causing cumulative damage to the prisoner, is intended to prevent effective readaptation after release from prison. This is also not so clear-cut and depends on a number of other factors (Sapsford 1978), examples of effective readaptation of prisoners released after serving sentences of up to several decades can be found in the literature (Coker, Martin 1985; Korecki, Korecki 2006).

Finally, it should be pointed out that the phenomenon of the adverse impact of imprisonment does actually occur, though it does not have such a devastating impact on the individual as Clemmer claimed (Miszewski, Miałkowska-Kozaryna 2020). However, it is worth remembering that Clemmer wrote this about American prisons in the 1930s, which were infamous for their very difficult conditions (see Rotman 1998), Welch (1995) is therefore surprised by the uncritical acceptance of the concept of prisonization in later American research, and the author of this study is even more surprised by the uncritical reference to it by contemporary Polish researchers.

## Sykes's concept of "pains of imprisonment"

In 1958, Gresham Sykes published a book entitled "Society of Captives". He presented his concept of "pains of imprisonment". In his opinion, it has its origins in frustration and deprivation of needs related to lack of freedom, lack of heterosexual relationships, deprivation of autonomy, deprivation of privacy and lack of access to important goods. This pain manifests itself in abandonment, discomfort, loneliness and the feeling of danger and uncertainty. Prisoners are trying to ease this pain by trying to adapt to the situation they found themselves in (Sykes 1958, pp. 78–79).

Presenting the ways of adapting to prison isolation, Sykes does not hide the fact that he owes much to Robert K. Merton and his typology of adaptation to the achievement of culturally defined goals by an individual (Merton 1938; a concise description can be found in: Olechnicki, Załęcki 1997, p. 201), which he then modified to fit to the issue of imprisonment. However, the problem is that Sykes does not name his types directly, but only descriptively; in some places it is difficult to associate them with Merton's types, they are not completely identical.

According to Sykes, the convicted person can cope with imprisonment-related problems by escaping from the situation understood as physical withdrawal. This means dreaming of situations which bring about happiness and thus mask the unpleasantness of imprisonment. The lives of these prisoners are closer to plans for the future rather than thinking about the present.

We may also encounter another type of escape from the pain of imprisonment, which Sykes calls mental withdrawal. A prisoner who chooses this form of adaptation may renounce goals, aspirations and needs that can be a source of frustration when being thought about or when they simply fail in prison conditions. There is also the possibility of fantasizing, which is connected with pleasant events from the past or imaginary life dramas after leaving prison. This strategy is not characteristic of most prisoners. The reason for this is probably that, despite the frustration that the prisoners feel about not being able to achieve their goals, they are too important to them and therefore they do not renounce them. Perhaps escaping into the fantasy world concerns prisoners who had a poor connection with reality before being incarcerated. However, most prisoners do not manage to escape the pains of imprisonment by using this psychological mechanism.

If the prisoner is unable to use any escape model, they may rebel against the prison rules and the rigorous treatment of the prison staff. This is also a reaction to the growing frustration. Since in a situation of open struggle victory always lies with the guards, this is the most common reason for not taking such actions. Very often, if prisoners even want to organize themselves to speak out against the institution, it turns out that they themselves cannot achieve a consensus, their

diversity does not allow them achieve sufficient solidarity to spark a rebellion. They rarely achieve a high level of organization.

If one cannot escape either physically or mentally, there is a lack of solidarity to provoke common, organized resistance against the rules established by the staff, which is doomed to fail anyway, there is a lack of faith in peaceful ways to reduce the pains of imprisonment, there is nothing left for the prisoners to do but to endure them patiently. The deprivation and frustration associated with it, constantly attacking the prisoners' self-image, will strike at them with full force, so that the time spent in isolation can be compared, as Sykes calls it, to living in Purgatory. And that is largely what actually happens in prison. There are no emergency exit routes, no way to eliminate the pains of imprisonment completely. But if they cannot be eliminated, they can at least be mitigated by appropriate ways of interaction between the prisoners themselves. And that is what the prisoners are trying to do.

Frustrated not as an individual, but as one of many, the prisoners see two ways opening before them. On the one hand, they can try to join other prisoners who provide support, respect and a sense of belonging, are loyal to one another and stand in opposition to the prison staff. On the other hand, they can enter the path of war between all against all, where they will only seek self-interest, without looking at the grievances or needs of others. In the first case, the severity of the prison environment collides with group cohesion and solidarity. Tolerance then replaces irritability, other prisoners become people who try to help rather than exploit, and the loyalty of the group becomes a dominant value. Sykes calls this the "collectivist" attitude. In the second case, the severity of the environment will cause alienation. Disgust and indifference will fuel friction. An inmate becomes a target of exploitation at every corner, the prison staff is simply just another threat in the pursuit of benefit. Such a convict is willing to betray their fellow inmates if only this will bring him closer to achieving his goals. Sykes calls this approach "individualistic".

In fact, as Sykes claimed, patterns of social interaction among prisoners are scattered between these two theoretical extremes. The prisoner community shows neither perfect solidarity nor is it a vipers' nest. Rather, it is a mixture of both, seeking balance in the achievement of this difficult compromise (Sykes 1958, pp. 79–83).

We may wonder to what extent the "pains of imprisonment" mentioned by Sykes still occur today. It seems that the new, revised regulations have significantly reduced them (at least in Europe). However, the typology itself seems to be still valid.

## Goffman's concept of total institutions

Erving Goffman, in his collection of essays on total institutions (1961 "Asylums"), he distinguished five modes of adaptation to the conditions of prison

isolation: withdrawal from the situation, rebellion, denial, conversion and cold calculation (the latest Polish translation [see Goffman 2011] uses, respectively, the terms: situational withdrawal, intransigent lie, colonization, conversion, playing it cool; however, in the remainder of this work I will use the older terms from the 1987 study because they are, in my opinion, more relevant and already established in the literature). Goffman's concept is almost a carbon copy of Merton's typology, but Goffman never openly admitted to borrowing these concepts.

Those using prison withdrawal tactics pay no attention to anything but events directly affecting them. Withdrawing from the situation is a strategy for adapting to the conditions of prison isolation, which is characterized primarily by a lack of interest. It is only important for such prisoners to withdraw their attention from all other events. They are not willing to cooperate with their environment and pay no attention to the presence of others.

A prisoner who adopts the tactics of rebellion deliberately opposes the institution, firmly refusing to cooperate with the staff. They are characterized by constant tenacity, sometimes high personal morale. The constant disapproval of a total institution requires them to be constantly well informed about its formal organization, which, paradoxically, is a deep commitment of sorts. This negative attitude, in turn, results in increased prison staff interest, increased surveillance, as well as difficulties. According to Goffman, this attitude is usually temporary and is limited to the initial stage of the incarceration in an institution. Later on, it usually changes to another type of adaptation.

Prisoners, who are characterized by settling in as a form of adaptation to isolation in prison, try to make a relatively stable life in prison. Their experience of the outside world shows that it is worth living even in a situation of imprisonment and it is here that one can create decent living conditions for oneself. While for a number of convicts there is very often a contradiction between the outside world and the life behind bars, for those who adopt a strategy of settling in no such conflict occurs. Both in prison and on the outside one can feel satisfied and adapt to the conditions. These prisoners very often say that they feel "at home" in prison, that that "there is no other place where they would feel better". Prison administration staff are often skeptical and reserved towards such prisoners. This is because prison is, by definition, a punishment and a very severe one at that. In this case, when the convicted person feels "too comfortable" in a given institution, it entails greater problems in returning to society. Sometimes it happens that these prisoners, right before they leave prison, do some damage or commit another offense to go back to prison. It follows that the more "friendly", the more modern, the more tolerable the conditions of imprisonment, the more likely it is that this adaptation strategy is employed.

A prisoner who adopts a conversion strategy plays the role of the perfect subordinate. Such prisoners not only take over the views of the staff, but also their behavior, gestures and vocabulary. They want to be liked by the staff and

to be always at their disposal (Goffman 1987, pp. 15–17). This strategy is also called “apparent adaptation to the prison conditions”. It causes self-concentration, inadequate self-assessment, prevents the use of one’s own resources and possibilities, leads to distortion of information, displacement of problems and rationalization of one’s own behavior. The acceptance of social norms and the desire to change is dictated by purely egoistic motives (Gordon 2005, pp. 114–115).

Cold calculation is a combination of different elements of the strategy for adaptation to isolation in prison. Behavior characteristic of conversion, establishment, loyalty to fellow companions, depending on the circumstances, is used here. This tactic gives the best chance of getting out of prison without suffering mental or physical harm. Characteristic behavior is showing loyalty to cellmates, and lack thereof in situations of individual conversation with the prison staff. Those who employ it sometimes adopt an attitude of “avoiding trouble” in their relations with their fellow inmates, sometimes they go on to break off their contacts with the outside world, but never completely settle in.

According to Goffman, not every prisoner can be classified as a single type. One prisoner can take on almost all strategies during the course of serving their sentence. It may also be that the types of adaptation, their characteristic behaviors and attitudes intertwine (Goffman 1987, p. 18).

The objection that can be raised against Goffman’s typology is the aforementioned fact that it is borrowed... from James Bonta and Paul Gendreau (1995, p. 76), also remind us that Goffman did not collect his data in prisons. His conclusions are based on a review of prison literature combined with the results of observations made in other total institutions. Apart from the above, it should be stated that it is a very useful analytic tool, probably due to its versatility.

## Typology of Irwin’s adaptation

According to Roy King and Kenneth Elliot (1977, p. 238) the best typology of methods of adaptation to prison conditions was created by John Irwin (1970). Irwin, before becoming an academic lecturer, had been imprisoned himself (he spent five years in isolation for illegal possession of firearms), this is King and Elliot appreciate its value as built on direct experience. Irwin has listed three main types of adaptations: jailing, doing time and gleaning.

“Jailing” represents the manner of adaptation of those inmates who are oriented towards the prison and its culture, who cut themselves off from the outside world, trying to “build a life in prison” (Irwin 1970, p. 68). According to Irwin, this attitude is characteristic of the “state youth”, i.e. all those whose institutional career has prepared them for the role of prisoners: “the prison life is the only life we know” (1970, p. 74). In prison, they engage in the social system of procurement and trade and in the struggle for power and prestige.

For those prisoners who remain attached to the outside world and want to preserve their patterns of life and identity (criminal and otherwise), “doing time” is about striving to maximize comfort and luxury and minimize problems. They avoid trouble, engage in activities that “take up their time”, secure several available prison “luxuries” (such as work, fixed meal hours), make “friends” with other prisoners and do everything necessary to get out of prison as soon as possible (Irwin 1970, p. 69).

Some prisoners, however, attempt to change their patterns of life and identity by adopting a method of adaptation called “gleaning”. These prisoners seek to “improve themselves”, “improve their minds” or “find themselves” and use the resources that exist in prison: educational opportunities, vocational training programs, treatment programs and others (Irwin 1970, pp. 76–77).

Irwin claimed that prisoners can change the ways they adapt during the course of their sentence, and can use various elements of different strategies (1970, p. 78).

## Typology of adaptation by Cohen and Taylor

In November 1967 sociologists Stanley Cohen and Laurie Taylor were asked to conduct sociology classes at Durham maximum-security penitentiary in the UK. However, as they admit themselves, they quickly abandoned the content of the course, which they found to be quite uninteresting, and under the pretext of continuing the course, they started researching the prisoners serving long sentences who participated in the course. What they wanted to learn from them was how they are affected by staying behind bars for so long and how they adapt to such a long isolation (Cohen, Taylor 1972, pp. 42–43). As a result of the research they specified five types of adaptations: self-protecting, campaigning, escaping, striking and confronting.

1. Self-protecting – this type covers both the usual attempts to make life in prison more bearable and the active or passive individual refusal to cooperate with the prison staff as well as the deliberate questioning of rules by staff established.
2. Campaigning – a way of fighting exists in all prisons which consists in formalizing reactions such as “moaning”, complaining, being petty and tedious. The prisoner who uses it constantly contacts the press to provide some information, organizes petitions, exchanges letters with various authorities responsible for supervising prisoners and guarding their rights. Although all prisoners are to some extent involved in this type of activity, there are also those who conduct it with such commitment and perseverance that over time both the prison staff and other inmates begin to perceive them as professional activists, and this activity practically becomes a manner of spending their entire time. These prisoners do not want to overthrow existing standards, but to use them to fight against the prison staff. Sometimes they are right to do

so, sometimes they are not. Complaints relate both to their personal matters (usually with poor results) and to the conditions affecting all prisoners (greater effectiveness).

3. Escaping – if the two previous types of adaptations were or could only be individual in nature, then escape – understood literally here – necessitates cooperation, even if it only takes on a passive form: not informing others about the preparations undertaken by the escapees. Although there are some spectacular escape attempts that end with a success, most prisoners do not see them as a real possibility. A successful escape improves the mood of the remaining prisoners and causes ironic smiles directed at the prison staff.
4. Striking – one of the most accepted types of offensive tools, non-violent resistance in political and religious conflicts, was a hunger strike. This is particularly useful in a prison where it would be pointless to withdraw from any other commitment, or at least from doing one's daily work (the authors do not mean industrial strikes here). However, the threat of going on a hunger strike till death by a person serving a life sentence may spark a certain humanitarian response. There are cases of collective hunger strikes, but this form of protest mostly remains a special tool used by an individual who does not want to involve others in their private protest, or whose complaint is purely private.
5. Confronting – if the other methods of fighting described above are inadequate, only open confrontation of prison staff remains. There are no longer any attempts to win with small victories, as these attempts can, in their own way, legitimize the position of the prison staff. Direct confrontation then becomes the most appropriate offensive technique for those groups (such adaptations are not envisaged by the authors as individually applicable) who can unite under an anti-authoritarian, ideological banner and who can show sufficient solidarity to counteract the inevitably severe retaliation by the authorities (Cohen, Taylor 1972, pp. 144–156).

The advantage of Cohen's and Taylor's study is that it is based on the close intimacy of the authors with the prisoners of the Durham maximum security penitentiary. In the scientific world, this has been deemed as a factor giving their research results credibility. Nigel Walker (1995, p. 99) is of a different opinion and claims that the authors have become biased due to this factor. In fact, it is puzzling that when listing the different types of adaptations, the authors call them "types of resistance" (Cohen, Taylor 1972, p. 144), as if all possible ways of adapting to isolation had to be an answer-opposition to the treatment by the prison staff.

## Typology of adaptation by King and Elliot

As Frances Simon writes (1999, p. 35), King and Elliot's book (1977) is an engaging account of the early years of Albany prison (near Newport, on the

English Isle of Wight). This prison was established in the early 1960s and was supposed to be a model prison. Unfortunately, as early as in 1972 a serious rebellion broke out in it, being one of the few that took place in English prisons at that time, which lasted for over a year and earned Albany the reputation of being the most problematic prison in the country (Simon 1999, p. 35). King and Elliot, along with other researchers, conducted research there from May 1968 to September 1969, returning for short visits in 1971–72. Researchers were interested, among other things, in issues related to prison management, specifically the question: why does a prison designed and opened as having security category C receive a category B shortly afterwards, but the decisions taken (i.e. restrictions) actually put it on a par with category A? It seems that excessive emphasis placed on security issues and the fact the staff excessively believed that they were a remedy for all prison ailments were the reasons for the protests (Simon 1999, p. 36).

King and Elliot claim that the way of adaptation is a flexible process, which is not unlike Irwin, in fact they openly admit that his typology was an inspiration to them. There is an element of strategy in each of them and they do not cancel each other out. Many prisoners use different adaptations at different stages of serving their sentences, or choose different elements from them and apply them simultaneously. The basic types of adaptation by King and Elliot are as follows:

1. Lack of self-confidence, uncertain negative retreat – difficulties in dealing with both staff and other prisoners;
2. Giving in to the prison life comfort, the so-called secondary comfort indulgence – taking day by day, satisfaction with prison “comforts” (fixed time of meals delivered by the prison staff, etc.);
3. Jailing – significant participation in the prison subculture, with access to goods and trade of contraband goods;
4. Gleaning – frequent contacts with educators, psychologists, psychiatrists, therapists and other “specialist” staff, participation in numerous educational courses in the hope of achieving useful qualifications;
5. Opportunism – using the prison staff, educational opportunities, as well as the position in the prison subculture for one’s own gains;
6. Doing your bid – never attracting the interest of either other inmates or the prison staff, being respected by both sides and enjoying the “comforts” offered by the prison (Mott 1985, p. 30).

As in the case of Irwin’s typology, I can only present one thing as “criticism”: neither Irwin’s nor King’s and Elliot’s concept are adequate tools if one wants to study the adaptation of Polish prisoners (based on the author’s own study, see Miszewski 2016). Created on the basis of English-speaking countries, they are deeply immersed in that culture and are applicable to it. This is of course a big advantage, but also a disadvantage (lack of universality).

## Ben Crewe's model of adaptation in late-modern prison

The aim of Ben Crewe's research was to analyze the way the staff exercises power over prisoners in a late-modern (as he described it himself) Wellingborough semi-open male prison in England. According to his research, this power is exercised in a completely different manner from that to which we are all used to, and most importantly, what the prisoners were used to (this change was also the subject of research, Crewe analyzed it based on the statements of convicts who had a history of imprisonment and who had a sufficiently long sentence to be able to make such comparisons). The fundamental change was that today's power is hidden from the prisoners – they cannot see it, have no access to anyone except for the lower-ranking officers, who only act as communicators of decisions that are made “up top”. This means that even if they wanted to, the prisoners have no one to protest against, nor will any subculture of collective open rebellion be accepted under these conditions (a little further on, the author will state straightforwardly that power has now been designed to individualize prisoners and easily rule them; Crewe 2007, p. 273). The prisoners at Wellingborough seem to be “well-behaved”, but, as the author continues to write, they do not have to be like that. Simply, the new situation forces much more subtle reactions, sometimes invisible at first glance. Crewe, recalling the typologies of adaptation quoted in this paper (Merton, Goffman, Cohen and Taylor, King and Elliot), states that none of them works in the changed conditions and proposes his own:

1. Committed compliance – the prisoners consider themselves guilty and prison is seen a morally adequate response to the act they committed. Through participation in numerous rehabilitation programs, therapies, over time they take on specific psychological jargon which they use when talking about their improvement. But he insists that they “do it all for themselves, not for educators”. Crewe believes that this type of prisoner is “dragged into the system” rather than intimidated by the system – such convicts consider themselves to be agents of power rather than subjects. The enthusiasm to work on oneself is further enhanced by the instrumental benefits that the system “pays out” to those who fulfill the tasks imposed by it. These prisoners often take advantage of this, but not because they are liars – they also see the ineffectiveness of the system and the apparent social rehabilitation efforts, and their goal is genuine self-improvement rather than blind obedience to the system.
2. Fatalistic or instrumental compliance – the prisoner agrees with the system, but for reasons that are rather fatalistic – which entail instrumental – rather than normative. Such prisoners consider the power in the system to be routine-based, with which the fight is doomed to fail from the get-go; this attitude is characterized by retreat. For pragmatic reasons, they accept the fact

that those fulfilling the requirements of the system enjoy certain concessions and privileges. However, unlike the previous type of adaptation, they do not legitimize this system. He thinks that the only way of gaining some privileges is to follow the rules, show courtesy and be willing to make a change. But they do it for noble reasons – they want to leave the prison faster to be close to their wives and children. They will not shy away from open rebellion, but only as a last resort. The older prisoners adopting this tactic are aware of the inefficiency, the frequent lack of logic of the prison system, but the years of calculations they made show that it pays off. The blame for this is placed on the system in the senior prison officers, they try to live in peace with those lower down the hierarchy, because although their observations lead to the conclusion that little depends on them, they do pass the information to the higher-ups.

3. Detached compliance – this category includes mainly alcohol and drug addicts who are trying to rebuild their life regardless of the system and its incentives. However, they have little faith in their abilities and their willpower not to give in to the temptations on the outside. Therefore, they treat their stay in prison as a rest and a natural barrier preventing them from returning to the addiction, they are not in a hurry to leave prison. They reject the objectives and means employed by the institution, but officers like them for their obedience and passivity. However, by rejecting the system, and wanting nothing from it results in no control over them. They rely on each other, without the help of both the prison and the outside world.
4. Strategic compliance and manipulation – i.e. manifestations of compliance that conceal opposing goals and resistance (in most cases – individual). Prisoners in this category do not see the offer of the penitentiary institution as a fair exchange – meeting the requirements of the system in exchange for benefits. Their normative commitment to the objectives of the prison is negligible, they are hostile to it at all levels, to its staff and to the rules in general. They assume that the motives of the institution are punitive or related to its own interest. Cheating the prison and getting released as soon as possible – without normative permission – is seen as a significant victory. However, in assessing that the system cannot be ignored or defeated, they adopt an institutional scenario of active obedience to achieve personal rather than systemic goals. They know perfectly well what the officers want to hear and they use it to manipulate them. They receive gratifications from the system, without giving any real commitment and improvement in return. Because of this, the prisoners do not do more than this when they want to express their resistance. It is usually expressed by a tone of almost mock courtesy which is a “protective shell” of submission to official discourse and legal authority. Such presentations mask behind-the-scenes resistance in various forms, including illegal activities of anti-institutional importance (e.g. drug trafficking,

stealing from kitchens and workshops) and active subversion (e.g. triggering fire alarms) (Crewe 2007, pp. 265–272).

In his later book (see 2012) Crewe slightly modified the above typology. Ranking prisoners from the most conformist to the least conformist, he calls these first group *enthusiasts* – they have accepted the legitimacy of the institution and see imprisonment as an opportunity for self-improvement and change. The *pragmatists* believe that there is no point in fighting the system, so they keep their heads low and want to do their time in peace. *The stoics* have a very similar view and, like many lifers approaching the end of their sentence, they simply want to “do their time”. The *retreatists* are very submissive and show fatalistic attitudes. The *players* internally reject institutional objectives, but knowing that the system is unbeatable, they externally comply with them (Behan 2013, p. 221).

## Conclusions

As Walker writes (1995, p. 100), prison sociologists have noted that prisoners find ways to adapt to the prison environment in a conscious or subconscious manner, and that these methods vary depending on the prisoner’s personality and criminal past. This was strongly emphasized by John Irwin and Donald Cressey (1962): often the prisoners’ behavior does not necessarily stem from prison deprivation but rather from the ideas, beliefs and lifestyle they led on the outside (Sykes). This brings us to a point where the dispute over why a prisoner adapts in a certain manner is led by two opposing theories: transmission and deprivation. They have been described in detail elsewhere (McManimon 2005, pp. 223–226), while the dispute they generate seems artificial at best— as Welch notes (1996, p. 152), inmates bring into the prison the lifestyles formed on the outside, and the prison restrictions reinforce them.

This does not mean that both theories could not inspire the creators of particular typologies: it can be said that Goffman’s concept was shaped under the influence of the theory of deprivation, and the constructs of Irwin, Cohen and Taylor as well as King and Elliot clearly bear signs of the influence of transmission theory. This has consequences: in Goffman’s concept prisoners are rather passive members of a total institution, he only considers the manner in which they adapt to the institutional conditions of the “mortification” process, while the prisoners in such an institution bring with them to the prison the strategies that enable them to cope with their life in incarceration and that are not overpowered by the “mortification” process (Smith 1996, p. 59).

As Walker claims, if the ways of adaptation contribute to stress reduction, they can be described as “coping strategies”. It follows that not every manner of adaptation is a sign of coping with the prison environment. As Walker comments, some strategies are more desirable than others, from the point of view of prison

“management”, as well as from the point of view of the physical and mental health of the prisoner. However, we must bear one thing in mind here: however desirable this strategy may be, both on the part of the prison staff and the prisoner, some of them are out of reach of many of them because of a lack of skills and personality traits. Attempts to force a prisoner to adopt in the desired manner may therefore prove unsuccessful (Walker 1995, p. 101). But that does not mean you do not make such attempts. Both the prisoners and the prison staff have their “favorite” types of adaptations, which, for example, may be more useful for the purposes of the administration than the prisoner, the other way around or serve both the administration and the prisoner, but do not serve the public interest at all (for all possible combinations, see Miszewski 2016, p. 529). This is quite a complex issue, which kind of adaptation could be deemed as “good” and which as “bad”, as the question immediately arises: for whom? from whose point of view?

Some concepts and typologies seem to be universal (e.g. those by Goffman or Irwin), others seem to be strongly limited to space and time (e.g. those by Clemmer, King and Elliot or Crewe). It should be borne in mind when choosing a tool for one’s own research.

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