




Emotions and agency in prison research

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Abstract

The emotionality of prison research has received much justified attention in recent years. However, this aspect of undertaking qualitative research is often not considered by early career researchers until they are confronted with the impact of both researching emotionally laden subjects and employing their emotional agency as the researcher. Emerging from this, the authors argue for the development of a methodology that conceives researchers as emotional agents. This methodology incorporates harnessing emotional experiences as a tool for data collection. In this way, researchers are encouraged and trained to shift from passive to active emotional agents. Thus, far from inhibiting the research, the inherent emotionality of conducting research enhances its rigour, integrity and validity. Emotionality is intrinsic to conducting research in the prison milieu. As such, it warrants constructive employment and integration into existing research methodologies. This article draws on the authors' respective experiences conducting mixed methods research in prison settings. The authors' research methodologies incorporated emotional reflexivity as a core constituent throughout their data collection, analysis and the writing of their doctoral studies. The argument will be illustrated by detailing experiences of emotional charge during the fieldwork. To reflect this, the authors advocate for the emergence of an integrative methodology. The development of such a methodology would be of value to prison researchers but particularly to novice and/or doctoral researchers. Furthermore, it would be similarly applicable to researchers throughout the field of criminal justice and beyond.

Keywords

Emotions, reflexivity, emotionality in methodology, prison research

Introduction

Prisons are emotionally laden environments. As prison researchers, we are taught to question the impacts of undertaking research in a closed environment where the captive population is one of the most marginalised groups in society. Yet, it seems that we are not ordinarily taught how to engage with the emotional impacts of undertaking research in such an emotionally fraught environment. Criminology as a discipline has been accused of lacking humanity (Crank and King, 2007; Dupont, 2008; Wozniak, 2008). Academic debate over the last decade has increasingly focussed on the emotionality of undertaking research in prison, particularly since Jewkes' (2012) called for criminologists, and specifically prison researchers, to consider the subject of emotion from an autobiographical perspective that would allow a deeper insight into the research.

Since Liebling (1999) and Jewkes (2012) appealed for researchers to engage with emotions as a substantive issue in their writing, there has been an increase in the number of prison academics engaging with emotionality in their research. Yet still, for most novice prison researchers or early career

researchers (ECRs), the emotional aspect of undertaking research only reveals the full extent of its role, and potential toll, when they are confronted with researching emotionally charged subjects, and when employing their own emotional agency as the researcher. While there is now a burgeoning literature on being an emotionally reflexive researcher, prison researchers are not routinely taught how to be a reflexive researcher or how to harness the emotionality of prison research.

The authors were confronted with this reality when undertaking research in prison during their doctoral studies. Both authors had previously experienced the emotionality that is inherent in working with vulnerable groups of people in various forms of confinement. Therefore, the authors had considered the potential emotionality of their research prior to

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embarking on the research process which inspired the ideas presented in this article. Expanding upon previous academic discussions, the authors advocate for the emergence of an integrative methodology that conceives researchers as emotional agents. This methodology incorporates harnessing emotional experiences as a tool for data collection. In this way, researchers are encouraged and trained to shift from passive to active emotional agents, prior to stepping foot in the prison environment.

Before ever entering a prison, researchers are ordinarily concerned with the delicate ethical issues that arise in a prison context; ontological and epistemological perspectives, negotiating access to the prison, the collection of their data, ensuring confidentiality (where possible) and methods of data analysis. This all forms part of the methodological process for prison researchers. Researchers are usually trained in this methodological process, although it is submitted that this will be dependent on the specific discipline from which they come. Prison scholarship has considered the emotionality of the prison environment generally (Liebling, 2004 assisted by Arnold; Sparks, 2002) and more recently, how emotions can be managed during the research process (Crewe, 2014; Jewkes, 2012; Liebling, 2014; Reiter, 2014). Sloan and Wright (2015) maintain that in order to become a prison researcher, support is required to enable researchers to deal with their emotions during the research process.

We develop that view, arguing that support is required before you enter the prison site; that researchers should be trained to anticipate the emotionality of, and the emotional labour (Hochschild, 1983) required, for their research. Much like a researcher is instructed on the ethical aspects of undertaking prison research and analytical methods, our argument envisages emotional agency being incorporated in the research methodology. In so doing, researchers are encouraged to become active emotional agents throughout the research process. Much of the extant literature discusses emotionality in the context of ethnographic research but it is also of importance in any qualitative research (Liebling, 1999).

This article first sets out to clarify our understanding of how prison researchers may employ agency when confronted with the emotionality of undertaking their research. The discussion then moves to consider how emotions have impacted and contributed to prison scholarship thus far. Theories on emotional labour and emotional work are to the foreground of this analysis. A brief synopsis of the authors' pathways to prison research and research topics are then provided. Two vignettes from the author's respective doctoral research studies are included to illustrate the significance of engaging with the emotionality of the research which leads to ensuing discussion. The authors conclude with an appeal for prison researchers, particularly PhD students, to embrace and employ emotional agency as part of their methodological approach including robust support structures.

Employing agency in the context of emotions

For the purposes of this article, we will outline our understanding of employing emotional agency as it relates to prison research. Agency is intrinsic to humans. How we employ agency in its diverse forms is complex and the subject of much academic attention (Ritzer and Jeffrey, 2017). Researchers involved in prison research are engaging in emotional labour and emotion work against the backdrop of a highly emotionally charged environment. Agency can be engaged in diverse ways and to different extents. Emotional labour and emotion work are discussed further in this article but for now, we are considering how prison researchers employ agency in the context of the emotionality of prison research.

Our approach envisages that researchers are equipped to prepare for, engage with and respond to the inherent emotionality of undertaking prison research. Doctoral candidates and ECRs are professional academics and, therefore, they are expected to minimise any risk of harm to research participants or research sites. Ensuring researchers are prepared to enter the research environment will assist in minimising potential harm to participants and sites.

Employing emotional agency requires one to first acknowledge that emotionality is a legitimate part of the research process and data. A dichotomy is presented when researching the criminal justice system and engaging with the emotionality of the research in such environments, as alluded to in the introduction. However, researchers involved in exploring social phenomena ought to exercise emotional literacy (Knight, 2014). It is inevitable, and a natural human response, that if you undertake research that involves human interaction, the researcher will be presented with the emotionality of the research subject (Clarke et al., 2015). To be emotionally literate requires the researcher to have emotional intelligence, which in turn, requires managing, thinking and reflecting on feelings (Knight, 2014). Therefore, how they impacted you and impacted your research must be considered. The process of reflexivity is tightly bound up in the definition of emotional intelligence. It might be expected that (prison) researchers are emotionally intelligent to begin with, but while considering the application of emotional literacy in probation work, Knight (2014) argues that the employment of emotional intelligence is not routine for everyone. She deems that it should be acknowledged as a soft skill (Knight, 2014). Such soft skills are practised, honed and developed by prison researchers over time and should contribute to the methodological approach of a prison researcher. Engaging with the potential emotionality of the research at the outset may also moderate some of the ethical considerations present in prison research.

Slaby and Wu (2014) assert that to be emotional is to be engaging. Once in the research field, engaging and employing one's agency in an emotional context requires the researcher

to have the ability to be emotional and to reflect on their emotions throughout the research process. This necessitates more than being a passive spectator who can rationalise a decision. Emotions can be viewed as more than mere mental states and as Slaby and Wu (2014) posit, 'more as temporally extended episodes involving a person's entire comportment in and toward the world' (p. 213). This position envisages the researcher acknowledging that experiencing emotions is not a passive experience, but that it persists over time, even after the research experience has finished. Upon leaving the field, the researcher must analyse the data, and perhaps, re-submerge themselves in the emotionality of the research. Emotions experienced while collecting data may resurface and be impactful, or the emotionality of the research may cause the researcher to reflect further on their findings (Slaby and Wu, 2014). Critically self-aware researchers will present their findings in the context of how the emotionality of their research impacted the research process and data.

From our experience, we advocate that being an actively engaged emotional researcher from the outset of the research process equips the researcher to be more adept to deal with the emotionality of undertaking prison research.

Emotions in prison scholarship

The analysis of emotions in prison literature

The prison is an emotional environment but must be conceived of, and analysed as, an emotional arena or field (Bourdieu, 1993). Emotions have come to prominence in the analysis of prisons in recent years. The specific focus on emotions in prisons or emotions featuring as a key component of the research has illuminated the previously underexplored feature of prison life and work.

The primacy of emotion in prison life is perhaps brought into sharpest relief in the nature of the normative forms of 'impression management' (Goffman, 1959) integrated into prisoners' and prison officers' cultures. The cultures in which we are immersed greatly influence our identities and these are inexorably linked to the emotional climate of the prison(s) (Liebling, 2013; Tracy, 2004). To account for the experience of prison researchers, the experiences of prison staff are particularly pertinent as, despite obviously disparate roles, their work demands considerable emotional labour and emotion work (Crawley, 2004b; Hochschild, 1983). For prison staff, the management of emotions and coping skills that are features of their jail craft constitute emotional labour (Hochschild, 1983; Nylander et al., 2011).

Based on her study of airline staff, Hochschild (1983) defines emotional labour as 'the management of feelings to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display' to be 'sold for a wage' (p. 7). According to Hochschild (1983), 'this labour requires one to induce or suppress emotions in order to sustain the outward countenance that produces the proper state of mind in others' (p. 7). Hochschild (1983) classifies 'surface

acting' as employees' feigning of emotions that they do not genuinely feel while suppressing the felt emotion to conform to 'feeling rules'. 'Deep acting' accounts for the expression of felt emotions roused as professionally required (Hochschild, 1983). Ashforth and Humphrey (1993) argue that even the display of 'genuine and spontaneous' (p. 94) emotions constitutes work in the form of emotional labour. Hochschild (1983) asserts that the distinct characteristic of jobs that require emotional labour is that 'they allow the employer, through training and supervision, to exercise a degree of control over the emotional activities of employees' (p. 147).

Emotional labour and emotion work (Hochschild, 1983) are essential constructive concepts for this article as prison researchers are inevitably, and unavoidably, engaged in these forms of emotional activities in their fieldwork. The original conceptualisation of emotional labour (exchanged for a wage) was distinct from emotion work (dealing with other people's emotions, colleagues for instance) despite the words often being used interchangeably in the literature. Furthermore, the later developments and expansion of the concepts are significant in their own right (Humphrey et al., 2015; Kruml and Geddes, 2000; Steinberg and Figart, 1999; Ward and McMurray, 2015; Wharton, 2009). However, for the purposes of this article, we build from the premise that engaging with, and the performance of diverse and complex forms of emotionality constitute both emotional labour and emotion work.

Crawley (2004a) and Nylander et al (2011), respectively, detail the internal prison 'feeling rules' about the kinds of emotions that are appropriate for prison officers to express at work. They focus on day-to-day activities and conclude that prison work demands a 'performative attitude' from prison officers (Crawley, 2004b: 414). Crawley (2004a) utilises Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical analogies of 'front-stage' and 'back-stage' to illustrate how individuals perform impression management, and is particularly appropriate in describing how prison officers must carefully choreograph their actions and emotions in their occupational environment. Crawley (2004b) invokes Hochschild's (1983) 'feeling rules' as governing this environment in the form of what Farkas (1997) called, an internalised 'normative code'. Though contested, negotiated and perpetuated in nuanced ways, they remain potent influencers of emotional significations. The toll and impact of emotions on prison staff are examined through the quantitative measures of stress or burnout against diverse variables in a growing body of quantitative literature (Dowden and Tellier, 2004; Finney et al., 2013; Griffin et al., 2010) while qualitative studies explored the lived experiences such as desensitisation, spill-over to family life, addictions and emotional dissonance (Arnold, 2005; Crawley, 2004a; Liebling, 2008; Nylander et al., 2011; Weinrath, 2017).

In the years since Hochschild's original work, the concepts relating to the management of emotions have developed by expansion to address the multifaceted nature of

emotions in the lived experience of occupational or organisation settings. Bolton (2000, 2004) studied employees across the National Health Service in the United Kingdom. Bolton's (2004) typology contains the following four categories of emotion management: pecuniary (instrumentally governed by commercial feeling rules), prescriptive (motivated by status and stems from professional and organisational feeling rules), presentational (managing emotion appropriately to conform to the accepted organisational conventions of feeling) and philanthropic (offering a sincere performance of emotion as a gift). Bolton seeks to balance emotion management governed by organisational priorities and feeling rules that are guided by informal expectations shared among peers.

Bolton highlights that organisational priorities are not the exclusive controller of emotion management as people 'draw on different sets of feeling rules according to context and their individual motivations' (Bolton and Boyd, 2003: 291). Bolton argues that people's types of emotion management are not rigid but are flexible and can change over time and context. Barry (2017, 2019) employs the concept of emotional labour while integrating Bolton's (2004) work on emotion management in organisations in the analysis of prison officers' experience of deaths in custody.

Prisoners' regulation of their emotions represents fertile ground for analysis (Laws and Crewe, 2016). It is linked to diverse but key aspects of prison life. When suppressed, emotions may resurface as violence (Edgar et al., 2003; Laws, 2019). When shared, emotions may foster deep relationships (Fassin, 2016). The conception of the prison as an emotional landscape is an important consideration in capturing the diversity and distribution of emotions in different prisons and within different zones of the prison (Crewe et al., 2014b).

Emotions are gendered and performative in prison. Prisoners and officers must wear their respective 'masks' or maintain 'fronts' (Crawley, 2004b; Crewe, 2009). Men and women 'do gender' (West and Zimmerman, 1987) in prison contexts by interpreting themselves and others as possessors of appropriate masculinity or femininity (Connell, 1987; Goffman, 1977; Zimmer, 1987). Organisations and institutions are gendered. Britton (2003) argues using the theory of gendered organisations that 'we should see organisations not as neutral organisms infected by the germs of workers' gender identities but as sites in which these attributes are present in pre-existing assumptions and constructed through ongoing practice' (p. 5). The prison must be viewed as an extreme example of a gendered organisation in which gender is not exclusively imported with staff or prisoners, but is already omnipresent and an integral part of organisational structures and cultures therein (Britton, 2003; Martin and Jurik, 1996; Tait, 2008). Masculinities, 'hegemonic' (Connell, 1995) or other forms are infused with emotionality that shaped the lives of prisoners and staff (Evans and Wallace, 2008; Messerschmidt, 2001; Sabo, 2001; Sim, 1994; Tracy, 2004, 2005).

Having discussed the literature featuring emotions in prison, it is important to note that while they are often not the focal point of prison scholarship, emotions have always featured to greater or lesser extents. The centrality of emotion in society is, like many other features, accentuated in prison environments. The inference being that emotions are omnipresent even if perceptible in latent forms. This is true of prison scholarship where emotions are not the primary focus. This is evident in the implicit emotionality of diverse prisoner experiences and adaptations from the 'depth, weight and tightness' (Crewe, 2011a; Crewe et al., 2014a) of imprisonment to the identification of strategies of coping with time and solitude of confinement in diverse carceral contexts (King, 1999; O'Donnell, 2014; Rhodes, 2004). The importance of emotionality in staff-prisoner relations (Crewe, 2011b; Crewe et al., 2015; Liebling et al., 2011) is profound and relates to the centrality of 'mind games' (McDermott and King, 1988) in prison life. Indeed, one cannot fully comprehend Sykes' (1958) seminal definitions of the 'pains of imprisonment' without sensing the resonance of the inherent emotionality invoked by these deprivations. The emotionality prison staff experience not precluded to within prison walls, as is apparent in accounts of spill-over into family life, and the sense of stigmatisation relating to prison work (Garrhy, 2019; Lambert et al., 2006; Tracy and Scott, 2007).

Emotionality and the positionality of the prison researcher

The deployment of emotional agency is central to conducting prison research but in the extant literature it is not conceived as part of the methodology, rather it is explored in the context of the positionality of the researcher and 'managing' emotions in the research field (Crewe, 2014; Drake and Harvey, 2014; Jewkes, 2012; Sloan and Wright, 2015).

In much of the recent scholarship on prisons, an account of the researcher's positionality is provided (Ayete-Nyampong, 2015; Carr, 2015). It is now acknowledged that the point of view from which the researcher observes the research, and the researcher's biography, have a bearing on the research (Damsa and Ugelvik, 2017; Jewkes, 2012). This is a relatively new dimension to prison research; as recently as 2009, Crewe (2009) posited that 'my identity was not what the study was about' (p. 488) and, therefore, he did not explore the issue in any substantive detail. In a subsequent article, while responding to Jewkes' (2012) call for prison researchers to engage with the emotionality of undertaking prison research, Crewe (2014) reformulated his thinking. He persuasively argues that prison research is enhanced by exploring the author's positionality and, therefore, inherently, their emotions. The positionality of the researcher is undeniably related to the emotionality of conducting prison research. The researcher is 'the research instrument par excellence' (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007: 17);¹ to obfuscate the researcher from qualitative research accounts is akin to severing a link in the research

chain. The researcher, while not claiming to be objective, has emotionally invested in the research, and the research participants, which allows the researcher to be more fully integrated into their research. Rowe (2014) contends that this reflexive exercise allows the researcher to explore how their presence impacts on the prison, providing a more profound insight into the particular phenomenon being explored.

Within the last decade, prison researchers have explored how being emotionally reflexive has enhanced their understanding and analysis of the prison environment (Crewe, 2014; Jewkes, 2012; Sloan and Drake, 2013; Yuen, 2011). Reflexivity requires of the researcher an introspective gaze; they must consider why they undertook the research, the views of the researcher, the emotionality of undertaking prison research and their biography. Engaging in reflexive practice forces researchers to engage with the emotionality of their research throughout both collection and analysis of data. As part of this process, researchers are encouraged to keep a reflexive journal to document their experiences, and critically reflect on how the research may impact their emotions (both from a negative and positive perspective) and how, in turn, they are influencing the research (Sloan and Wright, 2015; Yuen, 2011).

Embracing the emotionality of the research process, and the researcher's particular experiences, allows researchers to harness their emotions, thereby contributing to their understanding of their self and the research. Concealing one's emotions when researching an emotionally laden environment like a prison can lead to what Yuen (2011) refers to as 'emotional paralysis' (p. 81). For Yuen (2011), central to overcoming her emotional paralysis was her engagement with reflective practices through the maintenance of a reflexive journal. Yuen also describes how she dealt with her emotions, through engaging with other mediums of communication such as film and music. Finding a 'safe space' as Yuen (2011) refers to it, allowed her the freedom to share how she was feeling with others. This idea of a 'safe space' corresponds to Korczynski's (2003) 'communities of coping'. Engaging in prison research is emotionally laborious (Davies and Spencer, 2010; Dickson-Swift et al., 2001). Research from other disciplines has shown that in workplaces where emotional labour has a collective nature, communities of coping exist to help staff deal with the emotionality of their jobs (Korczynski, 2003).

Inherent in the preceding discussion is the level of impression management (Goffman, 1959) required of a prison researcher. The prison researcher is chameleon-like (Drake and Harvey, 2014), constantly having to negotiate the 'tight-rope line' between prisoners, management and staff (Ugelvik, 2014). As referred to in the preceding section, impression management (Goffman, 1959) is a tacit part of undertaking prison research. A conversation discussing policy with prison management may require a different tone and disposition than discussing experiences of imprisonment with prisoners. Accounts provided by prison researchers have revealed how

the researcher was perceived by prisoners and staff, often as a psychologist or undergraduate student (Sloan and Wright, 2015) or how the researcher presented themselves, initially as an unassuming 'student' who was naïve about the vagaries of the social world of the prison, before emerging into a professional, competent researcher's role (Sloan and Wright, 2015). This chameleon-like ability to engage with, and respond to, the demands placed on you by your surroundings requires an emotional investment by the researcher, ensuring that the researcher can converse with, and empathise with, people with differing expectations of the researcher, while all the time ensuring that the researcher's interactions are not contrived. Applying Goffman's (1959) theory on impression management, Drake and Harvey (2014) describe this aspect of the prison researcher's role as employing 'virtual identities'.

Discussion

Routes to recognising the emotionality of prison research and engaging our emotional agency

It is certainly not our intention to assert that we were fully prepared for the emotionality of prison research and the role of emotional agency within it. Rather, we argue for the co-ordination of the growing literature and wealth of knowledge in this area to develop a systemic approach to integrate these into prison research methodologies. It would be constructive to contextualise the divergent and convergent tributaries to our shared pathway to engage with the conceptualisation of the researcher as an active emotional agent in the field. This will be prefaced by briefly detailing our respective research projects upon which the data discussed in this article are drawn.

Aoife's contributions are based on the research undertaken for her doctoral study. Her doctoral study examined the operation of the prison discipline system in Ireland and also explored whether the discipline system operated differently in male and female prisons. The research highlighted the centrality of staff-prisoner relationships in the maintenance of order in prison, particularly with regard to the operation of internal procedures and prisoners' perceptions of whether the procedure is fairly applied (Watters, 2017).

The research was primarily qualitative and took place in the following four prisons: the Dóchas Centre and Limerick Female Prison (the only two female prisons in Ireland) and the corresponding male prisons, Mountjoy Prison and Limerick Male Prison. All four prisons are closed, medium security prisons. Thirty-nine interviews took place with prisoners and 17 staff engaged in interviews. Approximately, 5 full days of observation were undertaken in each prison. Thus, this element of the study could certainly not be considered 'ethnography proper' (Drake et al., 2015a: 3) and is more accurately described as a qualitative study comprising primarily of interviews with some periods of participant observation. Put simply, when the interviews were taking place a lot of 'hanging

about' (Bryman, 2015) talking to officers and prisoners occurred, while waiting for prisoners to be unlocked or waiting for staff and so on. In essence, time was clocked up, which is an important requirement of doing observation in prisons (Sparks et al., 1996). The interviews and observation took place over a period of 8 months. Therefore, observation was undertaken throughout this time, which allowed the collation of impressions over this phase. Limited quantitative data were also collated and provided by the Irish Prison Service on the operation of the discipline system.

Joe's research was also a doctoral study examining prison officers' occupational cultures and identities. It explored how officers make sense of their experiences and socially construct a meaningful occupational world. The study illuminates the nature of prison officers' occupational cultures as internalised prisms through which officers perceive their world and externalised frameworks within which officers perform (Garrihy, 2019).

The study employed mixed methods with a strong ethnographic core. It consisted of 14 months of rigorous ethnographic fieldwork in 4 prisons that comprised the Mountjoy Prison Campus. Two of these prisons, Mountjoy Men's Prison and the Dóchas Centre were also research sites in Aoife's study. Mountjoy West Prison was a medium security closed prison. The Training Unit was a semi-open, low security prison for males aged 18 years and with a capacity for 96 prisoners during the period of the study (Irish Prison Service, 2017). This included 76 in-depth semi-structured interviews with officers of all grades from officer grade through to governor. The qualitative data were complemented by quantitative data from a survey distributed throughout the Irish prison estate (n=544).

We will now outline our divergent and convergent paths that led us to engage with the emotionality of prison research. We both had previous experience in challenging and intense environments in professional capacities. Prior to starting the doctoral research, Aoife had extensive experience of the Irish prison system having undertaken research in, and inspections of, prisons in roles with the Office of the Inspector of Prisons in Ireland. At the commencement of the fieldwork, Joe had over 9 years' experience working as a Social Care Worker with persons with intellectual disabilities. Most of this time was spent in residential settings caring for service users who present behaviours that challenge and where violence, as well as the threat of violence, was commonplace. These experiences in such environments had divergent influences on our respective preparations for our research. It is reasonable to assert that we both felt we would be better prepared than many graduate students embarking on prison research as the initial visceral sensory explosion upon entering a prison may be mitigated to some extent.

There are specific and significant differences in these pre-research experiences in challenging environments too. Joe was embarking on a long-term study comprising a lengthy ethnographic component without much previous exposure to prisons in person. Joe had conducted a small Master's

research project with males who had been in prison, but he had not spent much time inside a prison. His experience with challenging behaviour was anticipated to be beneficial in terms of managing the emotionality of the prison atmosphere. Aoife was familiar with the prison environment, engaging with prisoners and staff and had experience of being exposed to the more distressing aspects of prison life. Prior to embarking on her doctoral research, Aoife felt that her previous work with the Inspector of Prisons would stand her in good stead to conduct her research and 'handle' herself.

Notwithstanding this, Aoife was concerned that her experience with the Inspector of Prisons may cause some challenges in how she was perceived by prisoners but more so, officers. In Ireland, there was considerable discord and ill-sentiment towards the Inspector of Prisons stemming principally from officers' perspective that oversight and inspectorate reports on prison are misrepresentative and unduly negative. Aoife's sense of preparedness for the emotionality and demands of emotional agency in the research ahead may indeed have increased their impact as will be discussed in the next section.

With Joe's study examining prison officers' occupational cultures and identities, a core focus of the research was emotions (Crawley, 2004b; Liebling, 2013; Nylander et al., 2011; Tracy, 2004). The prolonged process of negotiating access presented considerable challenges regarding the emotional labour required of prison researchers prior to the commencement of the fieldwork proper. Gaining access and engaging with gatekeepers is problematic for many prison researchers (Beyens et al., 2013; Drake et al., 2015b; Sloan and Wright, 2015). This was a challenge that both researchers were to overcome. The 16 months that Joe spent preparing to enter the field while seeking access to the prisons generated a significant range of emotional responses and demanded that he actively engage his emotional agency in various circumstances. The combination of researching the literature on prison officers' emotions, prison emotions in general and the literature on emotions more broadly, with the emotions encountered in gaining access invoked a significant interest in the role of emotions in prison research (Bosworth, 2005). During this time, it became evident that in the prison research methods literature, emotion was not a central focus beyond the examples discussed in the previous section.

Extreme emotionality and emotional agency

Liebling (1999), who has spent much of her career researching the prison milieu cautioned that even the most experienced prison researchers are not immune to the 'pains' and 'turbulence' of researching prisons. As referred to previously, the emotionality of undertaking prison research is situated on a broad spectrum of emotions, from the mundane feelings of ambivalence to what might be happening around you, to the small but ordinary moments in prison life that have such an enormous impact on a prisoner's happiness, to

the most extreme violations and abuses of rights. During Aoife's time with the Inspector of Prisons, she was accustomed to confronting and engaging with the many emotions experienced by a researcher in prison. A modification required of her positionality during her doctoral studies' research was the transition from being part of a team to a sole doctoral researcher, or a 'lone wolf' (Watters, 2017).

While it is acknowledged that undertaking research in prisons is emotionally demanding ordinarily, Aoife experienced the women's interviews as particularly traumatic, which reflects the elevated levels of trauma that women suffer prior to entering prison (Bloom et al., 2003; Corston, 2007; Segrave and Carlton, 2011). During their interviews, and while Aoife was 'hanging around' (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007) in the women's prisons, the women talked about missing their families, and particularly their children, the loss of their fertility while imprisoned, the abuse they suffered at the hands of family members, chronic illness, death and the anguish they experienced during their imprisonment. Such distressing accounts can be burdensome for a researcher. However, the impact can be minimised should the researcher be prepared from the outset of the research to actively engage with the emotionality of the research. Accordingly, the researcher must ensure that they undertake critical reflection of its impact on the data collection and analysis.

The ability to embrace emotional agency can, however, be fragile when researchers lack appropriate supports. For Aoife, her ability to engage with the emotionality of the research process was tested during a specific period of research in the Dóchas Centre. Upon embarking on the research process in the Dóchas Centre, Aoife began to receive allegations of bullying by a few prisoners perpetrated on one prisoner. The allegations were reported intermittently over a period of months. Initially, the women alluded to bullying in general being a problem, indicating that women did not rely on other prisoners for support as they did not know who they could trust. Over time, it became apparent that one prisoner had been subjected to callous and cruel physical bullying. However, Aoife was not aware of the identities of the prisoners involved.

One day, towards the end of conducting interviews, Aoife received three voluntary corroborating reports, during in-depth interviews, from women of the bullying incidents. The women who were distressed while disclosing the extent of the abuse, both physical and emotional, corroborated that one prisoner had been subjected to vicious bullying over a period of months. From the women's accounts, Aoife was able to establish that she had interacted with all of the women involved, but bullying had not been disclosed as a concern in the prison by any of them, including the victim. While the particulars of the bullying incidents were being recounted, Aoife was conscious of what emotions she should portray to the women. She wanted to empathise with the women and acknowledge disgust at what she was hearing.

Indeed, she felt like crying when she heard how a woman who was so vulnerable and who should be safe in the custody of the State, had suffered at the hands of other women in a similar situation. These emotions had to be balanced with her outward portrayal as a compassionate professional who had to continue with the interview, should the prisoner wish to. A level of surface acting (Hochschild, 1983) was required to enable Aoife adhere to the appropriate 'feeling rules' to partially suppress her feelings of disbelief and disgust and allow the interview to continue in a professional manner. Aoife was also conscious of the impression that being overcome by the emotionality of the interviews may portray to prison officers. In their work, feeling rules dictated that certain feelings were not welcome frontstage (Crawley, 2004a, 2004b). If Aoife had shown the true extent of her feelings in that moment, she worried whether she would be regarded as lacking resilience, which is the underpinning characteristic ascribed to prison officers (Crawley, 2004a). Following these interviews, Aoife travelled home without having disclosed her experiences to prison staff or to fellow PhD students.

Aoife wrote in her journal the following day:

I am haunted by yesterday's accounts of the woman being bullied. She must've been terrified and felt so alone. I can't begin to imagine how lonely, afraid, terrified, she must've been. The other women must've felt so helpless and distressed. I am numb today. What is the point of prison? (Reflective Journal, 2015)

The day after the culmination of hearing these accounts, Aoife was unable to comprehend how she was feeling. The incongruence between the felt emotion and displayed emotion could not be processed by Aoife. She was 'emotionally paralysed' (Yuen, 2011). Aoife could not share how she was feeling, despite questions from concerned family members as to what had happened, due to Aoife's despondent disposition following the interviews. The visions of the prisoner being attacked would not stray from her mind. She was fearful for the prisoner who had never indicated that she had been bullied, but was, upon reflection, extremely vulnerable. Aoife was also anxious for the other women, who felt so powerless that they could not intervene until the woman had received life-lasting scarring. The futility of undertaking research when this was the lived reality for women was overwhelming. These feelings of being 'haunted' and emotionally paralysed are not unusual feelings in the prison site (Sloan and Wright, 2015; Yuen, 2011). Similarly, the feelings of guilt and pointlessness of the research endeavour when people are suffering is a familiar emotion for prison researchers (Sparks, 2002). Given the short period within which the specific details had been disclosed to Aoife (3 interviews in 1 day), and the level of emotional investment required to manage her impressions, Aoife was probably suffering from emotional overload, or 'emotional strain' (Nylander et al., 2011).

While Aoife had a history of undertaking research in prisons, what was unusual was how forcefully the events had impacted her and how she felt unprepared for those feelings. The incident was one of the cruellest that Aoife had encountered throughout her extensive experiences in prisons. Aoife had previously experienced extremely sad and shocking incidents with the Inspector of Prisons. On some occasions, Aoife engaged in surface acting, to ensure the professionalism of the statutory authority for whom she worked was upheld, but she had never experienced the emotionality of the work to subsist for such a protracted time. Upon self-reflection, it was clear that it was the 'lone wolf' aspect of being a doctoral researcher that had led to this unexpected powerlessness to confront the emotions which the episode provoked. In her previous experience, Aoife had been part of a team and there was always an opportunity to de-brief with colleagues. Following this distressing episode, Aoife met with her Supervisor to discuss the events. She subsequently discussed her feelings with fellow PhD students, in addition to ensuring she more regularly de-briefed with fellow PhD students over a coffee. It is important that Schools where students are undertaking research in prisons have a safe space (Yuen, 2011), where students feel comfortable expressing their feelings and experiences of undertaking prison research. Undertaking a Doctorate is very much a personal endeavour, so students need a 'community of coping' (Dickson-Swift et al., 2001; Korczynski, 2003) where the burden can be revealed and understood by people in similar situations. Having a 'community of coping' allows the researcher to de-brief and extricate the emotions, so that on self-reflection they can clarify their thinking and identify the impact the emotionality has on their research.

Upon her return to the prison, Aoife told a number of prison staff how she had felt after the interviews. Staff confirmed that such reactions were not uncommon for staff, and they explained how they learned to cope with it over time. They develop mechanisms to deal with it. Staff let off steam in the 'back-stage' (Goffman, 1959) of the prison, when they are not being observed by prisoners and it often consists of dealing with the issue by engaging in humour (Crawley, 2004a; Nylander et al., 2011). This 'community of coping' provides prison staff with the necessary emotional support, rather than turning to professional support that may exist in the wider prison service (Barry, 2017).

Having discussed it with staff, Aoife identified parallels between the emotional work prison officers do, and that of prison researchers. The surface acting, the importance of having outlets to de-stress and the importance of having someone to turn to in a similar position and even, perhaps, an element of emotional strain. This parallel with the emotional labour of prison work provided a new insight on the work of prison officers, which up until that point had been underexplored by Aoife and it led to a deeper understanding of what is expected of them in their role. As alluded to earlier, prior

to undertaking the research Aoife was concerned with whether staff would be willing to partake in interviews. Following this disclosure of emotionality to officers, and the engagement of emotion work with officers, it appeared that (certain) officers were more willing to engage with the research than previously. Perhaps, they no longer saw Aoife as 'just there for prisoners', which would have been a charge directed at the Office of the Inspector of Prisons. Or, by opening up to officers, and acknowledging that she understood the emotional labour aspect of their work, a degree of rapport (Lindlof and Taylor, 1995) had been generated and staff trusted Aoife to listen and appreciate their experiences of working in prison.

In addition to these immediate feelings of despair and guilt, there was a concern over the ethical implications of the disclosure and whether Aoife would have to breach confidentiality to disclose the information to prison management, as she feared for the safety of the victim. Upon receiving the last disclosure from a prisoner, Aoife enquired of the officers on the landing whether bullying was a cause for concern in the prison. The officers disclosed that there had recently been a serious issue with bullying and the main perpetrators had been disciplined by the Governor. Once Aoife was aware that management and staff knew about the particular allegations, she concluded that she was not required to breach confidentiality. Breaching confidentiality, in this instance, may have terminated the research in that prison. Aoife was also concerned about the impact that breaching confidentiality would have had for the women in prison, and the legacy it may have for researchers engaging in prison research in Ireland. At this point, in 2015, undertaking qualitative research in Irish prisons was still on relatively tenuous ground, as there was not a long history of the prison service (or its parent Department, the Department of Justice and Equality) being open to external scrutiny. Breaching confidentiality would also have caused tension in the relationship built between Aoife and the research participants. Ensuring research is ethically sound is an ongoing consideration for prison researchers. Resolving such issues may also contribute to the emotionality of the research, as in this scenario. Yet, this aspect of prison research is rarely considered in prison scholarship (Nielsen, 2010).

This example is at the more extreme end of the type of emotionality experienced in prison research. When considered in the context of methodological training, it is clear that the ethical issues involved were engaged by Aoife, yet she felt that she was in a precarious situation when deciding how she might proceed and actively engage with the emotionality of her research. Aoife had considered the probable emotionality and emotional labour of her research prior to undertaking it but had not anticipated the extent of the impact on her. Through active engagement with the emotionality of it, Aoife gained a deeper insight into the work of prison officers, and also the social world of the prison.

Persistent pervasive emotionality and emotional agency

The extreme scenario and its associated considerations bring emotions and emotionality into sharp relief. However, these are, thankfully, not as common as the multitude of everyday emotionally agentic interactions and decisions. It is these pervasive endeavours that our analysis will now shift.

A brief contextual note will frame the analysis that follows. Mountjoy West operated as an annex to the main Mountjoy Men's Prison. It is a Victorian era radial design with three spurs. The second and third tiers of one of the spurs were exclusively used for housing prisoners on protection. These prisoners were of various antagonistic groupings such that the prison authorities employed a colour coded system to identify and segregate several distinct groups. To be precise, these would not be accurately described as gangs in the sense of strict affiliation and other affectations. They were mostly divided by locality, debts, inconsistent feuding and loosely organised criminal associates. In this sense, many prisoners' affiliations were interchangeable according to relations breaking down, being reconciled or considered the lesser of various risk factors. This, in fact, made it significantly more onerous for prison authorities to distinguish between groups over time.

In this instance, a prisoner had been placed on protection and transferred from the main prison but was broadcasting to his peers that he sought the transfer to gain access to Mountjoy West with the expressed purpose of assaulting a specific prisoner at the behest of (and associated reward from) an unnamed leading criminal figure in the main prison. There had been two events in the preceding days that influenced the climate of the wing. First, a serious assault where a prisoner had been slashed. Second, an incident where a particular colour coded group gained access to the cell of a prisoner in another group causing considerable damage including urinating on the bed and personal effects. This wing was consistently a tense environment, but this increased this state still further.

As Joe spent time on the landing, he felt the atmosphere change as the afternoon progressed. This was experienced as a 'gut feeling' synthesised with prison experience thus far and occupational experience elsewhere but Joe was uncertain whether to disclose this to the officers. Joe was undoubtedly not 'an expert' in jail craft (Crewe et al., 2015) in the eyes of the officers and disclosure ran the risk of being perceived as anxious, lacking fortitude to 'handle' the wing. The boundaries of participation in the practice of participant observations combined with the potential for emotionality to '(mis)lead' the research were considered (Brewer, 2000).

The role of gender permeates innumerable aspects of prison life, work and cultures. The intersection of emotion and gender in prison is a profound illustration of the role of emotional agency in prison research. Researchers must work within gendered organisations comprised gendered institutions (Britton, 1997, 2003; Crewe, 2014; Piacentini, 2015).

Gender is socially constructed within the framework of society broadly and specific prison cultures (Crewe et al., 2017). The emotion work and feeling rules are interwoven with 'doing gender' roles prescribed to and developed by researchers (West and Zimmerman, 1987). Researchers must negotiate their field identities through currencies of emotional capital and embodied performances. It is not sufficient for researchers to accept, negotiate or resist their prescribed gender roles, they must incorporate them into their fieldwork identities and present themselves accordingly through convincing performances of impression management (Goffman, 1959). Researchers learn that their gender can be their greatest strength and their greatest weakness. In this sense, the prevalence of 'hegemonic masculinity' (Connell, 1995) and other forms of masculinities within the prison cultures demanded constant negotiation. As an academic researcher, Joe was not subject to these but perceived the sense that wholly rejecting such gendered identities risked undermining the rapport built and respect generated to date within this framework of possessing a level of resilience to be accepted on the wings (Crewe, 2014).

Recognising that 'emotions constitute data' (Liebling, 1999) and the importance of emotionality as an 'analytic tool' in our 'intellectual strategies' (Piacentini, 2015), Joe decided to act. He proffered to the officers that he felt something was 'off' which instigated a discussion in which all three of the officers asserted that they felt the same. The officers and Joe commenced analysing the scene within which they were immersed. What followed was real-time examination of the preceding day's events synthesised with the current status of emotional charge on the wing. The officers recounted the assaults, the associated threats of retaliation and the prisoner's assertion of being contracted to target another prisoner in order to determine a context from which to interpret the current state of affairs.

The prisoners' giddiness and heightened levels of noise combined with the detectable anxiousness to have tuckshop orders fulfilled were interpreted by the officers as a sign of preparation for potential and/or planned disorder, and the inevitable resulting prison lockdown. During this time, officers surveyed the wing and discovered a missing handle of a mop, while other small pieces of metal were absent from equipment which officers viewed as evidence of material to be fashioned into weapons.

That night, Joe recorded the following in his reflective fieldwork journal:

I feel the events of today illustrate how despite getting acclimatised to this environment, at times it can hit you just how conversely intense yet acceptable this climate is, and this was perhaps brought home to me when I was standing halfway down the landing on D3 and five prisoners came out of a cell, one fella just looked at me and half laughed saying 'you're in the middle of a war zone here' so I just replied 'it looks like it yeah' to which he laughed and moved down the wing. This was unnerving in some ways, yet a bizarrely comforting exchange in others.

Apart from all the rationalisations, it felt normal to be in the middle of it but at the same time, what the hell was I doing there? I don't know where that leaves me really or how I feel about that tonight. (Reflexive Journal, 1 August 2016)

Upon reflection that night, Joe was minded of his anxiety the night before his first day of fieldwork. The notes taken in his nascent reflective fieldwork journal at 00:43 hours, after failing to settle to sleep musing over his preparedness, his ability to adequately embody and perform his role as researcher, particularly in the form of initial 'surface acting' (Hochschild, 1983):

[Joe] I wonder what my facade will be like. It reminds me of that first day in India, in Paharganj² when I thought I was stone-faced and calm walking down the road until that sleazy travel agent guy came over and told me I looked 'culture shocked'. Either it was that obvious on my face or he was using it as a way to make me uneasy and then offer the comfort of an understanding voice in the 'mayhem'. Either way it clearly affected me, caught me unaware or stuck with me as I remember it all these years later for it to come to mind now. It doesn't exactly fill me with confidence for my impression management skills before I enter an environment where they have to be 'on' all the time. First meetings and my 'presence' there is crucially important. Could be unlucky or could catch a break. Can't sleep and it's only a few hours before tomorrow. Hope this isn't a sign of things to come. (Reflexive Journal, 10 November 2015)

As suggested by Jewkes (2012), this is likely not uncommon in neophyte prison researchers but it was a benchmark of Joe's reflexivity throughout the study. As previously discussed, Joe had been accustomed to actively employing impression management in intense environments as a Social Care Worker and had spent 2 years preparing for the fieldwork, including its emotionality. Yet, these are the feelings that are invoked by and in the prison environment.

Reflecting on the prisoner's 'war zone' comment, Joe considered the fact that he felt acclimatised to the environment, but the self-conscious thoughts noted on the eve of commencing the fieldwork of indulging in 'edgework' (Lyng, 2004) surfaced once more. Choosing to conduct fieldwork in potentially dangerous environments, researchers must reflect on their motivations for doing so and their choices while there (Ferrell and Hamm, 1998). The scenario proved insightful but absorbing while demonstrating the complexity of conducting this research.

Joe was attuned to the emotionality of the scenario. He actively employed his emotional agency through performative emotional labour to simultaneously 'manage' his (dis) comfort while engaging in practices benefitted his research. This was achieved through the ability to be emotional (emotionality) (Pahl, 2009). By reading the emotional charge of the scene and disclosing, experienced emotionality is combined with the employment of agency to demonstrate the 'appropriate' amount of emotional literacy (Knight, 2014) to the officers. This paved the way to further develop rapport,

respect and repute among those officers as being 'on the ball'. The exchange with the prisoner's fatalistically comic comment provoked both feelings of acceptance, discomfort and self-doubt, while performance of reciprocating with a quip suggesting shared resignation.

Ultimately, this scene amounted to one of innumerable scenes experienced throughout the fieldwork, but the nature of emotionality and the central role of the researcher's emotional agency proved vitally important to the research endeavour. Significantly, or perhaps specifically, as with many other such highly charged instances in prison, 'nothing happened'. There was no violent incident or disorder. Prison life, work and research continued but these countless instances within the 14-month ethnographic portion of the fieldwork presented significant demands on and opportunities for the employment of emotional agency. The emotionality in this instance proved central to the data collection process and the insight gained to the benefit of the research. Joe gained an incredibly revealing insight into a real-time examination of prison work and cultures as experienced by officers, unfolding within an emotionally charged atmosphere, while as a direct result of conscious and unconscious emotionality and engaging his emotional agency for research purposes.

Conclusion: toward the methodological integration of emotional agency

There has been historically, and until relatively recently, an under exploration of the role of emotions in criminological research literature and, less so, prison research literature. This, combined with a lack of appropriate training in universities, presents an arduous task for novice prison researchers. This is still more pronounced for those entering without a background in the basics of qualitative research methods (law being a common example). The increased attention currently being drawn to the emotional experience of the researcher partly instigated by Liebling (1999), Crewe (2014) and Jewkes (2014) among others, has been further explored in collected volumes such as the *Palgrave Handbook of Prison Ethnography* (Drake et al., 2015b) and broader focused collections such as the *Pains of Doing Criminological Research* (Beyens et al., 2013). Nevertheless, the 'learn by doing' approach pervades much of prison research. Consequently, the myriad of dilemmas, impacts and challenges of conducting fieldwork in the prison environment may prove still more onerous. In this context, the researcher may be ill-equipped for the required emotionality of prison research while being wholly ignorant of the role their emotional agency will play in their research.

Confronting and engaging with emotions is becoming a more central and welcome aspect to the prison researcher's approach. While we caution against overestimating the importance of researchers' emotions, it is proposed that they have a role to play as part of a structured qualitative

methodology. In any type of qualitative research, the researcher is the primary research instrument (Claes et al., 2013) and, therefore, the researcher's positionality must be present in the research. We support Crewe's (2014) contention that the research is not *about us* but equally we contend that the research is being conducted *by us*. Accordingly, we do not suggest that the emotions of the research process and the role of the researcher's emotional agency should be *the* central feature in the writing up of research. Our aim is not to propose the foregrounding of self-indulgent naval gazing or the retelling of prison researchers' 'war stories'. Nor is it to contend that an auto-ethnographic approach is essential or preferable to conducting and writing up prison research. We argue that it should certainly be given due consideration and be fully integrated into the methodological development and execution of the research.

If the research is constructivist in perspective, then it stands to reason that the data are socially constructed or co-constructed by the researchers and the participants. One's emotions are central to this. We consider our demeanour, our stance, our seating arrangements in interviews, our audio equipment, confidentiality protocols, potential distress in participants but rarely is the researcher's emotional role given sufficient consideration. When it is considered, it is often in maintaining one's equilibrium in these instances, or as a burden to be endured and test of resilience. This resilience in many cases is in the forms of post-fieldwork, end of the fieldwork day anxiety or de-stressing practices. These can be healthy or unhealthy, but our emotional agency is neglected, ignored or suppressed.

While we forego notions of cold objectivity in research generated knowledge, the importance of emotion in prison life and research and the potential to gain insight into that emotional realm is tangible through the emotionality of the research. This is vital in our continuous endeavours at 'scratching surfaces' (Geertz, 1986: 373). As Crewe (2014) and others rightly assert, emotionally driven researchers do not necessarily conduct good research. However, we contend that the emotionality of prison is indisputable and therefore, the researcher must navigate this emotional landscape. Constructively plotting one's course over this terrain requires high levels of emotional literacy (Knight, 2014) and emotional investment. Furthermore, the complex and unpredictable forms of emotional labour that characterise prison research present consistent but constant challenges for researchers. As we unavoidably engage in emotional agency, it should be channelled to the most beneficial ends for the research. Thus, we assert that due consideration of emotionality and emotional agency in methodological design will harness our inevitable emotional agency to gain that 'intimate knowledge' (Piacentini, 2015) of the field. This, of course, relies on researchers' integrity and compliance with best ethical practices.

In the light of the foregoing discussion, prison scholarship can no longer be accused of 'lacking humanity' (Dupont,

2008), yet we caution that we are still doing a disservice to prison researchers by not ensuring that the emotionality of undertaking prison research, and the systematic harnessing of those emotions, are confronted by researchers, before ever stepping foot in a prison. Prison researchers are not passive emotional agents but often engage in emotional agency in an ad hoc fashion. Upon reflection on our respective research, including through the writing of this article, we contend that prison researchers would be better prepared by a systematic approach to the emotionality of prison research from the very outset. This must reflect that prison researchers are engaging in emotional labour (Hochschild, 1983), which requires a significant investment from the researcher. It is incumbent upon Schools and Universities to play their role by seeking to ensure that researchers are equipped to undertake such emotionally demanding research in a closed environment. Allowing for discipline and research project specific variants, we argue that this can be achieved through developing appropriate training and supports based on an integrative methodology for prison researchers.

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Notes

1. While they are referring to ethnographers, we submit that this can be expanded to include researchers undertaking most qualitative research (see the other papers in this Special Issue).
2. Paharganj is a densely populated bustling area in New Delhi, India where much of the budget accommodations are located and, particularly the Main Bazaar, is characterised by intensive tourist engaging commerce and solicitation.

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