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Doing criminological research: an emotional labour perspective

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Chapter 7: Doing criminological research: an emotional labour perspective

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Abstract

When it comes to emotional labour in the field of criminology, much of the focus has been on the criminal justice professions. However, it is also the case that the research of criminal justice and criminal justice engaged populations demands a high degree of emotion management. Criminological researchers can be exposed to potentially distressing accounts of people's experiences and put in potentially emotionally charged environments. This chapter therefore explores the emotional labour undertaken by criminological researchers engaged in empirical research. Divided into two parts, the first part of the chapter identifies extant research on the ways in which qualitative criminological researchers manage their emotions in order to do research, with a focus on gaining access, collecting data and exiting the field. The second part of the chapter is a case study which presents the analysis of 30 interviews with criminological researchers to identify the main ways in which criminological research requires the use of emotional labour. The chapter concludes with a discussion of

how researchers can ameliorate the negative consequences of emotional labour in their research and how institutions can support staff in their work. This is particularly important for early career researchers and when we think about the role of research in the context of the REF and other structural pressures which researchers face.

Key words

emotional labour, criminological researchers, emotions, empirical research

Introduction

Emotional labour is becoming increasingly recognised and utilised within the disciplines of criminology and criminal justice (as this book is a testament to). This chapter takes a 'peek behind the curtain' and looks at the emotional labour performed by the criminological researchers themselves. As is the case with all those engaged in empirical research, criminological researchers – particularly those who adopt a qualitative research design - are required to interact with other people as part of their research in order to gain and maintain access to the field of study as well engage in data collection. This inevitably results in the need to perform emotional labour in order to manage both their emotions and the emotions of their gatekeepers and participants. This is perhaps unsurprising given the nature of work, as is the fact that often such research requires criminological researchers to engage with vulnerable and sometimes dangerous populations and often in challenging environments. In spite of all of this, little research has been conducted in this area.

One of the reasons for this can be attributed to the way in which criminological research is structured as a 'social science' (Wakeman, 2014), and the historical masculinisation of the discipline (Wykes & Welsh, 2008). Furthermore, and arguably related to the masculinity of

the discipline, is the traditionally positivistic nature of criminology. As such, 'objectivity', 'restrained language', and 'methodology' are often seen as key to its rigour, and to the detriment of 'any form of biographical or emotional intrusion by the researcher' (Wakeman, 2014: 705 quoting Jewkes, 2011: 65). This, therefore, not only means that the researcher should not be present in the data, but also must stay silent about the emotional investment that they put into the research. As Jewkes (2012: 64) suggests, 'the academic environment arguably trains researchers to be rational and objective, to "extract out" emotion and not disclose feelings of anxiety, confusion, vulnerability, or anything of themselves'. As such, only a limited discussion of emotional labour in criminological research has been forthcoming. What little there is has primarily been in the area of prisons research and has led to the understanding that 'expressing, absorbing, and responding adequately to the expression of emotions in others, and handling it in oneself, can be among the most pressing challenges of prison researchers [both in terms of] our professional identities as well as our emotional wellbeing' (Liebling, 2014: 481, 483). It is therefore imperative that we understand not only the emotional labour undertaken by criminological researchers, but also the potential impact on their professional identity and wellbeing.

This chapter is divided into two parts. The first part is an overview of the existing literature around the emotional labour performed by researchers. We begin by looking at the emotional labour required to gain access to a field of study, before moving on to consider emotional labour in data collection, specifically looking at ethnography, autoethnography, and research interviews. We conclude this part by focusing on exiting the field, both temporarily and following the conclusion of research. The second part of the chapter provides a case study on emotional labour and criminological researchers, drawing on research conducted by the authors. We end the chapter by considering the implications for criminological researchers,

particularly those early on in their career and doctoral students, and providing some recommendations for going forward.

Gaining access to the field

In order to gain access to a research field, and therefore individuals within or linked to an organisation, it is generally necessary to contact gatekeepers, and negotiate access with those gatekeepers (Okumus et al., 2007; Patton, 2002; Shenton & Hayter, 2004). This process, while being crucial to the study is hard work and requires both strategy and luck (Van Maanen and Kolb, 1985). It rarely proceeds neatly nor predictably and almost always requires a variety of interpersonal skills in order to be effective (Burgess, 1984). Furthermore, where there is direct contact with gatekeepers, either face-to-face or on the phone this also involves the performance of emotional labour.

There remains little research in this area for criminology. However, there is, albeit limited, discussion of the emotional labour required in accessing the field more generally (Bergman Blix and Wettergren, 2014). Bergman Blix and Wettergren (2014) identify and explore the emotional labour researchers have to perform in order to build trust and rapport with gatekeepers in order to gain access to, secure and maintain that access. Their research focuses on the Swedish judiciary. Therefore they consider emotional labour required in relation particularly to elites, or 'researching up' as they describe it (2014: 689). The distinction between this and 'researching down' (ibid) is important given the different emotional labour required to undertake each type of research.

Emotional labour is analysed by Bergman Blix and Wettergren (2014) along three dimensions, and of particular relevance to maintaining access to the field is the first they discuss, strategic emotion work to access the field. Given the risks associated with being excluded from the field of study, researchers are required to quickly develop rapport with

gatekeepers. This requires engaging in preliminary work to understand the field of study in order to ensure a confident and trustworthy appearance, even where self-confidence might not be forthcoming, particular in the early stages of the project. As Bergman Blix and Wettergren (2014) suggest this necessitated surface acting, which also served to project understanding when actually the researchers were still working out what outward countenance was expected by gatekeepers. Once initial access had been gained, it was still necessary to engage in emotional labour in order to gain further access, and Bergman Blix describe how surface acting became deep acting as a result of the understanding that certain emotional displays proved successful.

Bergman Blix and Wettergren (2014) also talk about reflexivity in terms of gaining – and, for that matter, maintaining - access to the field and often involves a process of learning about their identity. This is because it requires researchers to place themselves in situations which they may not have chosen to be in outside the research. The consequences of this may be self-development, but inevitably requires the researcher to consider the distinction between their 'private' self and the 'professional researcher' they may become in the field (692).

In the field

Once a researcher has gained access, data collection begins. It could be argued that nearly all data collection methods will require some amount of emotional labour from the researcher, with a heavier burden generally falling on those using qualitative methods. The two which have had the most consideration and will be discussed here are research interviews, and ethnography/autoethnography.

Interviewing and emotional labour

The most commonly used form of qualitative data collection in the field of criminology has traditionally been interviews, with a heavy reliance on semi-structured interviews. However, the performance of emotional labour by criminological researchers during interviews has thus far received little attention. Although there is little writing on this in criminology we can look to related research areas where it is acknowledged that emotional labour is required in interviews and indeed that it can be challenging, not least because, as Hoffman suggests, 'decisions about what level of emotion and which emotions to share are very difficult' (2007, 339). This is particularly the case given the fact that while emotional labour is expected from researchers during interviews, the autonomous nature of their role (Lee Treweek, 2000) means there is little guidance on how to manage emotions both in relation to the researcher and participants. Moreover, as emotions in research are linked to a lack of scientific rigour, the suppression of emotion is often favoured (Kleinman, 1991; Bellas, 1999).

Nevertheless, emphasis has been placed on the need for researchers to display empathy during interviews, and particularly to be used as a tool to build relationships (Dickson-Swift et al, 2009), which is key to a successful interview. This is because it encourages trust leading to participants 'opening up' and discussing often sensitive issues (Hubbard et al, 2001). However, as a result of the autonomous nature of the researcher, there might be a lack of consensus in terms of the extent to which empathy should be displayed. For some, while the importance of displaying empathy is not to be underestimated, there is also the need to portray the 'competent detached researcher' (Fitzpatrick & Olsen, 2015: 52). In contrast, there may be those researchers whose empathic displays could result in them becoming 'part of the experience themselves' and displaying emotions similar to their participants (Dickson-Swift et al., 2009: 65).

This also raises the question of which emotions should be expressed by researchers, and which should be suppressed. Dickson-Swift et al. (2009: 65) comment on how some

researchers highlighted the importance of 'becoming emotionally open' so that they could connect with their participants on a personal level. While for others emotional displays such as crying would be considered inappropriate. Seear and McLean (2008) comment on how, for example, they felt it necessary to suppress emotional reactions because to display those emotions would result in losing or alienating their participants because it would be deemed to be unprofessional. They add that feelings were also suppressed as a result of being doctoral students, commenting that they felt accountable to their supervisors, as well as the institution and discipline more generally.

The suppression of emotion can lead to frustration in researchers and the need to release emotion after exiting the field (Dickman-Swift et al, 2009). Performing emotional labour can also resulted in feelings of guilt. This feeling of guilt is often linked to the notion of 'using' participants for qualitative data, and is not uncommon following interviews (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992: 112). Moreover, such feelings might be exacerbated by the expectation to display empathy. However, the display of empathy in particular can also foster further commitment from the researcher and the undertaking to give voice to participants taking part in the research (Emerald & Carpenter, 2015).

Ethnography (autoethnography) and emotional labour

Ethnography in the discipline of criminology is a relatively underused methodology. Only 10% of articles in US criminology and criminal justice journals make use of ethnographic methods. That said, there has been a recent growth in its use as a method of data collection, which has seen the publication of books such as *Doing Ethnography in Criminology* (Rice and Maltz, 2018) and the recently published *Criminological Ethnography: An Introduction* (Treadwell, 2019). A quick glance at the contents of *Doing Ethnography in Criminology* tells us that whilst ethnography is still relatively rare – certainly in comparison to surveys and

interviews - researchers have used ethnography to explore a broad range of topics such as courts, crime, drug dealing, prisons and the police. There are also examples of ethnography being used to research probation and women's experiences of being supervised (Harding, 2018), football hooligans (Poulton, 2014), and boy racer culture (Lumsden, 2009). A review of the literature also reveals a range of types of ethnography including overt, covert and autoethnography. Whilst much of the previously mentioned research was overt, Calvey (2018) identifies a range of settings in which covert ethnography has been used including police and prison culture, football hooliganism, recreational drug use and sexual deviance. Authoethnography has increasingly been used in criminology to reverse the 'ethnographic gaze' and thus problematise the ways in which criminology reifies objectivity and restrained language which, by necessity, excludes the researcher from the process of data generation and analysis. Thus, autoethnography in criminology seeks to consider the biography of the researcher and uses that biography as a heuristic device for exploring the phenomenon under consideration (Wakeman, 2014).

Therefore, ethnographic research in criminology has been used to explore different groups of people and criminal justice organisations although, interestingly, Copes et al. (2011) found that race and gender tended not to be specific units of analysis except where the focus is 'offender-based' ethnographic research. Despite ethnography being used less frequently than other methods, there is then a reasonable body of criminological literature which uses these methods to explore criminological phenomena.

Mirroring broader ethnographic work which recognises the emotional commitment required in ethnographic research there is an implicit assumption in much of this criminological work that ethnography requires the use of self. References to Goffman are abound and it is fair to say that there is a general recognition that emotions play a role in the generation, analysis and presentation of findings. In spite of this, there are only a handful of publications which

explicitly explore the emotional labour of doing ethnographic research. This is an important observation because, as we see in later chapters in this volume, face-to-face research will always involve the management of emotions. Moreover, ethnography demands the researcher to adopt multiple personae – sometimes simultaneously - such as participant, observer, researcher, expert and novice. Thus, it will - almost inherently - involve the management of emotion in order to achieve the goals of the job being undertaken by the researcher.

There is inherent role conflict in any ethnographic research. Moreover, there is a combination of implicit and explicit feeling rules at play all of which guide the ways in which emotions should be used. Thus some display rules are formalised in codes of ethics and health and safety guides for researchers, whilst implicit rules that researchers learn through experience, contact with other colleagues and rules which are underpinned by their own theoretical and political standpoint will also dictate the appropriate and inappropriate display of emotion. There is also no getting away from the fact in today's HE context, research is considered a key part of the job and academics do research not only for the normative justification of making a contributing to knowledge but also to meet personal and institutional goals such as publishing in high quality journals, gaining external funding, obtaining promotion/tenure and, in the UK context the Research Excellence Framework and demonstrating impact. There are, thus, a range of feeling rules - both explicit and implicit - which guide ethnographers' emotional labour during fieldwork and beyond.

Interestingly, much of the writing on the emotional labour of ethnography comes out of an ethnographic study that was exploring something else rather than being the product of a study in its own right. This is something which we hope to address in our own work on the emotional labour of criminological research which we discuss in more detail below. Even though this body of literature is small, some interesting themes emerge in terms of the

emotions that require managing in ethnographic research as well as the implications of it for the researcher.

Jewkes (2012: 69) highlights the fact that,

> introspection, anxiety, vulnerability, and trauma are present—if generally downplayed—in much prison research, positive emotional experiences are equally under discussed. As previously noted, the fact that prison research can be an ordeal has been documented by a handful of, mostly female, ethnographers. But prisons can also be stimulating, exhilarating, and curiously life-affirming environments in which to do qualitative research, and emotional identification with prisoners and prison staff, like all research participants, is often a positive and powerful stimulus in the formulation of knowledge.

Whilst more autoethnographic in nature, Jewkes makes a strong case for seeing researchers' emotional responses to a research situation as something which are 'subjective judgments about objective experiential worlds' in much the same way that our interpretivist forms of thematic analysis are subjective understandings of someone else's reality. Indeed, Phillips and Earle's (2010) account of fieldwork in prisons sheds important light on how the emotional reaction of a researcher is key to understanding the generation of data - thus, the way in which ethnographers manage their emotions is likely to result in data that takes on a particular shape. As an example, they describe an emotional reaction to a skinhead participant which 'conflicted directly with professional principles of resisting judgment of research subjects' attitudes and behaviour' (Phillips and Earle 2010: 368). In a rare explicit engagement with the emotions of doing criminological - and specifically prison - research Drake and Harvey (2014: 490) describe prison ethnography as 'emotionally exacting' and argue that prison ethnography will involve 'significant levels of impression management'.

This, they argue has an affective toll on the researcher which emanates from having to negotiate and re-negotiate access on a daily basis which, in turn, accounts for some of the emotional demand of prison research because this rests on having to constantly gain and regain trust from gatekeepers. They also discuss 'role strain' which is critical to prison research whereby researchers must adopt a range of 'virtual identities' and engage in impression management in a constantly changing set of contexts (Drake and Harvey, 2014: 494). A final emotion associated with this type of research is that of 'meaninglessness and fragmentation' whereby they would experience a sense of their own weakened identity and, as we have found in our own research, a tension between feeling like mere 'receptacles and sponges for other people's pain and suffering' and a sense of mastery on the other (that we were really 'getting' the prison environment)' which led to what might be described as a form of existential crisis (Drake and Harvey, 2014: 496).

The attentive reader will have noticed that much of writing on the emotional toll of doing criminological ethnographic work has been based on prison research. This is, perhaps, unsurprising considering that institution's relatively long history as the subject of such analysis (going back to Goffman) as well as the idea that prisons are 'special places'. Literature which explores the emotional labour in non-custodial settings are much less common. Harding's (2019) reflection on the emotional labour of doing research with people on probation is a rare example of this. Again, her work is more autoethnographic in nature but nevertheless highlights some of the ways in which this type of research demands certain emotional displays. Harding (2019) highlights the 'messy' nature of her research and uses the concept of 'emotional moments' to elucidate the untold stories of her participants. For Harding, her emotions and the process of suppressing and displaying emotion were critical to the way in which she 'generated data'.

Harding's analysis is underpinned by both an autoethnographic but also gendered analysis. Interestingly, despite Copes et al. (2011) suggesting that gender plays a relatively minor role in criminological ethnography except those which deal with specific groups of offenders, much of the writing on the emotional labour of doing ethnographic work does take a gendered perspective. Poulton (2012, 2014) reflects on her role as a female academic who was engaging with the overwhelmingly male and masculine world of football hooliganism. In one example she loses her well-earned rapport with a key informant and employs a series of impression management techniques to get him back on board. This involved the extensive use of emotion such as humility, ego-massaging and 'apologetic manner' and the situation was resolved resulting in a sense of pride for the researcher. Poulton describes the experience as 'emotionally exhausting' and involved her having to 'compromise some of my personal principles and manage my normal expressive behaviour to preserve what I now knew was a very precarious professional relationship' (2012: 5.8). Because ethnography depends on good relations, it might be expected that this type of emotional labour would be relatively common to this particular methodology.

For Poulton this needed to be understood in terms of the gender dynamic between herself and her informant, but the inherently relational aspect of ethnography underpins much of the writing on emotional labour in ethnography. For example, Copes (2018) describes how, in the course of conducting research with drug dealers and users in the US he had to become more open with emotions and engage in more 'emotionally open' to participants through a greater use of deep acting. This, he argues, allowed him to collect more meaningful data than he otherwise would have.

Exiting the field

Gobo and Molle (2017) explain that in ethnography there are various rituals to start research and live in the field but very little about how to disengage. They argue that disengagement from the field is both a methodological and a emotional problem, as the ethnographer must devise an exit strategy. This is significant to avoid ‘burning’ the field (Gobo and Molle 2017) for future researchers and also if the researcher returns to the field. Moreover, our own findings from interviews with criminological researchers suggests the regular 'exiting' and 'returning' during ethnographic fieldwork or when completing qualitative interviews in a challenging context requires further consideration. As we see in the chapters of this book and from our own research, researchers are aware of the intensity of the emotional experience, however, there is a temptation to dismiss examining feelings as: (i) distracting from the subject matter (ii) trumped by the traumatic experience of the participant and too self-indulgent. We would argue, however, that the intensity and duration of the research needs to be acknowledged as part of the performance of emotional labour (Morris and Feldman 1996). Such an approach would be helpful in supporting researchers to devise coping strategies and consider approaches for exiting and returning to the field.

A final reflection is whether it is possible to disengage from the field following the emotional impact of work undertaken by researchers. A helpful distinction here is Gobo and Molle’s (2017) proposal to consider institutional, interpersonal and intrapersonal reasons for exiting the field. The former might be the end of funding whilst the latter two can be related to emotional labour. Interpersonal reasons for ending research might be, for example, conflict between the role of researcher and parent. Intrapersonal reasons, on the other hand, might include mental exhaustion from being on stage and having to perform. Gobo and Molle (2017) then list some of the emotional consequences, for example: the development of close relationships with participants; indebtedness, when leaving feels like a betrayal (which can be intensified if participants experience social deprivation or hardship) and even relief following

tiresome relationships. It is suggested that these emotional consequences need to be acknowledged in the development of an exit strategy.

In criminological research there is evidence of these considerations, for example, in Sloan's prison ethnography considering men and masculinities, in which she reflects on when to leave the field (2016, p. 30) citing King and Liebling's (2008) maxim to discontinue research 'once compassion fatigue sets in.' In Ellis's ethnographic study of violent men and masculinities (2016) he talks about the emotional consequences during and after the field work when he experiences poor sleep, paranoia and guilt about exploiting people who had welcomed him into their homes. Moreover, Ellis (2016: 16) describes feeling guilt about how he actually had the choice to 'exit' the 'drudgeries, various difficulties and potential threats' when those he met did not have the same option. It could be argued that these both strongly relate to intrapersonal and interpersonal reasons for exiting the field.

Both Sloan (2016) and Ellis (2016) refer to the emotional costs during and at the end of their ethnographic research. A further consideration is the regular exiting and returning to fieldwork to complete qualitative research interviews. Whilst conducting qualitative semi-structured interviews with sex offenders Blagdon and Pemberton (2010) explain how they always close their interview with a positive, focusing on the participant's hopes and future plans. Further to this they explain how they debrief participants, thanking them for their time, offering reassurance about data management and signposting them to support services. Cowburn (2005) and Blagdon and Pemberton (2010) also mention that informed consent is an ongoing process when returning to interview a participant and should be continually checked. Cowburn (2005) suggests that the boundaries of confidentiality should be checked at the start of each day when conducting in-depth interviews with people who have committed sexual offences. When exiting and returning to interviews being aware of the potential harm caused by the interview, a positive end, praise, reassurance and continual

checking of informed consent form aspects of the emotional labour performed as part of ethical considerations in qualitative research. In ethnographic research Gobo and Molle (2017) consider returning to the field and how a positive relationship may be discussed, how you will stay in touch or reconnect following the development of work products. They make suggestions of giving a card or photograph and expressing feelings about the good parts of the project to participants.

We should note that the emotional consequences of the work do not always allow for a full withdrawal from the field. Ellis, later in this book, alludes to this issue by suggesting that one can physically leave the field, whereas it may be more difficult to emotionally disentangle from the experience. Whilst Gobo and Molle consider disengagement and return to the field, Watts (2008) questions whether anyone truly leaves the field due the emotional consequences of the fieldwork. Indeed, Drake and Harvey (2014) argue that some emotions can be examined in situ to alleviate emotional pressure and that the emotional dimensions of the research need to be revisited after some distance from the work through structured reflection. In our research with criminological researchers we see examples of the enduring emotional impact of the research. This involves disclosures about how our participants severed their ties with the field of research for interpersonal reasons, experiencing permanent change in their world view (both positive and negative) and citing intrapersonal reasons around looking after their mental health. Therefore, to describe leaving the field for good could be misleading when we consider the performance of emotional labour in qualitative criminological research.

Case study: emotional labour and criminological researchers

Thus far we have argued that there has been very little research explicitly exploring and documenting the emotional labour undertaken by criminological researchers. In attempt to address this dearth of literature we have investigated the experiences of criminological

researchers in order to create a better understanding of the emotional labour they perform. The aim of the research was to bring to light both the emotions felt and the emotional labour employed by criminological researchers in the fieldwork they undertake.

Thirty semi-structured interviews were conducted with researchers who either self-identified as 'criminologists' or identified their research as 'criminological'. Participants self-selected into the study having heard about the project via Twitter, academic conferences, or word-of-mouth. Interviews lasted approximately one hour, were conducted either in person or via online telephony, and were audio recorded for accuracy. They were then transcribed verbatim for analysis. The research was conducted ethically and in accordance with ethical protocols. All participants provided informed consent and were assigned a pseudonym to protect their privacy and assure confidentiality. The research team also took special care to anonymise identifiable pieces of research carried out by participants.

Overall our sample consisted of twenty-four women (80%) and six men aged between 23 and 52 years (mean age of 35.3 years). All participants were based in the United Kingdom and were predominantly white (90%): nineteen (63%) were 'White British', three (10%) were 'White Irish', five were (17%) 'White Other'. Two (7%) participants identified their ethnicity as 'Mixed'. Our researchers were at various stages of their academic careers and had varied educational backgrounds: three held masters degrees as their highest qualification, twelve were working towards their PhDs, and fifteen had completed their doctorates.

A thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006) of the transcribed interviews was carried out and a number of themes identified. The remainder of this chapter will develop some of these, focusing on the emotional labour performed, the consequences of that performance, and how our researchers coped with those consequences.

Emotion labour performed

The criminological researchers we interviewed were keen to discuss the emotions they experienced. They described facing and processing a variety of emotions throughout all stages of the research process, with the most common being during data collection, data analysis and writing-up. Positive emotions identified by the participants included feelings of gratitude, humility, responsibility, and sympathy:

> I felt really grateful as well […] interesting to feel grateful to your participants for their participation. (Sofia)

> I was aware it was quite shocking but if anything it just made me thankful for the life I have had […] It just made me very thankful and very humble for what I had. (Zoe)

Negative emotions included sadness, grief, depression, vulnerability, anger, frustration and disgust:

> I found that very difficult and I found it hard, because on the one hand what they were telling me was evoking quite profound anger in me and on the other hand it was provoking quite a lot of sadness, it was provoking some very kind of turbulent and tumultuous kinds of feelings of resentment, of anger, of hurt, of sadness for the experiences. (Mark)

Researchers also dealt with high levels of guilt around their research and their research participants:

> I don't think that I will ever really be free of guilt because [...] is still struggling so much and you can't help but feel a little bit helpless about that and I think the more I research [...] the more I understand that, so there is not really any way to

> soothe that and I don't really think that that's a bad thing as such, I don't think that I need to kind of shy away from that emotion. (Natalie)

Other common emotions comprised imposter syndrome, a wariness of showing emotion or uncertainty about what level of emotion to show. This final point leads us to explore empathy and suppression as emotional labour in greater detail.

Empathy as emotional labour

In terms of the emotional labour expected of our researchers; one of the most referenced was that of empathy. In line with the previous literature on emotional labour and qualitative researchers (Fitzpatrick & Olsen, 2015; Dickson-Swift et al, 2009) the criminological researchers we interviewed, whilst highlighting the importance of empathy did not necessarily agree on how empathy should be displayed to participants.

> On my part empathy really. I tried very much to give them space to express themselves and not allow my emotions to affect their stories that they were sharing with me…So it's negotiating that process of being sympathetic but not trying to move on or trying to over..., [pause] or not trying to affect their story. (Grainne)

Grainne clearly believes that the empathy displayed needed to be controlled. Dickson-Swift et al. (2009) link this controlling of empathy, and the subsequent suppression of inappropriate emotion, to the rigour of the research method being used, and the consequent questioning of the trustworthiness of the research. However, for Grainne, while it may be an underlying concern, it is not articulated in this way. Rather for her it is about allowing those being interviewed to be placed at the centre of the interview.

In contrast, Trina and Sandra describe a very different understanding of empathy, something more akin to sympathy:

> Showing as much empathy as you can…So very much validating each story…I've hugged quite a few participants and shed tears in a couple of interviews where I felt it was appropriate. (Trina)

> I am not embarrassed to say that on more than one occasion I've had tears dripping down my face while I've been speaking to women… I think it really helped the women to see me emotional because they knew I…understood, probably, and recognised the weight of what they were telling me and how important it was to them. So I think if I had sat there as a blank slate I don't think my interviews would be anywhere near as rich as they are, at all. (Sandra)

Both Trina and Sandra highlight the appropriateness of displaying empathy in this way. Furthermore, Sandra makes a direct link between her emotional displays of empathy and respect for the participant's stories. It is also seen as intrinsic to the development of the relationship and consequently the richness of the data gathered.

Suppression as emotional labour

The suppression of emotion was a strong theme that came out of the interviews. Participants highlighted a variety of reasons why they needed to suppress emotions. Nicki presents interesting commentary on the potential insecurity and vulnerability of criminological researchers:

> I think probably not masking them but probably didn't show - I definitely would try not to show any extreme emotion during the interview. Certainly not anything

> like nervousness or my personal worries. I would just try and mask those and come across really positive and friendly. (Nicki)

However, it is clear that the negative emotions of nervousness and worry need to be 'masked' in favour of presenting positive emotions. This type of emotional labour therefore requires surface acting, the suppression of one emotion in favour of the display of another (Hochschild, 1983).

Susan and Emily describe a different situation where the suppression of emotion is required:

> I've also had judgement, like so working, doing research groups with sex offenders, really, really difficult, like to set aside feelings of absolute disgust and horror. (Susan)

> ...when someone's telling you something that's emotional and you get emotional that's probably not necessarily going to be great for them. If they're telling you something and your primary emotional response is like, 'Wow, that's bad', again, you don't want that look to come on you face and them to feel judged. (Emily)

There is an understanding that it is important not to display any negative emotion relating to, for example, an offence that has been committed in the past. The suppression of this type of emotion is considered important in order to develop and maintain trust and confidence. This form of emotional labour resonates particularly with the suppression of emotions such as shock and disgust highlighted, for example, by probation practitioners in their everyday work with clients (Westaby et al., 2019).

Consequences of performing emotional labour

The emotional labour performed while conducting their research impacted our researchers in a variety of ways. Five of the key consequences will be discussed: resilience, responsibility, emotional overload, feeling unsupported and isolation.

Resilience is seen as moving from ‘something that is happening to them’ to starting to look for or creating the networks to move them to a different place in their ability to cope. This is in response to the negative emotions of guilt, anger, frustration, disgust, sadness, empathy. It challenges the ‘emotionalness’ that is sometimes expected while doing research.

> I love the field that I work in but I expect anything and everything now, so I can kind of take it with a pinch of salt, have some resilience as to what I hear and balance that in a way that won't affect me and my emotions too much I guess [...] Everyone's story that you hear are very different but the more different experiences that people share with you the more the resilience has built up for me in some sense. (Rose)

Secondly, our criminological researchers felt a strong responsibility in wanting to do their research justice and give a voice to their participants. They also found this positive responsibility motivated them to be more productive in their writing and other outputs:

> I want to help people individually because I had horrible feelings of guilt…I can't help the women because I know that's unprofessional…but what I can do…is bring that information into the light…into the kind of public awareness. (Trudy)

> Well I feel like I've helped people sometimes and I feel like - like I said, on a professional level I think sometimes the stuff that I can get from people really helps and I've got some really good projects where reports that have been generated through peer research as evidence have affected commissioning. I've

> seen like real changes in services for people as a consequence. So that makes me really proud and makes me want to carry on doing it. (Susan)

Responsibility could also be negative in that researchers felt like they were not doing enough and not doing justice to their participants. This consequence linked to feelings of guilt and gratitude.

The third consequence was emotional overload, or as described by one participant as an 'emotional hangover' (Lindsey). This, along with emotional exhaustion, depression, spillover, desensitisation, or burnout, were experienced by many of our participants as well as those in Dickson-Swift-et al's (2006) research who had experienced both physical and mental symptoms including insomnia, nightmares, exhaustion, depression, headaches, and gastrointestinal problems as well as emotional stress and difficulties which affected relationships outside the field. Watt (2008) too points to the potential for emotion deluge and fatigue linked to feelings of guilt, sadness, grief, responsibility, anger, frustration, sympathy, and disgust. This emotional overload often 'bled' into other aspects of their lives, sometimes linked to altered identity, nightmares and insomnia:

> [I felt a] bit of guilt, that small aspects of exploitation…research to get these people to tell their hard story and then we go and get a career from it. That I struggle with sometimes. (Trina)

Fourthly, researchers often felt unsupported by institutions and supervisory teams. This included no appreciation of the emotions they were experiencing and the emotional labour they were performing, and a lack of training and practical support:

> I guess it's about the importance of anonymity…and how long you're going to keep someone's data…and much less focus on actual, the messiness of human

> interaction…So on the whole, I would say I think that universities are quite bad at anything to do with emotional competency training. (Emma)

Not having official institutional support in part compounded the sensation of imposter syndrome, including feeling out of one's depth and outside of one's areas of knowledge. This lack of support was connected with feelings of grief, depression, trauma, disgust, isolation, and not wanting to appear 'weak' or vulnerable':

> I wasn't aware of the boundaries or the limit I could reveal sensitive information without affecting my relationship with my supervisors and colleagues. (Elena)

> It always felt a bit self-indulgent to me to talk about our own emotions. Like the people who were the subject of the research were going through such horrendous periods of their life. They had just been in prison, they had come out, lots of them had been split up from their families and so they were going through the mental agony of staying in a hostel overnight when they had kids and a family back home. It felt really indulgent to be wanting to talk about my own emotions. (Tom)

> ...just checked in every now and again [with a prison psychologist] because she was really busy [...] they were all so busy and I don't want to be a burden to anyone. That term we always hear, 'I don't want to be a burden'. (Amy)

> At the same time as well like I was also aware that I didn't want to make a really bad impression and you would think about saying, 'I'm having a really difficult time with this' about being a bad impression you're making on someone…when she's writing a reference for me. (Aoife)

The final consequence of emotional labour in research is, perhaps, the culmination of feeling unsupported and emotional overloaded: isolation. Misconceptions around confidentiality and

self-imposed isolation meant that, as can be seen above, many researchers felt they were not able to offload emotionally: ‘I can’t talk about this, it’s confidential’ was a common theme. There are also issues around a lack of self-care: ‘I don’t deserve to be looked after’, ‘I don’t want to bother people’, and ‘I can't be seen to be weak’.

Coping strategies

In order to deal with the consequences of the emotional labour performed our participants engaged a number of coping strategies. These can be roughly organised into six non-mutually exclusive approaches: self-care, escapism, communities of coping, space creation, rituals, and doing justice.

Many of the criminological researchers we interviewed described engaging in self-care with examples including taking a shower, changing clothes, reading, swimming, reflective writing, going to the gym, talking to a partner, and having a counsellor or clinical supervision:

> I try and have a bath or a shower and change my clothes, just sort of do some sort of mental closure…I think it just creates a sense of its over, like the connectivity with that person, you've moved on past it. So whether it's symbolic or whether it's real at some vibes level I don’t know, do you know what I mean, but that's the technique that I do. (Susan)

Wray et al. (2007) note that ordinary daily routines can have therapeutic value for qualitative researchers. It is therefore important to openly discuss simple self-care strategies which can aid in reducing the stress and anxiety resulting from performing emotional labour. However, Wray et al. (2007: 1399) also note that this did not always have the desired effect of remaining 'connected to our data without living in a fused state' particularly where researchers were less experienced. Therefore, as James and Platzer (1999: 76) maintain, 'self-

care is crucial, but where there is considerable emotional labor involved in research interviews [and for us other forms of qualitative research] we suggest that there is a requirement for formal supervision, not only of the academic, but also of the therapeutic kind'.

Common examples of escapism were alcohol, trash TV, violent video games, or any other activities that would give mental and physical space. One particular way of escaping the negative emotional consequences of performing emotional labour reported by the criminological researchers in our study was the consumption of alcohol. While engaging in such an activity, some commented on it being a rather unhealthy coping mechanism. As Natalie maintains, 'I would go out and drink too much, so I would describe that as a dysfunctional response'. However, interestingly, for a couple of participants when drinking was combined with social interaction with colleagues this was regarded as a form of self-care:

> So we would spend a lot of time in the pub afterwards, in the evenings, pretty much every evening would involve a degree of drinking and sometimes quite a lot of drinking and just talking through stuff…I wouldn't say they were deliberate choices or particularly around managing emotions, but incidentally they may well have helped manage emotions, if that makes sense. (Richie)

Arguably, the difference between the two quotes is the social interaction in the second example, in contrast to drinking alone, which was the case for Natalie. The latter therefore could be regarded as a form of a community of coping.

Indeed, such communities of coping (Korczynski, 2003) were often described by our participants as a way of dealing with the emotional challenges of engaging in qualitative research:

> There is a sense of solidarity I suppose isn't there with people who just know what interviews are like and who know what it's like to turn up at somebody's house and its 10am and they've already finished a bottle of wine and offering you some…Yeah so it that was useful to have the [postgraduate] resources in the form of people to offload onto. (Raegan)

These informal groups are important given the fact that there is a tendency for workers to cope 'communally and socially' (Korczynski, 2003: 58) with the potentially negative consequences of having to perform emotional labour. As Wincup (2001: 29) suggests, peer discussion 'can provide reassurance and helps to overcome feelings of isolation by recognising your own emotional experiences are not unique'.

The remaining three coping strategies are

1. Space creation. These are the explicit ways that researchers can create more 'head room' or separation between work and home life. Examples include taking time while commuting to and from work, travelling to and from data collection sites, taking a break from the subject area by engaging in other activities (see also escapism).
2. Rituals. In particular our researchers engaged in shedding rituals. These rituals often incorporated elements of self-care, escapism, and space creation.
3. 'Doing justice'. As mentioned above and interconnected throughout, our researchers had a desire to 'do right' by their participants. Examples of this included capturing participant's voices, writing and presenting their data, and activism.

Overall, our research has explored the experiences of thirty criminological researchers in terms of the emotional labour they perform as part of their empirical qualitative research activities, the consequences of that performance, and their coping strategies. Feelings of guilt, gratitude, humility, responsibility, sadness, grief, depression, anger, frustration, disgust, and

imposter syndrome were all felt by our researchers. The emotional labour of empathy and suppression was also keenly articulated by our researchers. The consequences of these performances were increased resilience and responsibility, emotional overload, and feeling unsupported and isolated. In response to this, our researchers exhibited a number of coping strategies including self-care, escapism, space creation, rituals, 'doing justice' and communities of coping. Going forward, our researchers felt that more training and support to deal with the emotional labour of research was needed, especially for doctoral students and early career researchers.

Conclusion and recommendations

There are a number of cross-cutting themes evident from both the review of the literature and the case study around power, gender, reflexivity, training and support which highlight the particular issues that arise from conducting *criminological* research. Issues around power and the power dynamic amongst researchers themselves and between researchers and their participants are evident across both the extant literature and the case study. Amongst the researchers, there are noted power issues between doctoral students and supervisory teams, between principal investigators (PIs) and the rest of the research team, and between more junior and more senior researchers. This power dynamic manifests itself in feelings of inadequacy, imposter syndrome and emotional suppression, which in turn lead to feeling unsupported and isolated, and experiencing emotional overload. Many researchers dealt with this by establishing communities of coping and engaging in escapism. Between researchers and participants this is reflected in the huge feeling of guilt and worries about taking advantage of their participants. This lead to an increased sense of responsibility to their participants, many researchers discussed 'doing justice' for their participants as a way of coping and alleviating some of the guilt and perceived power differential. Gender was seen to exacerbate the above power dynamic, particularly as female researchers tend to hold more

junior positions (student, early careers, research assistant, etc.) and male researchers tend to hold more senior positions (PI, reader, professor, etc.).

The need for greater reflexivity during the research process was also identified as a cross-cutting theme. This is reflexivity *in situ* to use emotional responses as analytical data, to monitor the influence of your own emotional responses in the research and for self-care to recognise the emotional cost of the research experience. Moreover, after some distance from the research to make sense of the experience for methodological insight. In training, institutions should pay attention to the performance of emotional labour by researchers facilitating discussions about what emotions might be displayed by researchers and to what degree they should be used in research. Further to this, the researchers should be encouraged to reflect on their own knowledge and experiences, how this influences their approach to the research, their coping strategies and the emotional cost of the research (to themselves, the gatekeepers and the participants).

The lack of adequate training and support for criminological researchers, particularly for those in the early stages of their careers, was universally noted. This was in relation to both both formal or institutional training and support, as well as more informal training and support. It is not an exaggeration to say that all the criminological researchers who participated in our study at some point during their interview discussed the lack of emotional support provided by their institutions. For those of our participants who then found themselves in the position of 'supervisor' or 'PI', many made the explicit effort to put support mechanisms in place for those researchers they were responsible for. Our participants spoke about how they learned through their own primary research experiences the importance of being able to access proper emotional support throughout the research process. For them there was no need to 'learn the hard way'.

From the existing literature and our research we would make five recommendations to help researchers cope with the consequences of performing emotional labour and therefore improve their research experience.

1. Address and improve the culture within the criminology community to allow for emotions and emotional labour and their consequences to be openly and critically discussed. Of the key issues raised by our researchers is why the same formal and informal support systems that exist for other professions who perform 'emotional labour', such as psychology or counselling (Brannen, 1988), do not exist within criminological research practice (Letherby, 2003:113). While the vicarious trauma that psychological professionals can suffer has been widely recognised (McCann and Pearlman, 1990), social researchers also experience vicarious trauma. Yet there is an eerie silence in the social sciences about this, as well as about ways of managing the emotional labour necessary to ensure qualitative data collection with participants is successful. Adeptly put by Trina, 'how important it would be for PhD students but also for research teams to have institutional support and that there should be built a culture around that, where it should not be seen as a weakness'.
2. There needs to be more training provided at all levels around emotions and emotional labour. This training should be aimed not only at doctoral students and early career researchers but also supervisors and PIs so that they are better able to support researchers who they are responsible for. Areas for training should include planning emotional wellbeing into research projects, the acknowledgment and mechanisms of self-care, asking for help and accessing support, acknowledging and performing emotional labour, understanding how are emotions used in research, etc. Academic institutions should also learn from the third sector, where training around the use of emotion and emotional labour are employed to a greater degree.

3. Institutional ethical approval forms should have a section for reflecting on the potential emotional impact of the research on the researcher(s). The emotional wellbeing of the researcher(s) conducting research should be considered of equal importance to their physical safety and to the physical and psychological safety of their participants. Equally this should not become an administrative burden nor be used as a way to prevent certain types of research or researchers.
4. Clinical supervision should be recommended in emotionally high risk pieces of research, and encouraged to any researcher(s) who may benefit from it. Research might be considered to be emotionally high risk due to either the research subject, environment or participants, or the needs of the researcher themselves.
5. The creation of formal and informal support networks and communities of coping. As different researchers will need different types and levels of support at different times it is important that a variety of support options are available. Potential support networks could include mentoring schemes or 'buddy' programmes, social media groups, walking groups, pub nights, etc.

Acknowledging and starting to address these recommendations is a good first step in improving the quality of criminological research and the quality of life for criminological researchers. These recommendations will have a more substantial impact on our students and early career researchers, making for better doctoral experiences and a better introduction to the academy more generally.

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