

## **The emotions and emotional labour of criminological researchers**

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# The emotions and emotional labour of criminological researchers

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This Special Issue examines the emotion work and emotional labour performed by criminological researchers, with emotional labour being understood as an explicit methodological tool to explore research experiences and the research process. It is important that we study and understand emotions and emotional labour in research because ‘research is informed by auto/biographical experience and is an intellectual activity that involves a consideration of power, emotion and P/politics’ (Letherby, 2014). As Garrihy and Watters, later in this volume put it,

Whilst 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.

The aim of the Special Issue is to expand the appreciation, understanding and use of emotional labour in not only criminology but in the social sciences more broadly. With contributing authors from Australia, Ireland and the United Kingdom this Special Issue covers topics from across the discipline, including survivors of childhood sexual abuse, police hate crime reports, political violence and terrorism, victims of crime, prisons, child sexual abuse, and child protection.

Emotional labour is ‘the management of a way of feeling to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display . . . which is for a wage’ (Hochschild, 1983: 7, fn). First developed by Hochschild (1983) in her work *A Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling*, emotional labour is the way in which people manage and display their emotions in order to achieve the goals of their employment organisations. Although initially developed in the context of the private sector, with a focus on how emotions can be appropriated and deployed for the purpose of profit, more recent academic attention has focused attention on the ways in which professionals and those working in public services use emotional labour as part of their work. Hochschild (1983) provides three criteria which must be fulfilled in order for a worker to engage in emotional labour:

First . . . face-to face or voice-to voice contact with the public. Secondly, they require the worker to produce an emotional state in another person . . . Third, they allow the employer, through training and supervision, to exercise a degree of control over the emotional activities of the employees. (p. 147)

The first two of these criteria, ‘face-to face or voice-to voice contact’ and ‘producing an emotional state in another person’, are clearly evident when undertaking qualitative primary data collection. The third criteria ‘exercising a degree of control over the emotional activities of the employees’ has become more contested in recent years. This original condition of Hochschild’s (1983) led to the exclusion of particular job roles such as those inhabited by ‘professionals’. These workers were seen differently because they are not considered to be performing while under the direct supervision of a superior. However, this narrow definition of who can do emotional labour, along with the notion that emotional labour must be ‘sold for a wage’ (Hochschild, 1983: 198, 7fn), has increasingly been challenged by a growing body of work (Guy et al., 2008; James, 1989; Mastracci et al., 2012; Phillips et al., 2020), including articles in this Special Issue. The definition of emotional labour has now been stretched to include ‘professional’ occupations such as lawyers, social workers, therapists, criminal justice practitioners, academics and researchers, and those not performing for a wage (e.g. voluntary sector workers). Moving forward, there are even those who have started to challenge the first criteria – contact needing to be ‘face-to face or voice-to voice’ – to include online ethnography, data analysis (Moran and Asquith, 2020 – this Special Issue), and other ‘written’ interactions (Ishii and Markman, 2016; Webb, 2012).

Social researchers, engaging particularly in primary qualitative research, are expected to control their own, and others, feelings and emotions, requiring the performance of emotional labour. This performance requires effort, planning, time and knowledge (Morris and Feldman, 1996; Skilbeck and Payne, 2003) and much like the physical and practical side of research, emotional labour is absolutely essential to the successful completion of a research project.



Emotional labour is a rigorous analytical tool – not just simply ‘narcissistic navel-gazing’ (Carl, 2016) – and is used by the authors in this Special Issue as an analytical lens to examine various aspects of the research process including gaining access, collecting data and engaging in research more generally. Although the papers in this Special Issue focus primarily on the performance of emotional labour within the discipline of criminology, the analysis and discussion presented by our authors transcend disciplinary boundaries.

Letherby et al. (2012) argue that ‘critical reference to the knowing/doing relationship is an essential aspect of all research’, and we would argue that emotional labour can act as that critical lens. A researcher’s own personal values and identification will influence their performance of emotional labour, as will the characteristics of their participants, the research topic and the research environment more broadly, recognising ‘both the personhood of the researchers and the complexity of the researcher/respondent relationship’ (Letherby et al., 2012). All of these factors impact the researcher in terms of feeling rules,<sup>1</sup> including genuine emotional displays, surface acting, deep acting and disengagement.

The level, type and amount of emotional labour performed by a researcher will invariably depend on their own personal values and identity, the research participant, the topic of the research and the research environment more broadly. Thus, the examination of emotional labour in this context provides a critical insight into the research process, data collection and ultimately the data that are generated.

This Special Issue comprises seven articles. It opens with a paper by Waters, Westaby, Fowler and Phillips exploring the emotional labour performed by doctoral criminological researchers. The ability to be able to perform effective emotional labour is an essential methodological tool for qualitative researchers and is an important part of their professional practice. Waters et al. focus on this population as they typically transect a variety of circumstances, including being new to empirical research, researching emotive topics and researching with vulnerable or dangerous groups, which can make their research particularly emotional and challenging. Based on 30 semi-structured interviews, this research uses the lens of emotional labour to investigate how emotions are displayed and dealt with as part of the research process for novice researchers. The article concludes with recommendations to address the support and training needs of PhD candidates, their supervisory teams and the HE sector more broadly.

The second paper, by Moran and Asquith, examines how we understand vicarious trauma and emotional labour in criminological research. The psychological cost of being exposed to traumatic events has received little attention in relation to social researchers. This article considers the nature and impact of vicarious trauma both in the field and during process of analysis using two research projects as case studies: one a qualitative project engaging with survivors of childhood sexual abuse, and the other, a quantitative analysis of

police hate crime reports. The authors then identify risk factors and protective assets associated with the ‘cost of engagement with trauma’, including having a personal connection with the issues, previous experience, creating productive outputs and having an impact on practice and policy. The importance of recognising the impact and costs of vicarious trauma is critical in developing more robust and ethical research processes in qualitative research more generally and ensuring that it is managed appropriately in the long term.

McGowan’s research on emotional labour, reflexivity and ethics-as-practice is the third paper in the Special Issue. The aim of this article is to provide a useful resource for scholars interested in the ethics and emotional practices of qualitative inquiry. Using Guillemin and Gillam’s (2004) distinction between ‘procedural ethics’ and ‘ethics in practice’ as an anchor, McGowan critically reflects on his doctoral research project on political violence and terrorism. Following an overview of the study, vignettes explore how ethical decision-making processes engaged with ‘in the field’ were extensions of more every day and mundane reasoning, and not those typically associated with ‘sensitive research’. It is argued that this every day and mundane quality to ethical reasoning is sometimes obscured, and therefore missed, in formal accounts of ‘reflexivity’.

The fourth paper by Fohring examines the risks and rewards of researching the victims of crime. Drawing on existing literature and the author’s extensive experiences of conducting in-depth interviews with victims of crime, the article explores the psychological impact, including vicarious trauma, of working closely with survivors of violent crimes. Situating the discussion against the backdrop of a rapidly changing and commercialising higher education sector, Fohring examines how the increasing pressures and reduced freedoms in academia, combined with the difficult subject matter studied, requires researchers to perform significant amounts of emotional labour and places academics at a heightened risk for vicarious trauma. The article finishes with a discussion of the reasons for why, despite the risk, research in this area is still necessary and rewarding, and with suggestions for best practice in avoiding vicarious trauma.

Garrihy and Watters’ exploration of emotions and agency in prison research is the fifth paper of this Special Issue. While the emotionality of prison research has received increased attention in recent years (Crewe, 2014; Jewkes, 2012), this aspect of such research is often neglected by novice researchers until confronted with it. Emerging from this emotional confrontation, Garrihy and Watters argue for the development of a methodology that conceives researchers as emotional agents, harnessing emotional experiences as a tool for data collection. This article draws on the authors’ respective experiences conducting mixed methods research within a prison setting. Using emotional reflexivity as a methodological tool for data collection, analysis and dissemination, the authors advocate for the emergence of an

integrative methodology. The development of such a methodology is of value to all researchers throughout the field of criminal justice and beyond. Novice and/or doctoral researchers may find it particularly useful.

The sixth paper is Guerzoni's examination of vicarious trauma and emotional labour in researching child sexual abuse and child protection. Reflecting on his doctoral research around child protection initiatives within a religious institution, Guerzoni discusses experiencing vicarious trauma and performing emotional labour as a self-imposed, protective practice. In particular, the article explores the author's experience of self-regulating emotions in response to the reading of disturbing content and actively filtering conversations within professional, familial and social settings when asked about the study in order to prevent causing distress or upset to his interlocutors. The article, as many of the articles in this Special Issue do, finishes with advice to other researchers encouraging them to consider how they might prepare themselves for potentially emotionally and socially difficult content/data prior to starting the study.

The final paper of the Special Issue aptly addresses the question – when does research end? In his paper, Thorneycroft ruminates on this question and on to his own long ago finished doctoral research. Still haunted by feelings of guilt, shame and abjection in relation to his position of researcher and academic, Thorneycroft explores the notion that research has a clear beginning, middle and end. He then reflects on the politics, emotion and emotional labour involved in conducting research, particularly when it involves understandings and experiences of violence. Finally, Thorneycroft demonstrates how personal, theoretical and methodological decisions are complexly intertwined in research and exposes how theoretical and pragmatic decisions, as well as incidents and accidents, leave 'mnemonic' traces (Butler, 1997). All of these lead to his concluding argument that researchers must consider 'what they research, why they do it, its effects, and consequences'.

Overall, the papers in this Special Issue use emotion and emotional labour as explicit methodological and/or analytical tools to understand their research and their data, and although the papers in this Special Issue are 'criminological' in nature, the overarching methodological discourse is relevant to all social science researchers. Throughout this collection, there is a multiplicity of overlapping themes interwoven between the individual contributions. We would like to conclude this editorial by highlighting the most central of these.

The 'use of self' and reflexivity as methodological/analytical tools were common themes throughout the Special Issue. Recognising that 'theory and research [are] personal and political' (Thorneycroft) were crucial to this understanding of 'self'. As was the use of reflexivity '*in research [as]* not a single or universal entity but a process – an active, ongoing process that saturates *every stage of the research*' in which 'our social and political locations [as researchers] affect our

research' (McGowan citing Guillemin and Gillam, 2004: 274, emphasis added). This idea then of 'researcher as research instrument', fundamentally affects how we understand the research process, including the creation and analysis of data, and subsequent theory generation.

The difficulties and hardships faced when conducting research, including vicarious trauma (Guerzoni, Fohring, Moran and Asquith), and the acknowledgement of the implications of these emotions was addressed in many of the papers. The lack of emotional preparedness, training for and support of researchers was recognised to be a universal failing. Many of the contributions within this Special Issue call for better training and support, including 'official' institutional support, for researchers, with a particular emphasis on doctoral and early career researchers (Fohring, Guerzoni, Garrihy and Watters, Waters et al.). With increased institutional training and support, the implications of emotion, emotion work and emotional labour for ethical approval and institutional ethical practices and procedures were emphasised (McGowan, Moran and Asquith, Fohring, Garrihy and Watters, Waters et al.), with McGowan arguing in particular for institutional ethical procedures and forms needing to better capture the lived experience of researchers 'in the field'.

The concept of 'coping strategies' or 'coping mechanisms' also appeared in many of the contributions (Fohring, McGowan, Moran and Asquith, Waters et al.). These coping strategies included 'self-care' (Guerzoni, Waters et al.) – McGowan also notes how researchers may feel undeserving of such self-care – 'communities of coping' (Garrihy and Watters, Waters et al.), 'reparative advocacy' (Moran and Asquith, Fohring, Waters et al.) and 'activism' (Thorneycroft). It is advocated by many of our authors that researchers should be acknowledging these strategies and openly writing them into their research methodologies, with some calling for overarching 'culture change' around the discussion of emotion and emotional labour in research (Fohring, Moran and Asquith, Waters et al.).

A frequent ending to the papers in this Special Issue is recommendations to other researchers so that they would not experience the same/similar challenging situation(s) that the author(s) found themselves in. The authors in this Special Issue want to 'pay it forward' and help the next generation not to have to learn these lessons the hard way. In her paper, Fohring ends with the following message for good practice which was echoed across the Special Issue:

there are steps that can be taken to ameliorate the risks to some extent: engaging in communities of coping, being reflective in our work, and focusing on the positives of why we entered the social sciences in the first place: to elicit change in systems and policy, and thereby, help people.

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**Note**

1. Feeling rules are 'rules or norms according to which feelings are judged appropriate to accompanying events' (Hochschild, 1983: 59). They are 'behavioural expectations about which emotions ought to be expressed and those that ought to be hidden' (Rafaeli and Sutton, 1989: 8) and regulate the emotional labour of workers who interact directly with others.

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