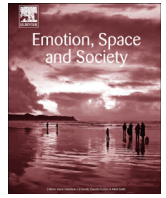




Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Emotion, Space and Society

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/emospa

Motherhood disrupted: Reflections of post- prison mothers

Lucy Baldwin

De Montfort University, The Gateway, Leicester, LE1 9BH, United Kingdom

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 26 March 2016
 Received in revised form
 9 February 2017
 Accepted 20 February 2017
 Available online xxx

Keywords:

Mothers in prison
 Mothers after prison
 Emotion and prison
 Mothering identity
 Separation
 Prison space and emotion

ABSTRACT

Prison is a challenging place for most women but this emotional space is magnified when it is a mother who is incarcerated. The maternal experience for mothers in prison is often at best disrupted, at worst destroyed, by the location. This paper considers how maternal emotions and the maternal role are assembled and challenged through carceral space, and more specifically, how mothers themselves assimilate this experience whilst navigating motherhood post incarceration. The data presented is based on twenty recorded in-depth individual interviews with released mothers across England and Wales. The research findings highlight the significant emotional harm and turmoil felt by mothers themselves and on mother-child relationships, experienced during incarceration and long after their release. Furthermore, the findings emphasise the significance and value of compassionate and thoughtful management of carceral space in relation to mothering emotions. The paper concludes with reflections on the findings of the study and recommendations for future research and practice.

© 2017 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

'It's normal to have photos of your kids up ain't it ... school ones, baby ones, embarrassing ones I've got loads all over at home ... but I couldn't here – for my first six month I couldn't bear them up or look at them without breaking down – it was easier to cope not seeing their little faces staring at me ...but that made me feel terrible an' all ... what kind of mother don't have photos of her kids up?'. (Carla, 45)

1. Introduction

In the United Kingdom, over 13,000 women are received into custody annually (Prison Reform Trust (PRT), 2015), and research suggests that as many as 61% will be mothers of children under 18 (Caddle and Crisp, 1997:1). Given this figure does not include mothers of over 18s or grandmothers, it is safe to say that most of the UK female prison population are dealing with significant mothering-related emotions during their incarceration. Despite this, acknowledgement and exploration of mothers and mothering within the criminal justice system is an area of only recently growing scholarship.

The lived experience for mothers in prison is very different from that of mothers outside. Simple things that a mother outside might take for granted such as looking at photographs of her children, are

deeply affected by space and place in prison, as illustrated by the opening quote. Most profoundly however, mothers in prison are faced with the emotional and practical struggle of negotiating maternal identity and mothering whilst being imprisoned and therefore spatially separated from their children.

The relationship between motherhood and emotion is a powerful one. There are few ideals that elicit more emotion and arguably more judgement than that of mother and child. O'Reilly (2016) calls for motherhood to 'have a feminism of its own', where mothering emotions are respected, valued and understood. She suggests it is possible to recognise that, whilst aspects of gender are certainly constructed, "motherhood matters, and that maternity is integral to a mother's sense of self and her experience of the world" (2016:204). She argues that this focused feminism ought to be recognised as 'matricentric feminism' (2016).

Over time, researchers and academics (Mead, 1935; O'Reilly, 2004; Oakley, 1985; Rich, 1995; Thurer, 1995) have explored the challenges faced by everyday women in terms of meeting the challenges and ideals of being a perfect mother or even simply a good enough mother. They suggest most, if not all, women feel pressure to conform to mothering ideals. If even non-imprisoned women, who, at least in theory can deliver in relation to these expectations, demands and ideals, feel such pressure; what then is the emotional impact of attempting to manage these expectations and ideals from prison; or subsequently as a mother who has been to prison? This paper unpacks these questions and contributes to both broader literature on women's imprisonment and the small

E-mail address: lbaldwin@dmu.ac.uk.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.emospa.2017.02.002>
 1755-4586/© 2017 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

but growing body of research which specifically considers the experiences of mothers in prison.

Women, prison and gendered aspects of incarceration have been extensively researched (Smart, 1976; Carlen, 1983, 2002; Worrall, 1990; McIvor, 2004). Research in this field has tended to focus on the different ways in which men and women are treated by the criminal justice system, (Walklate, 2001; Carlen, 2002; Gelsthorpe, 2004; Fawcett Society, 2004), and how differently men and women might experience custody (Carlen, 1983; Padel and Stevenson, 1988; Caddle and Crisp, 1997; Devlin, 1998; Chesney–Lind and Pasko, 2004).

There is also an increasing body of research on carceral emotions (Knight, 2016; Crewe et al., 2014; Crawley, 2004), and in relation to maternal incarceration, particularly in the USA (Flynn, 2014; Bloom, 1992; Baunach, 1985; Enos, 2001). Wahidin (2004) undertook valuable research on the older female prisoner population, but mothering, grand-mothering and emotion, although present in this work, was not its primary focus. The topic of maternal incarceration is garnering interest in the UK and Ireland (Epstein, 2012; Masson, 2014; Minson et al., 2015; Moore and Scraton, 2014; O' Malley and Devaney, 2015; Baldwin, 2015a; Abbott, 2015; Prison Reform Trust (PRT), 2015), although (except for Baldwin) this has not been specific to emotions.

The emotional trauma as a result of the actual physical separation of a mother from her child via incarceration is, to some degree at least, acknowledged and evidenced in existing research. What has been perhaps less appreciated, explored or evidenced is any relationship the prison space itself might have in terms of incarcerated maternal emotion. There has been little or no research specifically focused on the emotional impact of incarceration on mothers and mothering identity or the mothering role, particularly with specific reference to place, and in mothers' own voices.

Drawing on one key theme emerging in early analysis of current doctoral research,¹ this paper aims to show how the specific physical space of prison and the dynamics within, give shape to a powerfully stigmatised, painful experience of motherhood. Furthermore, it will demonstrate how the socio spatial configuration of prison can be impactful both in the short and longer term on mothers and their children long after the prison sentence ends. The paper will build on the existing work of maternal and carceral geographies and, through the lens of emotion, give voice to mothers (and grandmothers). It will discuss mothers' post-custodial reflections on their experiences, and how their maternal emotions and identity were assembled and challenged, both throughout their incarceration and sometimes long after release.

2. Methodology

The data for this paper was drawn from current doctoral research and includes the analysis of twenty in-depth face-to-face interviews with mothers who have experienced imprisonment. These voluntary interviews were recorded and all participants gave informed consent for their data to contribute to the PhD and publications. In line with Layders' (2004) adaptive approach, thematic analysis began early and was sustained throughout the fieldwork, thus enabling core themes and patterns to be identified and extracted from the transcripts (Bryman, 2012). These emergent themes and patterns could then be more deeply explored prior to the conclusion of the fieldwork (see Layder, 2013). Ethics approval for this research was granted by the Faculty Research Ethics

Committee at De Montfort University (DMU).² Further, the researcher is also a qualified social worker and a member of the British Association of Social Workers, and as such is required to abide by the code of practice of that body.

2.1. Sampling and recruitment

Criteria for the research participants was that the women identified themselves as mothers, (whether they had their children currently in their care or not), and that they had experienced at least one period of incarceration. The age of their children was not a conditional issue (several mothers in the sample were mothers and/or grandmothers of adult offspring). Purposive sampling was used to access the first line of participants. The researcher had permission and ethical approval to utilise existing professional contacts in Women's Centres (community centres working with women in the criminal justice system both as an alternative to custody and for supervision following release) and via charities working with women in and after prison. This proved fruitful in terms of securing participants. Some mothers were interviewed at the centres/charities themselves, others asked to be interviewed in their own homes. Posters describing the research, inviting mothers to volunteer were placed in the centres. In addition, an 'invitation to contribute' was placed in various publications that women in or leaving prison were likely to see. This led to several participant approaches and requests to find out more about the research - with most of those then going on to give an interview. The remainder of the participants were secured via snowball sampling - i.e. interviewees were asked if they knew of other mothers fitting the criteria who may be willing to be interviewed. Many did and several mothers contacted made direct contact. The sample comprised of 20 mothers from diverse backgrounds across England and Wales. The mothers were aged between 19 and 66 years, their children ranging from infancy to adulthood. The mothers had served sentences ranging from 6 weeks to eight years, their length of time out of prison ranged from 12 months to 24 years. Most of the offences the women were imprisoned for related to theft, fraud and drugs offences. Some of the women were held in open conditions, some in closed and some of the women would have experienced both.³

2.2. The interviews

Interviews lasted between 45 and 90 min and although they were largely free-flowing, some of the participants required more prompting or more open questions than others. Therefore, a flexible and responsive interview position was adopted, meaning that some of the interviews became more semi-structured or conversational, although always participant-led. It seemed that for some of the mothers the topic was too overwhelming to talk about in an unprompted manner. One of the participants illustrated this by

² Alongside ethics approval provided through the researcher's university, approval was also granted by a national umbrella organisation that has responsibility for women's centres across the UK. In addition, approval and support was given by a national charity working with women in and after prison, who provided premises for interviews if required and a means of contacting women via their magazine and premises.

³ The conditions in which a prisoner is held may affect the amount of free movement within the prison, the possibility and regularity of release on temporary licence (ROTL), the number and type of visits permitted, the amount and type of contact with other prisoners and the type of cell/room the women live in. **Closed Conditions:** Prisoners for whom the very highest conditions of security are not necessary but who present too high a risk for open conditions or for whom open conditions are not appropriate. **Open conditions** Prisoners who present a low risk; can reasonably be trusted in open conditions and for whom open conditions are appropriate. (MOJ PSI.39/2011).

¹ This research was conducted as part of a doctoral project, Baldwin, L. 'Motherhood Disrupted: An interpretivist Study Exploring the Emotional Impact of Incarceration on Mothers (2014 – ongoing). De Montfort University

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/7322883>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/7322883>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)