INTRODUCTION FROM THE SPECIAL ISSUE EDITORS

Feeling the Carceral: Emotions and the Affective Politics of Incarceration

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The 'emotional turn' has been felt throughout the social sciences, including in the fields of cultural studies (Ahmed, 2004), geography (Anderson & Smith, 2001; Bondi et al., 2005; Horton & Kraftl, 2009), law (Abrams, 2011; Bandes, 2009; Freiberg & Carson, 2010; Nussbaum, 2004, 2001; Welch, 1997), philosophy (Massumi, 1995, 2002; Protevi, 2009), political theory (Connolly, 2002; Elster, 1999; Kingston & Ferry, 2008), political and moral psychology (Alderman et al., 2010; Marcus, 2002; Westen, 2007), and sociology (Barbalet, 2011, 2001; Gould, 2009; Goodwin et al., 2001; Summers-Effler, 2010; Turner & Stets, 2005). Criminologists have largely taken up the call to consider emotions, which Karstedt (2002, p. 301) describes as "the re-emotionalization of law" across two fronts: "the emotionalization of public discourse about crime and criminal justice, and the implementation of sanctions in the criminal justice system that are explicitly based on – or designed to arouse – emotions". Given that case law, legislation, and harsher penal practices like mandatory minimum sentences, the ongoing war on drugs, and other efforts that shore up carceral expansion are often enacted in and through the mobilization of emotional socio-political discourse (Alderman et al., 2010; Freiberg & Carson, 2010; Welch, 1997), it is important to study how feelings and emotions shape the carceral field.

To begin, we should conceptualize the difference between emotions, feelings and affects. Emotions are the expressions, gestures, and linguistic motions of affects that are structured by the interplay between social convention and culture, interpersonal and environmental dynamics and intrapsychic scripts. The expression of complex moral emotions such as compassion, disgust, fear, or anger reveals how we attach certain principled ideas to our ability to express emotions (Jasper, 2006). For example, we might feel shameful about expressing anger. Affects are unconscious but registered embodied experiences in response to different stimuli (Massumi, 1995, 2002), meaning, affect is what makes us *feel* emotions. Feelings capture the phenomenon of affect and emotions connote bodily, felt experiences (Gould, 2009).

More than these conceptual differences, it is important to understand how emotions are mediated in and through place and space. For example, the pleasure and well-being that is experienced when spending time outdoors in nature, the different ways in which intimacy is felt and expressed in different parts of the home or between the home and public spaces (Bachelard, 1994), or the ways in which certain spaces can produce feelings of distress and anxiety (e.g. the courtroom, prison or hospital). The spatiality of emotion requires examining how the setting, experience of time, non-human material objects, human interactions, and affects (embodied feelings) structure our feelings (Bachelard, 1994; Bondi et al., 2014).

Building on Foucault's (1977) historiography of the prison, research in the fields of carceral geography and emotional geography study the spatial distribution of carceral institutions (Gilmore, 2007) and the ways in which different prison spaces manifest different feelings (Crewe et al., 2014; Lachapelle & Kilty, 2023a, 2023b; Moran, 2015). Prisons are highly structured multi-use spaces. They are simultaneously public and private spaces, 'home' environments (Comfort et al., 2005; Turner, 2013), labour sites (Wacquant, 2010), spaces of surveillance (Foucault, 1977), zones of exclusion demarcated by the loss of human rights (Moran, 2012a, 2014), and described as mental health clinics (Jordan, 2011; Wright et al., 2014). Anger, distress and sadness are commonly felt in exclusionary spaces (Moran, 2012a, 2014), where specific places (e.g. segregation cells) are used for physical and symbolic rejection and punishment (Lachapelle & Kilty, 2023a; Martel, 2006; Schliehe, 2014; Sibley 1995).

The prison is also an 'anti-place' (Stoller, 2003), where the architectural design and use of space constitute the prisoner as a 'depersonalized unit' with little autonomy (Dirsuweit, 1999). Incarceration restricts mobility within space and limits socialization both within prison and between the inside and outside of the institution (Crewe et al. 2014; Fayter & Kilty, 2023; Moran, 2012a, 2014, 2015). Drawing on Bachelard, (1994), Stoller (2003) refers to the cell as a 'nesting place' that is emotionally distinct from the prison itself. While the cell is a primary space of control and surveillance (Dirsuweit, 1999; Foucault, 1977; Schliehe, 2014), it is also where imprisoned people make their 'home', keep their possessions and maintain a semblance of privacy (Turner, 2013). In nesting places (e.g. the cell, clinic or visiting room), the rules of emotional display can shift so that emotions that are typically hidden become condoned (Crewe et al., 2014; Fayter & Kilty, 2023). In this way, spaces shape feelings, especially in total institutions like

prisons (Goffman, 1961) with their strict feeling rules and emotional display rules. Empirical research demonstrates that the appropriate expression of emotion in prison settings includes the suppression of both negative (e.g. aggression, sadness, distress) and positive (e.g. care, empathy) feelings and emotions (Bogosavljevic & Kilty, 2024; Crewe et al., 2014; Fayter & Kilty, 2023), which Sykes (1958) described as the "silent stoicism" of the code among the imprisoned.

Presenting the material experiences of currently and formerly incarcerated people, this special issue helps to map the feeling and display rules that constitute the emotion culture(s) of different carceral spaces. This work also entails considering the affective experience – a 'felt' geography (Davidson & Milligan, 2004), for example, where the confined body acts as a canvas for the inscription of identity, social relations, and experience (Moran, 2012a, 2012b), such as when the scars from self-harm act as a visible signifier of emotion (Kilty, 2012a, 2012b). In this way, "law [and the prison] 'takes hold of' bodies in order to make them its text" (de Certeau, 1984, p. 139). Space also shapes how time is experienced (Lefebvre, 1991). As prison exhibits a 'drudgery of place' (Urry, 2014) where time stagnates, prisoners often feel suspended in time, increasing their feelings of detachment and loneliness (Guenther, 2013; Martel, 2006; Moran, 2012b; Stoller, 2003). Studying how emotions shape the organization and management of carceral spaces and how carceral spaces shape feelings and emotions contributes to rethinking the affective politics of these environments.

As confinement evokes intense emotional responses and behaviour from both prisoners and prison staff (Bogosavljevic & Kilty, 2024), this special issue of the *Journal of Prisoners on Prisons* (*JPP*) aims to nuance assumptions about how and why different carceral actors express themselves emotionally in different carceral settings. Notably, the contributions to this special issue examine how incarceration, through its isolating and disciplining forces, shapes the emotional and affective experiences of imprisoned people. Carceral space is neither uniform nor orderly, and emotions are felt differently depending upon the specific setting, be it segregation, counselling spaces, the medical unit, programming and educational spaces, or an individual cell. Studying how emotions are ordered and expressed in carceral spaces requires documenting the feeling and display rules (Hochschild, 1979, 1983) that structure the prison's different emotion culture(s). Such emotion culture(s) also include the penal policy context, for example, considering how emotions and feelings structure the implementation of harm reduction

programs (e.g. needle exchange), which allows us to explore how feelings are organizing sites of political agency (Kilty & Orsini, 2024).

THIS ISSUE

This issue of the *JPP* contains discussions and considerations of how the disciplinary, socially isolating, and punitive structures of carceral spaces – from prison classrooms, cells, solitary confinement, and program spaces to halfway houses and the challenges of community re-entry – shape incarcerated people's social and emotional relations over time.

"Emotional Perspectives from Carceral Spaces and Beyond" by Ronnice Giscombe, Wes Guzylak, Ogo Esenwah, Varina Gurdyal and Nadia Judunath is based on a series of conversations between 'inside' and 'outside' students from a Walls to Bridges (W2B) prison education class. The authors explore the challenges of managing and expressing difficult emotions in prison and how this contributes to or hinders the development of resilience. Through an analysis of different coping strategies and social interactions, primarily within non-Correctional Service of Canada generated programs and informal activities, the authors highlight how both the social and physical environment of prison shapes emotional expression among imprisoned people. They assert the need for humanizing and compassionate spaces within oppressive penal environments.

In "Education, Gossip, and Social Carcerality: Contesting the Liminal Spaces Between Incarcerated Body and Incarcerated Mind" by Billie Cates and Gerty B., the authors indicate how carceral conditions facilitate gossip and the weakening of social networks. Juxtaposing the harmful prison environment where prisoners live under "layers of surveillance", with the humanizing and safe space of a W2B classroom where prisoners are "just students", the authors contend that education can be an act of abolition by disrupting statist social control.

In "À fleur de peau: An In-depth Look at Two Strategies of Handling Emotion in French Prisons" by Y.E., Hannah Davis and H.W. – which is based on a dialogue among two formerly incarcerated people and a W2B instructor from the American University in Paris – the authors reflect on the emotions elicited by imprisonment, along with various strategies for managing these emotions. By invoking the French metaphor of "*à fleur de peau*" the authors examine the hypersensitivity that imprisoned people experience in terms of heightened emotions and reactionary responses. Reflecting on the "social

mask" or emotional shell that prisoners develop to enable their survival, the authors explore two distinct individual strategies of emotion work by mobilizing Hochschild's (1979, p. 561) conceptualizations of "fronting" and "masking". The authors demonstrate how incarcerated people can reshape their relationship to emotion through internal (e.g. meditation) and external (e.g. tougher, self-protective social relations) processes of transformation.

"The Power of Meaning" by Star Morrison, is a reflective essay blending lived expertise with relevant literature from a strengths-based perspective. By drawing on the work of Holocaust survivor Viktor Frankl (1959) and others, the author describes their search for meaning and purpose amongst tragedy and suffering. This heartfelt and authentic reflection examines complex emotions related to imprisonment by exploring phases of their carceral experience: intake, settlement, and pre-release, along with various coping strategies. The author asserts that mobilizing strengths and focusing on positive activities such as writing, art, exercise, yoga, and meditation, while building community with fellow prisoners, can help mediate the harmful stressors of the oppressive prison environment.

In "A PAWSitive Connection", Todd Ramsum provides a hopeful personal narrative based on an oral presentation, highlighting the healing power of a dog therapy program in prison. The author describes his struggles with addiction and a near overdose while in custody, which led to serious health problems, but also a new outlook on life. By connecting with a volunteer-led dog program in which prisoners care for and train their canine friends, he felt unconditional love from the dogs, which helped him to let his guard down, open-up emotionally, and feel safe. Based on this extremely positive experience, the author advocates for increased access to dog therapy and other similar non-Correctional Service Canada generated programs for prisoners, along with better access to health and mental health care, and transitional supports for re-entry, underscoring the value of meaningful social supports for criminalized people.

In "Emotions are Ours as Humans: The No Apology, Apology", Cathee shares an intimate emotional narrative of survival in a halfway house, which she likens to experiencing imprisonment. In halfway houses, she argues that constant surveillance, social control, and scrutiny of every word and emotion that is evoked by residents, can be weaponized against them by staff who have the power to send people back to prison for "suspicious behaviour". Focusing on the emotionally exhausting nature of this community carceral experience, she describes how emotions such as anger, sadness, and even

anxiety and excitement can be used against a person on parole. The author recounts an unjust interaction with halfway house staff, describing in detail her physiological affective state in which she felt like she was imploding due to consciously suppressing her emotions and maintaining neutral "non-threatening" body language, despite staff encroaching on her personal space.

"Prison is a Trap" by K WooDZ, provides a personal essay reflecting on being entangled in the oppressive, racist, federal penitentiary system as a young, Black, queer person. Asserting that systemic racism is inherent to the penal system, the author describes the dehumanizing treatment of prisoners, which makes them feel like caged, wounded animals. Reflecting on the harmful impacts of incarceration, such as self-harm, addiction, and institutionalization in a setting that lacks opportunities for "rehabilitation" or transitional supports, the author stresses that upon release people are returned to the same conditions that led to their initial criminalization.

This issue also offers a *Response* entitled "Carceral Power and Emotions: A Reflection", by Kevin Walby. This paper reflects on the value of critically examining emotions in carceral spaces by drawing on the contributions in this issue, along with his own research and prisoner solidarity efforts. Specifically, this piece highlights how carceral power pathologizes prisoners' emotions as a mechanism of social control. Despite this deprivation of human dignity, the author asserts that incarcerated people continue to challenge carceral power by developing initiatives, advocating for change, and fostering social connections.

The *Prisoners' Struggles* section for this issue outlines a "Call for Contributions: Commemorating the 50th Anniversary of Prisoners' Justice Day" facilitated by the Abolition Coalition, inviting testimonials and demands from currently incarcerated people concerning their conditions of confinement. This will be shared during the sixth edition of PJD TV that will air on August 10, 2025, from 6:00pm to 11:00pm ET on the Criminalization and Punishment Education Project's Facebook page (@CPEPgroup).

There are also several critical and engaging book reviews in this issue. These book reviews examine topics ranging from writing in prison, resistance, power, and adaptation in prison, to racialization, street "gangs", identity, and conflict in urban settings.

As guest editors for this special issue, it has been a privilege to work with the diverse minds who contributed to these important emotional dialogues. The prison is not an ideal space for healing or emotional discovery. It is not a place where feelings and emotional expression are often encouraged or

nurtured. We acknowledge the tenacity of contributors to this collection, celebrate their accomplishments, and in editing this issue have learned a great deal from them. For if we are concerned about individual and collective accountability for harms done and we wish to live in a safer, kinder world, it is essential to consider the state inflicted harms that are born through processes of criminalization and incarceration.

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