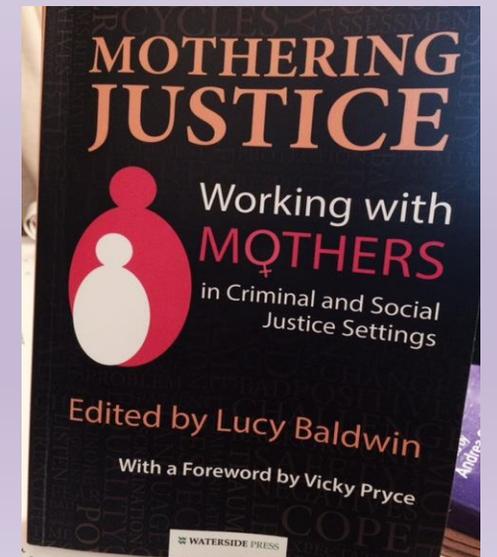




Motherhood Disrupted: The relationship between compassionate prison space, maternal emotions and maternal identity: reflections of post prison mothers.

Lucy Baldwin.
Senior Lecturer in Criminology.



Contextstatistics...sentencing .. Already a 'vulnerable population'....

- 61% female prison population are mothers (children under 16)..so no accurate figure
- 18,000 children- 13,000 mothers separated
- Only 5% stay in their own homes
- Over 50% have experienced abuse as a child and adult
- High rate of self harm
- 46% have previously attempted suicide
- Already a 'vulnerable population '
- For most mothers in custody 1st time separated from children for any length of time
- Most mothers located 60-150 miles away from home
- Many mothers do not expect custodial sentence and do not prepare
- Breach/short sentences/low risk of harm
- All of that **PLUS** mothering emotions =**focus of the study**

****Meeting women's needs doesn't start with prison – begins long before and continues long after, complex and multi faceted. ,**

Doctoral Research :Motherhood Disrupted: An interpretivist study exploring the emotional impact of incarceration in post-prison mothers.

- Fieldwork Complete – Analysis ongoing , wrestling with Nvivo and thematic analysis (informed by Layders (2014) adaptive
- This presentations relates to one specific theme (the relationship between prison space and maternal emotion) extracted for an accepted (but not yet published) paper for Emotion , Space and Society .

Fieldwork has been completed. In line with Layders' (2004) adaptive approach analysis began early with a thematic analytical approach sustained throughout the fieldwork, thus enabling core themes and patterns to be identified and extracted from the transcripts (Bryman 2012). Early analysis reveals emergent themes which when explored prior to the conclusion of fieldwork can facilitate more developed investigation (Layder 2013).

Research Aims of the Doctoral Study. The main aim of the study is to understand more about the emotional impact of incarceration on mothers.

Overall aims and objectives:-

- To develop an understanding of the emotional experiences of mothers who have experienced incarceration, particularly in relation to maternal identity.
- To consider the relevance of emotional experiences of mothers who have experienced incarceration, in relation to sentence planning and post release supervision – with a view to making informed recommendations for effective practice.
- To add to existing research, knowledge and debates in relation to emotion and prison.
- To add to existing research, knowledge and debates in relation to mothers, prison and post release supervision.

The Wider Study

- Mothers self defined
- Aged between 19-66
- Diverse population across England, Scotland and Wales
- 'Children' ranged from infancy to adulthood
- Length of sentences 6 weeks -8 years
- Length of time in community 12 months – 24 years
- Initial contacts via existing professional contacts
- Snowball sampling
- Posters / invites WIP /Jail Mail/Inside Time.
- 21 interviews –between 45- 120 minutes
- Recorded /transcribed / fieldnotes

Early Emergent Theme – not necessarily an anticipated one – clues in word choices from early interviews to do with space/place (and so in line with Layders adaptive approach paid attention in later interviews)

“Suffocated”

“herded”

“Vast spaces/tiny room”

“ I felt like I was nowhere”

“No place like it”

“The noise echoed in the spaces”

“Scary place”

“the cruelty of the place”

“need to make my space like home”



From a place of judgement to a place of punishment

*"... it's not all that I am [being a mother] ...but it's the largest and most judged part of who I am".
(Ursula ,48)*

(and that's even before/without court – arguably for all women – but more so for 'criminal mothers').

Women spoke of despair at 'entering' the prison space. Maggi:-

"all my life all I'd done was be a Mam ... my kids came before any man – we never had much but we had love, I was a good Mam – well I did my best ...when I went to prison I felt like that was all wiped out. I'd failed...Even worse because I'm a Nanna and a Mam – I'm meant to be respectable at my age ...I just looked round when I first went in [prison] and thought that's it, ... I've let them all down... look at this place – how the fuck did I get to be here?" (Maggi,55)

Prisons are emotional spaces full stop. Prison 'simply' as a location – a space

- Mary described prison as

“an assault on her ability to be any kind of mother at all let alone a good one”

saying she entered prison as *“damaged goods”*.

As someone whose life before prison had been so chaotic, she described how she came to prison as an

“already failing mother” (Mary, 66). whose already present guilt was only magnified by her location, stating

“good mothers don't go to prison do they”.

- Kady – felt like she was in “no place “

“I couldn't make sense of the location and space outside – I would hear the seagulls and thought... am I near the sea?... I didn't know London was near the sea?... But then I would smell when they cut the grass and it smelt like the country [side]... Desperate to feel connected to the outside I remember once squeezing my hands through the bars ... I just wanted to try to catch a snowflake”. (Kady, 28).

Situated maternal feeling – mothers come to prison – not as a homogenous group of course (Rowe 2011, Baldwin 2015)

Sometimes

- A place of safety , sanctuary , opportunity and recovery
- (O'Malley and Devaney 2015, Kaufman 2001)

More often

- A place of pain , powerlessness, sadness, failure and profound hurt.
- Goffman 1958, Datesman & Coles 1983, Enos 2001, Scraton & Moore 2014, Baldwin 2015)

**Obviously the emotional, mental and physical perspectives of the mothers have some bearing on how they experience prison and prison space. ... how they respond to the space , the regime , the security and those around them

The 'unbearable pain' of separation and being in the prison space as a mother ;

- One mother described her '*agony*' of being sent to prison as a still breastfeeding mother.

'I was locked in this horrible lonely, scary place with leaking breasts and no baby... I held my pillow like it was my child and it was soaked with my milk and my tears... I felt bereft, I have never felt grief or pain like it'. (Beth)

- *How mothers are responded to can be the difference between life and death...literally (Michelle Barnes, Sarah Reed)*

- Notwithstanding Rowe's reminder that women, indeed mothers are not a homogenous group, the pain simply of *separation* adds literal weight to other emotions. With mothers describing despair, anger, grief, loss, frustration, hopelessness, guilt, sadness and shame - even when they are in contact with their children(because they are still 'separate'.)
- Datesman and Cales (1983) describe this pain as a result of separation as '*a profound hurt*'.

Prison challenges maternal identity by limiting the ability to carry out the mothering role – or ‘forcing’ mothers to mother or experience mothering in painful ways....

- Enos 2001 ‘a firefighter fights fires.....
- Some Mothers mothered protectively – ie refuse visits, (so much to say about visiting space!!) lie about whereabouts , refuse contact ... then painfully accept they may have ‘lost ‘ children to ‘better places’ , ‘better people’
- As one mother stated “It’s the little things that get you”, such as her daughter’s first haircut:

“her granny took her and got all her lovely curls cut off- I should have taken her for her first hair cut-. It should have been me. I would have kept it long, just trimmed – I cried for days and days...” (Margot, 33)

“One day when I phoned home my middle daughter came on the phone sobbing, absolutely sobbing – you know those big breathy sobs like when you can’t catch your breath – I was terrified and was like ...oh darling what’s the matter tell me what’s wrong ... she went on to tell me that her leotard wasn’t clean and she needed it for a gymnastics competition - there was no soap powder in the house and daddy didn’t know what to do.... I told her to check if there was shampoo in the house to wash it with or to pop next door and ask to borrow a cup of powder. She went off the phone relatively happy and purposeful, but me? God I came off that phone so upset -... it was such a small thing but it broke me, I felt so angry with myself, angry with him [for not solving the problem] and just – well just powerless – hopeless – disconnected – it was just awful – I went quiet for a while after that. I think that’s when it hit me you know when I ‘knew’ I was a bad mother – once I ‘knew’ I wasn’t a good mother, nothing else about me made sense”. (Ursula, 48)

Prison Relationships in Prison Space ... with each other , with staff – all affected by the space and how its organised and categorised.. (security level)

Staff; ‘emotional arena’ (Crawley) , ‘The heart of the prison’ (Liebling)
...atmospheres...

- *“Prison Officers are just like humans really - there’s good and bad ones like there is in any job... but if you get a bad bus driver it might only spoil your journey- if you get a bad screw ...well it can affect everything about your world for months or years...they can have so much power over you and everything you can or can’t do in prison.”* (Queenie, 64;
- *“I refused to be labelled as just a prisoner... I used to think I’m more than this ...I’m a mother ... but it was hard to hang onto when every message you got from staff was that you’d failed ...it becomes hard to not to believe it and think that it can never be made better again ... that this was it, because I’d come to prison I would be a bad mum **forever** ”* (Rita, 35).

With each other ...

- *“the older women , well they mothered us – we called them mum – always – it helped us all I think”*
- *speaking of the MBU - “it means we can get together like normal mums who just want to spend time together and think about having a baby.”*
- *“being a mum was the only thing we had in common , ...but it was enough”* (Jamelia ,28)
- *“I just loved to be with them ...[the other mothers]..it made me feel normal”* (Lauren,26)

Organisation of space , security, the ‘cell’ ...

Open/closed conditions

“In closed conditions visits were just made so difficult for no reason - it was so stressful the waiting, the wondering and shortness of visits – when I got to ...[prison name] ... it was so different – it was a really friendly room – not horrid for the kids ... there was a family worker to watch the kids and a play area with toys and colouring stuff for the kids to do things – it made me feel so much less guilty bringing them in to that environment – but in closed, well it was just pain” (Rita,35)

“We all bonded over motherhood- it felt lovely to be able to talk about our kids – it wasn’t all we talked about – but it was mostly – it made us all feel ‘normal’. [...]. we had nothing in common at all other than we were mothers – we probably wouldn’t have spoken outside, yet in prison we walked in the grounds – about three miles a day every day – just walking and talking -closed conditions you can’t do that – it makes it harder ... and for what for, for nothing ...most women don’t need to be in closed conditions ...what were we going to do? shoplift them or fraud them to death?” (Rita, 35).

“my space in this hell hole”

- Interestingly the cell or room space elicited mixed emotional responses. It was felt by some mothers to be a lonely space where fear and loneliness took hold:

“I hated bang up, it was time alone to think, and I didn’t want to think, it made me feel unstable and unpredictable to think too much – I could hurt myself then, and I did.” (Lauren, 26)

Yet for others a place of sanctuary and safety where they were reminded of ‘home’:

- *“I used to retreat to my room and kind of hide. You make your space comfortable...you make it homely...you make it home” (Kady ,28).*

Nussbaum (2001) drawing on the work of Sen (1985) asserts that the creation of compassionate spaces in institutions will have positive affect/effect in terms of emotional wellbeing and affiliation. . She goes on to suggest that a ‘compassionate institution’ will create socially sentient spaces that can assist in meeting the needs of vulnerable and suffering individuals but that this requires ‘institutional structures’ rather than being reliant on individuals (Baldwin 2016)

“ she fell over ...I wasn’t allowed to pick her up....I had to stay in my seat...outside that would be neglect ” (Kady , 28)



The Benefit of meeting the emotional needs of mothers in prison space and beyond ...already been judged, no need to continue to punish mothers and their children – my research is supporting this 100%

For mothers and grandmothers

- Its quite simply the right, human and decent thing to do!
- Assists in maintaining family relationships – directly linked to desistance (*if all is lost there's nothing to lose*)
- Promotes emotional and psychological wellbeing of mothers/families and children
- Short and long term gains – in and out of prison – for individuals, staff and wider society – quite simply no one loses

For staff

- Promotes a feelings of trust, mutual respect and transparency
- Better more productive relationships with women in their care and control
- Fewer incidents of self harm/distress/trauma and even suicide
- Increased engagement in sentence planning
- Happier , healthier working conditions – with better 'results' or outcomes .

Relationships – Maternal identity “forever changed” ... the geographical reach.

- *“ I used to worry all the time when I was inside... where was she? who was she with? was she safe? I kept myself going thinking – not long now, then it will all be ok and I can keep an eye on her properly... But she doesn't tell me anything now...we don't have the same relationship as before. She got used to being without me I guess...I wasn't expecting that’ (Shanice, 24).*
- *“I will spend the rest of my life looking through the lens of a mother who's' been to prison...every bad decision they [my children] ...make or wrong turn they take, I will wonder if it's my fault, it it's because I went to jail...any sentence for a mother is a life sentence really...” (Ursula, 48).*
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Relationships with carers, children, relatives – forever altered – sometimes for the better , mostly for the worst , but rarely , if ever , the same.

Implications of preliminary findings of my current research (on one theme alone !)

- The importance of compassionate spaces – prison design – prison architecture holding/security conditions for women (*“what are we going to do shoplift or fraud them to death”* ...Rita)
- Staff training – an appreciation /understanding of emotions in prison – sometimes particularly those of parents/carers- or sometimes specifically mothers (not a hierarchy of needs – just ‘needs’)
- Sentencing revisions (eg Scotland)
- Need for on going support for mothers/families post release, during supervision and beyond.
- More research in relation to compassionate spaces, emotions and prison.