RESPONSE

Carceral Power and Emotions: A Reflection

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Focusing on emotions in research and writing can help to reveal moments of injustice and legacies of inequity in our society. Despite the importance of emotions to meaning and wellbeing, there are many mechanisms of control in everyday life that discourage us from sharing emotions or talking about them. This kind of silencing or muting effect when it comes to emotions are experienced tenfold inside the prison walls. It is therefore hugely important to examine emotions in carceral spaces, as well as in response to criminalization. What the writings in this special issue show is that carceral spaces are a mechanism of hyper-control, one that discourages people from being their whole selves (also see Fayter, 2023). The prison pathologizes emotions as a main mechanism for reproducing its institutional power and justifying countless punitive 'get tough' laws and policies. Focusing on emotions in carceral spaces and control of emotions or pathologization of emotions is therefore crucial for critical inquiry, as it reveals the injustices of carceral power and the inequality that prison and jails foment.

I am not someone who has personally experienced criminalization or incarceration. I have been active with the *Journal of Prisoners on Prisons* (JPP) for about 15 years. Before that, I was active with Books 2 Prisoners. And for the last decade I have been involved in Walls to Bridges education in Winnipeg on Treaty One Territory. Walls to Bridges, Inside-Out, and other programs like this offering post-secondary classes inside carceral spaces are really doing transformative work with education. In these different roles over the years, I have encountered the carceral effect on emotions in person, in class, on the phone, in letters. Reading this issue, I have thought of those moments, some that had slipped my mind, and I am thankful to these authors for surfacing those memories. This is the background I bring to understanding this topic and that I brought to engaging with the articles in this *JPP* issue.

In my career as a researcher, I have also written a little bit about emotions. In my research I have found that emotions can motivate people to undertake difficult tasks and do important work in their communities (Enkhtugs & Walby, 2024). I have found that emotions can help bind people together

and foster solidarity (Walby & Spencer, 2018). The emotions that people experience are also felt in relation to places and objects (Walby & Spencer, 2012a). I have learned that people are asked to perform emotions in certain settings according to specific feeling rules in those sites (Walby & Spencer, 2020; Goodrum & Stafford, 2003) and that this experience is germane to people in capitalist societies across the globe. I have also explored the intersection of prisoner peer mentoring and emotions in a Canadian prison (Walby & Cole, 2021, 2019). However, emotions in relation to criminal justice are most often part of panics that feed into forms of regulation and social control (Walby & Spencer, 2012b; Karstedt, 2002; De Haan & Loader, 2002). Often, emotions are turned against people who the state and corporations treat as outcasts or 'others' – the 'monsters'. There is a lot of scapegoating of criminalized people and there is a lot of hate projected toward incarcerated people, which continues to animate policing and punitive law across Canada and the United States (see Persak, 2019; Bandes, 2016; Canton, 2015; Freiberg & Carson, 2010; Pillsbury, 1988).

As the issue editors note in their introduction, there are numerous definitions of emotions in scholarly literature, but one constant is that space and place shape how emotions are understood and experienced. Space and place provide certain conditions and rules for how emotions can be experienced and shared. When one realizes that the prison really is a site of extreme deprivation and isolation, almost an anti-place (also see Horii, 1989), one starts to understand that emotions are experienced and treated very different within carceral sites. One other point that is important to note is that most of the literature in this research area of prisons and emotions focuses on guards and staff, hence the importance of platforming the perspectives of people with lived experience of criminalization and incarceration.

Examining the intersection of emotions and carceral space is a main theme of this issue. The paper "Emotional Perspectives from Carceral Spaces and Beyond" by Ronnice Giscombe, Wes Guzylak, Ogo Esenwah, Varina Gurdyal and Nadia Judunath analyzes how space and place shape the expression of emotions inside carceral sites. It becomes clear that prisons are spaces that deter emotions, that emotions can attract harm from staff or other folks doing time, and so the suppression of emotion becomes an essential means of survival inside (also see Laws & Crewe, 2016). The authors also reflect on Walls to Bridges as a platform for personal

and emotional growth. The voices of people who have experienced the emotionally paralyzing effects of the criminal justice apparatus ring true in this piece and throughout the other papers as well.

Another paper showing this effect that the prison has on emotions is "Education, Gossip and Social Carcerality: Contesting the Liminal Spaces Between Incarcerated Body and Incarcerated Mind" by Billie Cates and Gerty B. The authors focus on the segmentation and sequestration of the prison and the effect this has on social networks and emotions. Poor treatment by staff leads to low self-worth among imprisoned people (also see Bourque, 1988). Among the most egregious forms of isolation the prison exacts on the people it warehouses is banning of mourning of the death of a loved one outside. The authors argue that institutionalization leads to alienation from the self. Carceral spaces do not encourage people to have a healthy relationship with their own emotions and punish people further if they do show emotion. The authors argue that prison education provides a reprieve from the isolation and deprivation, and therefore the politics of prison education can be seen as critical and abolitionist insofar as they provide an alternative to the barren emotional landscape of the prison.

The skillful analysis of emotions in carceral sites continues with "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. The authors communicate the palpable fear that most people experience inside, as well as reflect on the physical and mental health ramifications of that fear. There is almost no outlet for expressing emotions other than those that the prison itself will pathologize. Under these conditions, anger can mount and circulate. People must wear an emotional mask or perform emotion work to cope under these austere conditions. These authors also describe how making connections or showing care carries risk in the prison space, including risks of reprisal and risks of pathologization from staff. For this reason, people inside are on edge and extremely sensitive at all times.

The experience of emotions in carceral spaces is full of ups and downs. Reflecting on this cycle in "The Power of Meaning", the author – Star Morrison – traces out the role of emotions throughout the multiple stages of imprisonment, from intake to settlement to pre-release. There are many tricky moments of arbitrary control throughout the system (also see Lauzon, 1989). Star Morrison shares some techniques for navigating this system and techniques for being settled in a system that is fundamentally designed to unsettle the self. This is a call for life and hope against all the mechanisms

of the criminal justice apparatus that seek to dampen life and hope. The author argues that people inside need to find ways of making meaning, which is difficult in carceral spaces designed to inhibit life and meaning.

It is a political and policy choice of the executives and middle managers to make the prison so austere. Proof of this, the paper "A PAWSitive Connection" by Todd Ramsum, provides details on a program organized by volunteers and offered in select prisons. This is the dog or canine therapy program. This program allows people who have been inside, sometimes for decades, to interact with dogs, sharing affection and care with them. This is a healing experience. The emotions we share with animals are as positive and efficacious as those we share with humans (Walby & Doyle, 2009). The author describes the effect of the therapy dog program as helping him to feel again. It is a humanizing experience in a carceral space that is purposefully designed to be dehumanizing. The author argues this program is helpful in allowing people to feel like whole persons again that it should be expanded and offered everywhere.

The damage that carceral sites inflict on people and communities can never really be undone. Reflecting on this, in the paper "Emotions Are Ours as Humans: The No Apology, Apology", the author Cathee focuses on how emotions are weaponized in the carceral environment. In biographic detail, the author describes how weaponization of emotions leads to personal damage that lingers on for years even after release. The conditions of experience of emotions inside persist and permeate the self, and become a form of trauma one must wrestle with for the rest of their lives.

Another important issue is that emotions are treated differently depending on who is expressing them (Ahmed, 2014). "Prison is a Trap" by K WooDZ examines the intersection of race and emotions in Canadian prisons. At many carceral sites, race continues to be at the centre of disputes and abject abuse from staff. As a Black prisoner, the author was targeted for reprisals and further punishment in ways that layered trauma upon their experience of inequity from growing up in poverty and experiencing police profiling for years. It is a story of surviving the racism of the criminal justice apparatus. It is also an account that will be all too familiar for Black and Indigenous peoples in Canada who have been subjected to abuse inside carceral sites as a mechanism of control. Furthermore, what it reveals is that the physical and emotional damage that the criminal justice apparatus does to Black and Indigenous peoples is and always has been the main facet of settler colonialism.

I am thankful to the authors for sharing their critical and provocative writings. What we learn is immense. We learn that the carceral power of the state relies on harvesting emotions of criminalized people, to pathologize them, to further animate the caricatures and stereotypes of the 'risky', the 'criminal', the 'dangerous' that the criminal justice apparatus requires to justify its existence. It is a cycle, and the pathologization of emotions by carceral entities as well as their psychologists feeds both the cycle and the system. We hear that the criminal justice apparatus continues to deprive people of basic human connections and dignity. We learn the imprisoned people must perform emotion work to simply survive one day to the next (also see Greer, 2002). We learn that guards seek to exact extra-judicial punishment on prisoners simply for the expression of emotion. And we learn that there are some people who have not given up, who offer unique programs and initiatives, who seek to foster connections, solidarity, and personal growth. Emotions are pivotal in this too.

I am especially thankful to the authors for doing the work of being brave enough to share their emotions in carceral spaces that prey on punishing vulnerability. I have seen many times that imprisoned people and even prison staff inside who demonstrate that they care, are further punished by the system, further segregated, further dehumanized. The demonizing of emotions behind bars operates to replicate the whole penal institution and the broader criminal justice apparatus. May these writings here contribute to a non-carceral future for all.

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