The Role of Emotions in Fieldwork: A Self-Study of Family Research in a Corrections Setting

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In this study, we document a reflexive process via bracketing techniques and the development of a conceptual map in order to better understand how emotions that arise in the field can inform research design, implementation, and results. We conducted a content analysis of field notes written by a team of researchers who administered an interview to caregivers bringing children to visit an incarcerated family member at a local jail. Our self-examination revealed themes around the team's discomfort connected to the institutional jail setting and intense emotions regarding the life situations of study participants, their treatment by jail staff, and our own concerns about leaving the research setting. We offer recommendations for scholars conducting research in similar environments with vulnerable participants. Key Words: Corrections, Emotions, Fieldwork, Qualitative Research, Reflexivity, and Self-Study

Introduction

Prisons and jails are by definition closed environments that pose special challenges for researchers (Byrne, 2005; Hart, 1995). These challenges can be ethical, in terms of ensuring the adequate protection of a vulnerable class of human subjects in the case of studying prisoners, as well as pragmatic relative to adapting to the institutional restrictions of correctional settings (Quina, Varna Garis, Stevenson, Garrido, Brown, Richman, et al., 2007). Typically, human subjects Institutional Review Board (IRB) processes and informed consent procedures are quite rigorous in prison and jail based research due to concerns about coercion and incarcerated persons' limited capacity for voluntary informed consent (Moser, Arndt, Kanz, Benjamin, Baylees, Reese, et al., 2004). For example, researchers must obtain additional human subjects' permission (beyond their respective universities) from state or federal agencies responsible for the oversight of a particular system of jails and prisons and gain the cooperation of the facility itself. Subsequently, researchers are subject to the regulations of a particular

facility which generally involves surrendering certain personal rights they may enjoy on the outside (e.g., security search prior to entering, movement restrictions).

Here we extend the discourse on research in corrections settings to focus more fully on the experience of the researcher in terms of how gaining access and spending time in a relatively closed environment is deeply affecting. Academic and corrections systems are quite distinct. The punitive and restrictive environment within the custody and control mission of the correctional system clashes with the environment of open inquiry associated with the research mission of the university system (Byrne, 2005). These differences necessitate adaptations on the part of the researchers in order to work in corrections settings and comply with multiple regulations (Quina et al., 2007). Such adaptations can include not utilizing videotapes, audiotape or computer assisted technology in data collection, or being precluded from compensating participants due to prison or jail policy. Despite the many challenges inherent in conducting research in a corrections setting, the process can be a transformative learning experience (cf., Quina et al.). We contend that a central mechanism of this transformation involves researchers' intense emotional responses to the often uninviting environmental conditions of prisons and jails, the sense of restrictiveness and loss of privilege that comes with entering the setting and being subject to prison rules, and the intimate proximity of the researcher and the researched inherent in fieldwork. This last point is particularly important because as the distance between researchers and participants is dissolved, *their experience becomes our experience* catalyzing very real and profound emotions. In this paper, we seek to further explore the ways in which fieldwork in a jail setting was transformative and how a shift in experience can ultimately transform scholarship examining prisoners and their family members. We do this via qualitative content analysis of our field notes which were written while conducting interviews and participant observation of caregivers with children who were visiting an incarcerated family member at a local jail.

The Context of our Fieldwork: The Visitation Waiting Room

In discussing our emotional experience in the jail setting, as well as articulating elements of our transformation as researchers, it is essential to first specify the context of the imprisoned, and more specifically visitation areas. Suffice it to say that both the incarcerated person, who is under "state control," and his or her family, are embedded in a broad sociocultural network that stigmatizes imprisonment (Braman, 2004; Davies, 1980). Stigma intensifies the possibility of risk and has unique disruptive effects for the parents themselves, as well as their family members because of the demoralization and social isolation that comes with the prison experience (Golden, 2005; Lowenstein, 1986; Western & McLanahan, 2000). The stigma and risk associated with imprisonment translates to the environmental conditions and institutional practices associated with prison and jail visitation (Arditti, 2005; Comfort, 2008). Visitation rooms clearly are settings which have "coercive influences on behavior" (Scott, 2005, p. 297) given sparse resources, constrained and uninviting environmental characteristics, and explicit and enforced restrictions regarding movement, physical contact, and social interaction (Arditti, 2003; Comfort; Hairston, 1998). Inmate parents and their family members often have to withstand a lack of privacy, tedious and lengthy waits, humiliation and rude treatment by correctional officers, visiting and or waiting to visit in crowded, noisy, and

dirty facilities (Arditti, Lambert-Shute, & Joest, 2003; Comfort; Hairston). Prohibitive physical and social processes associated with visitation may thus undermine any therapeutic value and create uncertainty and distress for the inmate parent, intimate others, and their children. Visitation can connect with loss-related trauma, painful feelings, and expose both offender and family members to a risk situation fraught with difficulties (Arditti, 2003; Arditti & Few, 2008; Arditti, Smock, & Parkman, 2005; Sack & Siedler, 1978).

A Qualitative Consciousnesss

Given the often prohibitive and stigmatized context of prison and jail settings, and in particular the difficulties associated with visitation, Arditti, Acock, and Day (2005) discuss the need to bring a qualitative consciousness to the study of marginalized populations impacted by incarceration. Implicit in such an approach is the exposure of disadvantage and oppression and "preserving the perspective of those whose human experience is being studied" (Byrne, 2005, p. 226). Byrne articulates a similar idea by arguing for the importance of maintaining an ethnographic orientation within prison settings. Such an orientation is characterized by data collection and interpretation that is respectful of study participants who are not only knowledgeable about their own perspective but can often "speak for the group" (p. 226). Features of a qualitative consciousness broadly involve creating a trusting presence in the setting, equalizing power between the researcher and the researched, and exposing the "unavoidable place of values in scholarship" (Arditti, Acock, et al., 2005, p. 354).

Beyond the value of allowing participants to tell their story, a qualitative consciousness also requires researchers to reflect politically and possibly view their own lives differently as a result of the research experience (cf., Fonow & Cook's [1991] discussion of emancipatory knowledge). Political awareness and perhaps discomfort may arise because a qualitative consciousness often involves the exposure of disadvantage and oppression (cf., Few, Stephens, & Rouse-Arnett, 2003), facets of experience arguably characterizing many families impacted by incarceration (Foster & Hagan, 2007; Western, 2006). In preserving the participants' experience and perspective, researchers may very likely come face to face with strong emotions—their own as well as participants' emotions. As stories of loss and perceived injustice unfold among the researched, the researcher must on some level share the pains of imprisonment (cf., Sykes, 1958) to remain conscious in the sense that Arditti, Acock, et al. (2005) and Byrne (2005) articulate. These pains encompass the corresponding deprivations, psychological suffering, and frustrations that come with incarceration (Haney, 2002).

We contend that researcher emotions such as sadness and anger may be unavoidable in prison and jail settings. Indeed, Quina and associates (2007), in describing their experience conducting research in a women's prison, claim that "trauma is inherent in corrections research" (p. 127) for all parties involved: the offender in confinement, the families and friends of the offender, and the researchers studying offenders and their kin. Clearly the incarcerated are multiply traumatized from their past life experiences and their time in the prison environment (Byrne, 2005; Haney, 2002). Additionally, the children and families connected with the offender are traumatized -- mourning losses, experiencing relationships disruptions, and dealing with incarcerated

related stressors (cf., Arditti, 2005 for a review; Byrne). Our concern here pertains to the researchers entering the prison or jail setting from the outside world of academia; it is likely they too may be "frightened and disturbed" (Quina et al., pp. 127-128) by the setting and the experiences they would learn about as part of the research process. Per Jaggar (1989), we were in a setting replete with the conditions that would give rise to outlaw emotions, conventionally unacceptable and intense feelings that often provide the first indication that something may be wrong (Ferrell, 2005).

A qualitative consciousness implies that emotions emerging in the field serve to strengthen the research process because *feeling is a way of knowing* (Ferrell, 2005). A continuing dialogue on the intense emotions associated with researching persons and groups impacted by incarceration is warranted because of the incapacitation and emotional pain that is a hallmark of the prison experience (Haney, 2002; Western, 2004). Prisons and jail tend not to be happy places, rather they contain a great deal of human suffering, not only on the part of the prisoner, but also on the part of family members connected with the offender (Arditti, 2003; Arditti & Few, 2008; Sack & Siedler, 1978). Indeed, the prisoner's shame and difficulties tend to *bleed* onto the family that is there to visit, sometime leading to the severance of family ties during the course of incarceration (Braman, 2004). When one comes in contact with this suffering as a researcher, it can be experienced as an emotional jolt; such strong feelings may influence the a priori data collection agenda. Ultimately, in feeling, our presumptions about criminality and deviance, particularly in terms of the difference between us (i.e., non offenders) and them (i.e., offenders and by extension their families), were dismantled as we witnessed both distress and resilience in the face of adversity. Our anger was piqued when we witnessed jail staff's harsh and disrespectful behavior toward visitors, our sorrow and compassion activated by the tears of study participants, and like Quina et al. (2007), our humanity strengthened as a result of the research project.

Self-Study, Emotions, and Fieldwork

Qualitative and feminist methodologies emphasize the importance of self-study, and the notion that "who a researcher is, is central to what a researcher does" (Bullough & Pinneger, 2001, p. 13). Indeed, self-study reflects a concern about the researcher as instrument, and involves constructing an understanding of phenomena via the questions he or she asks, researcher interactions with participants over time, and the researchers' own personal biographies (Bullough & Pinneger; Merriam, 1998; Rossman & Rallis, 1998). In self-study research, authors must take a forthright and honest stand. Such a stance involves examining assumptions, attending carefully to persons in context, and "provides an inside look at participants' thinking and feeling" (Bullough & Pinneger, p. 19). Self-study incorporates a blending or borrowing of methodologies (Bullough & Pinneger) and upholds the importance of emotions and personal reactions in understanding participants and their experiences (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). Indeed, feminists encourage an emotional relationship between the researcher and participants in order to validate the experiences of women and other marginalized groups (Fonow & Cook, 1991).

The notion that something might be gained via efforts to understand, express, and report emotions in the field, while not new to feminists (Jaggar, 1989; van Maanen,

Manning, & Miller, 1993), has not been particularly visible in criminal justice research although the application of qualitative methods is becoming more frequent and widely accepted (Pogrebin, 2003). Fieldworkers' efforts to process emotions, particularly *outlaw emotions* (i.e., identification with the imprisoned; Jaggar), is an essential aspect of research in jails and prisons. This emotional labor (van Maanen et al.) needs greater visibility to help normalize the feelings that may arise after interview or observational field work, as well as contribute to science via deconstructing long held and accepted views of offenders and their families. For example, the lead author (Arditti) is currently consulting on a project evaluating enhanced or family friendly visiting in three state prisons in Missouri, one of which is a male maximum security facility. During the course of Arditti's consultation, the project coordinator and her staff responsible for data collection expressed concern about their experience of profound "sadness and exhaustion" after each interviewing day in the field and subsequently requested a copy of this "emotions" manuscript (T. Gillespie, personal communication, April 14, 2009). Their experience affirmed the need to provide researchers in the field with tools and scholarly support in order to effectively manage and understand the role of emotions that may emerge when collecting data inside prisons and jails.

While there is no precise definition for emotions, most researchers would agree that emotions are internal self-feelings that are responses to "social acts and self-interactions" (Denzin, 1983, p. 404). Feelings are grounded in social contexts and interactions (Reger, 2001), thus it stands to reason that emotions, the act of feeling, would influence the research process and in particular, the field team's relationships with participants. The purpose of this paper is to articulate a reflexive process which relies on the use of field notes that links key relational content, assumptions, and both feeling and empirical findings of a research project conducted in a jail setting. By exploring these linkages using bracketing techniques and via the construction of a conceptual map, we document our own emotional journey, provide others with a prototype for their own exploration of how emotions can inform the research process in corrections environments, and provide depth and meaning to the empirical work carried out in these settings. Ultimately examining feeling sources of information in this manner gives transparency to how researchers choose their focus and subsequently interpret and report data. When conducting research in difficult and highly sensitive circumstances associated with human suffering and pain, such a process serves to normalize any researcher emotions that arise in the field and embrace them as part of the research design.

Studying Our Emotions through Field Notes: Our Process toward Understanding

The focus of the original study for which the field notes for this paper were used was to gather information from family members bringing children to visit a relative (usually the children's father) in a large local jail which also housed state and federal prisoners (see Arditti, et al., 2003 for details about context and methods). Using an interview primarily composed of closed ended questions and quantitative scales, the study investigated the social, health, and economic characteristics of parents and children visiting an imprisoned family member and how incarceration affected these factors. Over

a ten-week period, we interviewed 56 parents or caregivers of children who had a family member who was incarcerated at the research site.

Field notes are considered an important supplement to other data-collecting methods such as interviews, the primary method used in the Arditti et al. (2003) study (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Patton, 2002; Rossman & Rallis, 1998). Field notes generally have two components. The first is called the running record which is characterized by description of what people say and the details of a situation. The running record allows a reader to vicariously experience the field setting. The second component of field notes is the researcher's commentary on the running record. This component, typically referred to as observer comments, is comprised of the observer's feelings, reactions, and reflections about what has been observed. The nature and intensity of feelings should be recorded. From a qualitative research standpoint, the observer comments contain insights, interpretations, and working hypotheses about what is happening in the setting (Bogdan & Biklen; Patton; Rossman & Rallis).

Upon commencing data collection in the jail visiting waiting area, we quickly came to realize that the jail environment, and the social interactions contained within it (between visitors, staff and visitors, and of course our own interactions with study participants and their children) were having a profound effect on us. Indeed, like the project coordinator in the Missouri study, we left each data collection block sad and exhausted. We were also angry. Thus bracketing (Denzin, 1989) our observer comments, that is keeping them distinct from the running record, was becoming increasingly difficult. Our observer comments were largely comprised of our emotional response to what we were observing in the jail and how we felt during the interview process. As we reviewed our notes during weekly project team meetings, we could see that our observer comments were clearly infused in our observations of what we heard and saw in the visiting room. Emotions colored how we perceived the families we were interviewing, our interactions with jail staff, and likely had some role in data interpretation.

Here, we document the closing of the distance between us and them and our identification with the experiences of our study participants via self-study. The aim of our self-self-study is to provide insight and interpretation (cf., Bullough & Pinneger, 2001), our own transformation from objective to subjective, and in doing so, hope to affirm the role of emotions in criminal justice research.

Methodology

Interviewer field notes described thoughts and feelings about the research process, direct quotes by participants, our observations at the jail, and reactions to what we were observing (Patton, 2002). Written field notes used for this study comprised a total of 28 pages (or 10,608 words) and were written during the spring and summer months of 2001. We obtained additional human subjects approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Virginia Tech to analyze the field notes for the present study.

The Research Team

The research team consisted of the lead researcher (the first author), and three female interviewers Karen, Jennifer, and Latanya. One interviewer, Latanya, was African-American, and the remainder of the team Caucasian. The lead author spent time in the field, trained the interviewers, and lead weekly reflexive group discussions each week with the research team. The lead author oversaw all data collection and guided the content analysis that is the basis of this paper. Each of us brought a unique perspective to the study due to our diverse professional and life experiences which provided multiple foundations for understanding what we witnessed and the process, analysis, and interpretation of the data we collected.

Throughout the study, the interviewers wrote detailed field notes about observations, thoughts and feelings during the research process, direct quotes by participants, and reactions to what we were observing (Patton, 2002). Each member of the interviewing team described her experiences at the jail interviewing and interacting with participants and our reflections about how these conditions impacted participants. These field notes, and more specifically the emotions depicted within the field notes, informed the analysis and interpretation of the quantitative and qualitative data via the emphasis on the adjustment problems parental incarceration posed for children, the stigma and isolation experienced by participants, and the hostile environment in which participants were forced to endure in order to visit their incarcerated family member (Arditti, 2005; Arditti et al., 2003).

Bracketing and Conceptual Map

Bracketing is a technique used in phenomenological research to view the phenomenon under study through a critical lens (Denzin, 1989) so as not to interject personal experiences or preconceptions into the study. Specific content is inserted in "brackets" or in a special section illustrating research self-reflection. To bracket one's beliefs as a fieldworker involves suspending *taken for granted assumptions*, *or unintentional pre-understandings,* about the participants and the setting. An example of a pre-understanding relevant to our reflexive analysis might be: prisoners are different from the rest of us. In suspending these assumptions, one becomes aware of feelings, thoughts, concerns, and biases which influence understanding of the other person's experience (Papadimitriou, 2001). This technique is seen as particularly useful in conducting sensitive or controversial research, which tends to arouse strong emotional reactions.

However, as Hipsky (2006) points out, what actually goes in the brackets can be interpreted in multiple ways. The process is not as neat and tidy as one might think; the guidelines for what should appear in brackets seem to be loosely established and can involve "research, attitude, and common sense" (p. 720). Based on the infusion of emotion in our running record we found it helpful ad hoc to utilize a pre-conceptual map (cf., Hipsky) of sorts to better document and link content areas that emerged in our field notes, assumptions about the participants and setting, feelings in the jail visiting room, and the resultant empirical findings emerging from the jail project. We label our modification of Hipsky's approach a conceptual map, since much of this work was done post hoc rather than a priori, that is, after the data were collected.

Table 1. *Conceptual Map of Field Note Content, Researcher Assumptions, and Findings[1]*

Relational Content	Assumptions	Findings
Coding Category: Forming Relationships with Participants Themes: Establishing/Maintaining Trust	Jails are scary places full of people "different" from us Participants can trust us We are here to do a job; we can make a difference.	*Feeling afraid, unprepared* *Feeling inauthentic (like we are taking something for nothing)* *Feeling a need to help* **Participants suffered social, emotional and economic losses[a]**
Coding Category: Participants' Relationships with the Criminal Justice System Themes: Stigma / Marginalization	Family members are victims of the system Family members should cope	*Feeling angry/hostile toward corrections staff* *Feeling despair over family members' pain* *Feeling powerless over our inability to change things* **Participants feel ashamed and invisible. The lack of supportive rituals and community verification contributes to parental distress and family difficulties[a]** **Visitation can connect with loss-related trauma, painful feelings, and expose both offender and family members to a "risk situation" fraught with difficulties[b]**
Coding Category: Participants' Response to their Relationships and Circumstances Theme: Resilience	People can overcome	*Feeling hopeful* **Caregivers may make extraordinary efforts to ensure pleasant no-contact jail visits (for children under their care) despite institutional difficulties[ab]**
Coding Category: Dissolution, Ending our relationships with participants Theme: Helping families with multiple problems	Deadlines and funding parameters define the research process; others must step in to help families The Criminal Justice System Must Change	*Feeling relieved* **Key areas of intervention should involve: alleviating intrapsychic distress, helping family members deal with unresolved loss, empowering offenders and their families and parenting support aimed at caregivers (and especially single parents) who may be overwhelmed and unprepared for the responsibilities of caring for the offender's children[ab]** *Feeling guilty* **More distal interventions include institutional practices aimed at enhancing family ties and rehabilitation rather than incapacitation, and sweeping policy reform that addresses the alleviation of cumulative disadvantage, and efforts to reduce our overreliance on incarceration[ab].**

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[1] Findings in *italics* represent feelings sources, Findings in **bold** from empirical analysis based on interview data. [a] Arditti et al., 2003; [b]Arditti, 2003

We used thematic content in our field notes, to identify our related pre-understandings, and our emotions, conceptualized here as the "feeling source of knowing" (Ferrell, 2005) to construct linkages to key empirical findings that emerged from publications based on the data collected for this project. Based on our findings, we hope to inform fieldwork practices in corrections' setting by acknowledging emotional sources of knowing. Feeling sources give depth and understanding to the empirical literature which documents the profound social, emotional, and economic effects of incarceration on families and children (Murray & Farrington, 2008; Parke & Clarke-Stewart, 2003), as well as the findings and recommendations that emerged from the data collected for this project (Arditti, 2003; Arditti et al., 2003).

Field Note Analysis

We engaged in a process based on procedures outlined in conducting theoretical coding whereby researchers move through progressive levels of abstraction for the purpose of generating grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Here we summarize the steps of our analytic approach. After completion of data collection from participants, all four members of the team individually read complete copies of all field notes several times to generate an initial list of codes that focused on our relationships with the participants, participants' relationships with each other, and broadly, both the team's and participants' relationships with the criminal justice system. In constructing codes, we used a constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) in that codes captured a recurring pattern as exemplified through "the preponderance" (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984, p. 139) of our field notes. Coding via constant comparison was a way to break down the data in order to develop conceptual themes that made sense of the field notes in a new way (Strauss & Corbin). We specify these codes in Table 1 under "Relational Content." Based on these coding categories, and guided by our beginning understanding of how emotions were impacting the multiple relationships we were examining, we analyzed text falling within each coding category in order to develop themes that captured emotional states and meanings relevant to our experience in the field. In developing themes, we analyzed the coded transcript individually, and then we collectively compared our work, refining the emerging themes until we agreed upon predominant themes within each coding category relative to the relational content and exemplar illustrations from the field notes. Themes are also specified in Table 1 under relational content.

After our content analysis, we engaged in a reflexive process of examining our underlying assumptions and feelings associated with each theme. We achieved this primarily by discussion during multiple research team meetings as well as by providing feedback to the first author on the present manuscript as it evolved. Our reflexive approach incorporated two aspects specified by Rossman and Rallis (1998): our own reaction to the field setting and participants as well as our interpretation regarding how participants reacted to us and to other actors in the field (i.e., each other and jail personnel). We were interested in articulating our emotions as findings per conceptual map methodology, as they had bearing on the reporting and interpretations of the data. To assist us in our analysis and presentation of the findings, we used both bracketing techniques (which focus on feeling states) and our conceptual map (which we summarized and delineated content and assumptions to derive researcher biases). Based

on our central concern with emotions in the field, we examined field note excerpts that linked to the four content areas specified in Table 1 (per coding), and identified the feeling states that were evoked by the specific thematic content within the context of our data collection. We broadly defined emotions as areas of that involved "social acts and self interactions" (Denzin, 1983, p. 404). Consistent with our reflexive approach, the four substantive areas were relational in nature in that they involved our interactions with participants and setting, ours as well as participants' interactions with jail staff and setting, participants' interactions with their family members and children' and finally, our dissolution of relationships with participants. Per Ferrell (2005) and Hipsky (2006), we define our findings as feeling states that lead to knowing; findings link with our assumptions or understandings associated with our fieldwork in the jail setting and are reported as derived from our reflexive process. Table 1 summarizes the relational areas and corresponding themes, assumptions, and findings per our content analysis of the field notes and reflexive discussions of our data collection process.

Findings

Below we elaborate on Table 1 content utilizing excerpts from interviewer field notes to demonstrate our approach to self-study. Table 1 also includes findings from published work that correspond with our emotions and demonstrate the links between relational content, assumptions, emotions (or feeling states), and interpretation of empirical data published from the jail study. One can see how the feelings states of the team connect with how hard data is reported.

Forming Relationships: Establishing and Maintaining Trust

Here we examine content pertaining to our entry into the field, our efforts to establish rapport with potential participants for the purpose of recruiting them as interviewees, as well as our continuing relationships with participants. It should be noted that we set up a small play area in the visiting room for the children that were waiting to see their incarcerated family member. This area was staffed by an undergraduate student and contained toys, building blocks, and art materials donated by the lead author. The purpose of the play area was to free caregivers up in order to participate in interviews without distraction from their children.

Bogdan and Biklen (1998) have discussed how disconcerting the first few days in the field can be, and similarly Kleinman and Copp (1993), have described the intensity and complexity that experiences in the field could evoke in researchers, especially when feeling multiple, and at times conflicting emotions simultaneously. Latanya's comments illustrate this point:

> First off, I was nervous. I had so looked forward to this challenge and all I wanted to do was turn around and go home. I felt like the new kid at a neighborhood party. . . I don't remember any triggers, but I do recall several moments when I ended up staring at the paper, telling myself not to cry. It was—surreal—is that the word? (February 24)

Per our field notes, our initial feelings of awkwardness and fear began to subside as we began to develop relationships with participants. As they began to get to know us as people, both our anxieties and those of participants diminished. With this growing sense of comfort came a desire to help participants, which offered new dilemmas and influenced the boundaries we established. On one hand, we felt somewhat inauthentic about developing relationships solely for the purpose of securing an interview, and on the other hand, participants seemed to benefit from the interview experience and appreciated the opportunity to tell their story to someone.

At times, we had the distinct feeling that we were, somehow feigning friendship. Latanya wrote about this early in our research:

> Some of the kids were waiting for us. They weren't just waiting for toys; they were waiting for us. I had forgotten about children and caretakers. Then, several of the parents said hello—casually. . . not just cursory—but like new friends. (April 13)

As parents and children began to recognize and trust us, we responded emotionally. We felt affirmed and somewhat protective over the visitors. We believed, at that early stage, that we were doing something positive: being action researchers and making a difference just in being there. We believed in the need for connection and relationships; the development of trust was key to beginning to understand the lived experiences of these women, men, and children. Karen shared:

> The trust seems to be increasing as these women and men begin to share very painful experiences in their lives. Many are quick to greet us and catch us up a bit on their lives, and smile as they watch their children playing. They are thankful for the toys and interns to assist them as they wait to see their partners. There is less anxiety in their faces as they've gotten to know us a bit better. They've also begun to approach me, wanting to learn more, curious, and wanting to participate in this research. There seems to be less reluctance. (March 31)

Our process, then, paralleled the development of rapport in field settings described elsewhere (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). There was nothing unusual about our beginning discomfort and the subsequent familiarity that emerged with repeated visits. Gradually, people sought us out and missed us when we were not there, common indicators that we were accepted by the participants (Bogdan & Biklen). Despite the relationships we were developing, there was a haunting feeling that the *friendships* we were forging possibly were not in the best interests of those around us. Jennifer processed her reaction in her notes and stated: "I felt bad like I was lying to her and him because I am not her friend and won't be around for long" (March 24). Latanya (April 13) recalled, "I thought about disclosure then—the feeling of having exposed oneself and wondered if anyone was feeling regretful or angry—there is nothing for them to come back to—no closure—except us and we have nothing to give or promise." There was the feeling, just beneath the surface, that somehow we were taking more than we would be able to give. In the larger study, we noted how participants may have seen themselves as

victims of the criminal justice system (Arditti et al., 2003). As we acclimated to the jail environment, we identified with our participants (rather than jail staff), and our attention was in fact drawn to the deficits these participants were experiencing rather than strengths. Indeed, in the empirical work emerging from the data it was concluded that *participants appeared to suffer great social, emotional, and economic losses* (Arditti et al., 2003).

Participants' Relationships with the Criminal Justice System: Stigma and Marginalization

As we sat, week after week, watching, observing, and listening, we began to get a real sense of the stigma associated with involvement in the criminal justice system. This social stigma and its connection to cumulative risk from parenting strain, work-family conflict, financial strain, and structural issues (e.g., race, class, gender, marital status) became a primary finding in the larger study (Arditti et al., 2003). In large part, it was our own deep feelings of anger at witnessing the stigmas associated with the visiting families coupled with our own ambivalence about coming to the jail, which likely contributed to our emphasis on the social stigmas and impacts of cumulative risk experienced by the families. This is not to suggest that we would not have been aware of those social stigmas without reflecting on our own emotion, but our strong revulsion at what we were observing heightened our awareness of stigma. Our anger seemed to live within us, almost as if we ourselves were being victimized by "the system," and caused us to reflect on what it must be like to have a family member in jail. Latanya mulled over this in her notes:

> These are people with stories and lives I have to wonder about—outside the jail waiting room. . . they live like the rest of the world except, of course, they have to come here. Having done nothing, they leave with the touch of the stigma on them. Surely they must be inclined to keep it a secret. . . What must it feel like from the inside? What must it be like for a former insider, to come out—with an automatic implied need to defend yourself—or to lie. (April 13th)

As we came to feel closer to participants we developed self-protective measures and more deeply explored our emotional reactions to participants and the jail environment. Through our relationships with participants, we observed how they became stigmatized via their relationship with the prisoner and the ways in which they were treated both at the jail and in the larger community. We vicariously experienced the stigma, and what we perceived as their victimization, and it enraged us as we observed visitors' interactions with deputies who were often rude and uncaring. We sat with study participants during the long wait for a visit, and watched as mothers and children were turned away from their chance to visit after these long waits due to the close of visiting hours.

While feminists have long argued that empathy toward and connection with the researched is a crucial component of the research process (Ellingson, 1998), this deep understanding was often painful. We shared in the despair of the visitors. Like others

studying phenomena connected to physical or emotional pain (Ferrell, 2005), the suffering we were witness to in that room had the power to grasp us and we could not avoid the reality of it like we could prior to entering the world of the imprisoned.   In this sense our pain was transformative, a signal that something was deeply wrong, and gave way to another emotion: anger. We became angered by the harsh, disrespectful behavior of the deputies and the poor environmental conditions of the waiting area that participants were forced to endure, such as the filthy bathroom, with feces spread on the toilet and stall walls that were not cleaned for the entire duration of our study.   Latanya, in processing these emotions and her own compassion toward participants, tried to find a way to understand the behavior of the deputies that supervised the waiting and visiting area:

> I feel so yucky-cranky. . . I can see how the stigma attaches, or at least how the anger builds for personnel. They could get sick of the place. . . Wonder if they feel overwhelmed? I wonder if they have to detach, just like I do. I wonder if they have to justify their detachment with blame? (April 13th)

Though we were able to have empathy for the necessity of the deputies' detachment, we could not accept their harsh, and at times, cruel treatment of visitors. Latanya wrote:

> It's a very frustrating thing. . . so many people have little sympathy for prisoners and the prejudice has flooded into the treatment of their families. They can be treated rudely. . . there is no touch for the prisoners—they are not allowed to touch their children. The children are not held by their parents. (March 24th)

Perhaps the most difficult thing for all of us was to watch as families struggled with the no-contact visiting rules, which are common in most jails across the country.   The prisoners were not allowed to touch family members during visits, and we listened to caregivers tell us stories about children helplessly banging on the glass separating them from their parent. One participant told us her young son became hysterical because "he thought his father had no legs" based on what the child could see (torso only) through the glass. Certainly, the children did not understand.

It was not only learning how the lack of touch rendered partners and children vulnerable, but also being confidante to the grief of participants' grief that profoundly impacted us. Participants told us they felt that they could not openly grieve the very real loss of a family member due to the social shame surrounding incarceration.   The observation of deplorable visiting conditions, along with contemptuous treatment of visitors by some of the deputies, aroused in us feelings of frustration, sadness, and anger at a system which did not appear to care about the children and parents there, and seemed to justify indifference and maltreatment by holding the families accountable for the crimes of those incarcerated. Families were separated and they had two choices: to grieve in isolation, or to risk the public shame of connection to one who was incarcerated. As one participant said, her experiences of having a family member incarcerated "was like a death without a body."   Indeed in our larger study, the issues of social isolation

from the stigma associated with incarceration presented additional challenges to participants and did not allow for appropriate grieving processes (Arditti et al., 2003). The sense of shame and stigma overwhelmed each of us, beyond what would be within the normal confines of empathy. We certainly had been made aware of those stigmas as our participants had expressed them, but it was through our own experiences at the jail and the expression of our emotions that we came to more profoundly realize the impact of those stigmas on our participants. We found ourselves wanting to avoid coming to the jail—just as many participants had expressed. As researchers, we felt much more than simple empathy for our participants, we were beginning to feel their sense of powerlessness. As Latanya (April 4) wrote in her notes: "defeated, no one thinks things can change, or work to change it, they think they don't have any power to do things or make things different; they are right and wrong."

Through shared experiences and observations, we could see how a prisoner's marginalization, the stigma that never fades (Anonymous, 2002), extended to his or her family and how that stigma could morph into trauma and adjustment problems for children. Unexpected and powerful, our observations poignantly reflected that the families too were "locked out and left behind" and deep feelings of sadness and powerlessness intertwined with our observations. These emotions informed our focus on "vulnerable families and the accumulation of risk" (Arditti et al., 2003, p. 201) in the published results of the study.

Ultimately, the prisoners were not the only ones who suffered the consequences of incarceration; children were the most poignant victims of the system. Some that passed through the waiting room during our time seemed traumatized. Karen wrote about a young toddler who came into the jail visiting room and ran immediately to the locked door where he usually visited his father. He screamed over and over again for his "daddy." His mother tried to quiet him, but he continued to scream for his father. The other visiting family members in the waiting area were stunned into silence, not knowing how to acknowledge the child's pain, but at the same time, understanding it.

Situations like this fueled our anger at the criminal justice system, often leaving us feeling deep sadness and hopelessness at effecting any real change. One of us (Karen) can remember tears slowly rolling from her eyes while watching the child, and then continuing to talk to the parent she was interviewing; we did not speak of what we had observed. We had been told more than once by participants that in order to survive you had to just "keep on moving." But the expense of that movement was not lost on us who had shared, briefly, a snapshot like moment into the lives of these women, men, and children.

We observed many situations like these: children throwing themselves against the door that led to the visiting cubicles, children waving outside on the street to their incarcerated parents who stared out at them behind a sliver of glass window. During the interviews and in subsequent informal conversations, families seemed to embrace us as an outlet as they described their pain. The adjustment difficulties of children were apparent to us, and became an integral part of the project findings. Our continued observations of deputies being disrespectful, neglected bathrooms that remained filthy and broken-down, and the children who showed up Saturday mornings in their Sunday best to see daddy and then were turned away without a visit, fueled our resentment and crept into our impressions and interpretations, such as our focus on adjustment

difficulties for children. In addition, while focusing on our own needs to deal with our emotions, participants began to see us as an outlet to their pain, which we noted in our larger study discussion, that participants were "using the interviews as a means to vent about their problems and the perceived injustice of their situation" (Arditti et al., 2003, p. 201). All three members of the interview team had counseling and therapy backgrounds and we found ourselves caught between the boundary of counselor and researcher adding to our frustration.

Our feelings of powerlessness continued throughout our process at the jail. Our inability to improve waiting room conditions or the behavior of the jail deputies fueled our sense of powerlessness. When we came into this project, we believed ourselves to be action researchers and able to enact change simply by being there. And yet, we came to feel powerless to make any substantive changes. Listening may have a level of catharsis, and there was still the hope that the research findings could bring criminal justice reform, or at the very least, improve visiting conditions at the jail, but it just did not seem to be enough. All we could really do was provide some necessary referrals and give a list of resources to participants, and of course, disseminate our results to the scholarly community. The following field notes exemplified the powerlessness felt by the interviewers. Karen wrote about a mother's experience with her daughter. The mother expressed that her daughter:

> was writing statements like, 'I want to die' 'I want to start over' 'why can't I start over' 'I want to kill myself'. . . . [The] mother stated that things have been getting worse since the incarceration and that for the past five months they've gotten really bad. . . . .[The] mother indicated that the daughter had been making comments at home like, she hoped her brother would get hit by a truck because all the men just left her and she wished he would hurry up and go too. (March 24)

Karen assisted the mother in contacting multiple local resources to get help for her daughter. The mother found scissors under her daughter's pillow and her daughter drew pictures of cutting her wrists, blood everywhere. She attempted to have her daughter hospitalized and Karen assisted in this process, all to no avail—as the mother had no insurance. The next week, Karen reports in her notes: "the mother came to talk to me immediately when she came into the waiting area of the jail. She stated that her daughter had attempted suicide and had been hospitalized." Only after a suicide attempt could she finally get help. Karen followed-up with the mother as long as the team was there collecting data, but it felt like too little too late.

We were supposed to be there as interviewers and observers, but once again the boundaries between field researcher and counselor became blurred for each member of the interview team. The fact that all three members of the team were trained as counselors contributed to their feelings of powerlessness as their research role precluded them from ethically engaging in a counseling relationship, despite our acute awareness of participants' need for such a relationship. We in turn empathized with the participants' feelings of defeat and incapacity to help their children deal with the difficulties associated with the family member's incarceration. Yet, despite the discomfort and stigma of visiting, parents, children, and family members faithfully returned, week after week, to

the dismal jail, only to feel once again abused by a faceless powerful system and by those who had vowed to protect and serve. It was not only the voices of participants that exclaimed the lack of justice that diminished an already difficult situation into one of nearly pointless cruelty. Our observations revealed a pervasive lack of humanity by the deputies, the jail personnel, the physical environment, and the very coldness of the enforced rules, and we felt there was little we could do.

Participants' Response to their Situation: Can People Overcome?

Family researchers often indicate that one of the most crucial elements for child development is a positive relationship with a competent and caring adult. Most children rely on their parents to nurture and provide a supportive environment in which to grow and develop. Unfortunately, when parents are overtaxed and overburdened, as is the case when dealing with the issues surrounding the incarceration of a partner, the non-incarcerated parents' abilities to meet these needs become somewhat hampered (Arditti et al., 2003; Beck, Cooper, McLanahan, & Brooks-Gunn, 2009; Braman, 2004; Herman-Stahl, Kan, & McKay, 2008; Lowenstein, 1986). Caregivers responsible for the inmate's children are often unprepared physically, emotionally, and financially to care for the children—particularly over extended periods (Hungerford, 1996). Parents may become emotionally numb, depressed, irritable, and less communicative, thus being less responsive to their children's needs (Osofsky & Fenichel, 1994). In the findings of our larger study, we also emphasized the emotional toll on children (Arditti et al., 2003). We further emphasized that we became a "sympathetic ear" to participants and as a result "difficulties might be more obvious than resiliencies and family strengths" (Arditti et al., 2003, p. 201).

Participants had to work a great deal harder to meet the emotional and physical needs of their children, and there were several instances of what we considered resounding strength. Despite our own feelings of powerlessness, anger at the system, and our own despair, there were glimmering moments of participant resilience that clearly stood out in our minds. In general terms, resilience is often defined as the ability to succeed, or at least forestall, adversity (Masten, Best, & Garmezy, 1990) and involves the capacity to access and use resources that are available, despite risk factors present (Fraser, Richman, & Galinsky, 1999; Masten et al.). Jennifer discussed her thoughts on resilience relative to the study participants and the interview setting, and how they made an impact on her as we left the jail that final day:

> I thought that the people I would interview would be distrustful, rude, secretive, and depressed. However I found that most were open, and willing to share their story with me. They were tired and stressed, but so resilient. They did not hate life, did not give up on people, but in fact they invited me into their lives to share a part of themselves with me. The ones who are resilient. . . .[are able to] find the support they need. If not from the traditional sense, family or formal services, they are able to look beyond the box. So where I thought I would see despair and leave with a feeling of depression I did not. I saw strength, community, and hope. (April 28th)

In another example, Jennifer wrote about how she observed moments of sheer courage, strength, and a will to foster relationships that were amazing given the circumstances. During both field notes and debriefings, she shared how participants would find relationships from unlikely people and develop them into resources that supported their family's needs. She wrote, "when people don't have support they are resilient enough to get support where they can. They are not bound by family or normal areas of searching for support….[they] find resources in unexpected places" (March 17).

As previous researchers have noted, we must be cautious not to emphasize how strong participants can be to the detriment of fully understanding the negative impacts of the life experiences of participants (Punch, 1986; Taylor, 1987). Kleinman and Copp (1993) suggest a focus on resilience may be a coping mechanism to deal with our own strong emotions. In our desire to establish strong rapport with participants, which often includes developing positive feelings for participants, we might inadvertently romanticize participants or view them in stereotypical ways (Reinharz, 1992). Knowing this, we questioned ourselves. We wondered as our feelings intensified, had we transformed our discomfort into interpretations of positive strengths and assets of participants? For example Arditti (2003) considers the following example of a caregiver's attempt to get her nephews in for a visit a demonstration of resilience:

> The caretaker. . . said with a very happy, cheerful voice that they're here to visit him in the 'super-hero school.' 'He's here to build muscles.' And began talking to the kids about how when he came out he'd have large muscles. The children began to banter happily about how strong he'd be. (pp. 130-131)

Jail was "super-hero school" and the children gladly bought into this fantasy. Was this evidence of resilience in terms of the participant's optimistic bravado with her nephews? Was her perpetuation of the lie about where their father really was a source of resilience, thus providing a much needed "reality shield" (Arditti, 2003, p. 131) for the children, or was it a delusion potentially creating more harm than good for the children in the long run? With the exception of one member of the team, we chose to interpret the visitor's lie as resilience. We perceived the participant's actions as evidence of strength, and it made us all feel better for her to pose this difficulty in such a positive way. Yet, though this was a deliberate choice for three of us, there was still some concern that our feelings of powerlessness may have somehow led us to our conclusions. After all, it did give us hope to define resilient behavior for it implied that somehow everything would be ok. Was our willingness to embrace resilience somehow a positive coping mechanism on our part to deal with our feelings of powerlessness? Indeed, Latanya saw things differently. The "super-hero" story did not make her feel better. On the contrary, it angered her because of the social conditions which necessitated the lie. Latanya did not see the family members as people to be pitied or romanticized--rather she expected them to cope. She resisted viewing the families as desperate and in some need of paternalistic social intervention. In our process of constant comparison, she wondered, was hers a minority perspective? Our reaction and interpretation of the myth of "super-hero school" was one example of how we may have used our feelings to validate our needs, while our feelings may have also been a barrier to seeing what may have been there. We raise these

questions as part of our struggle to understand our own emotions while accurately portraying the families involved in our study.

Dissolution: Leaving Behind Multiple Problem Families

We were often concerned for the welfare of study participants in a culture that seemed to be indifferent to their feelings and needs. The majority of participants enrolled in our study seemed to be in distress and have multiple problems in that they were families characterized by unemployment, criminal justice involvement, and mothers who were overworked and overwhelmed (Sharlin & Shamai, 2000). Our departure from the field was associated with both guilt and relief. We experienced guilt in that we had identified with the participants, cognitively and affectively understanding the difficulty of their situations, and yet could provide no direct solutions for their problems. We also experienced relief, more evident in our debriefing sessions than our field notes, in that we no longer had to share the pains of imprisonment with our interviewees and their children; similar to the experience of helping professionals who sometimes avoid working with families in extreme distress due to the strong emotions such work typically invokes (Sharlin & Shamai).

We were not only family scholars, but three of us were clinicians, *trained* to be empathic, and like Ellingson (1998) in her study of cancer patients, we left the interview setting "drained from the emotional empathy" (p. 22). Jennifer documented her concern for visitors at the jail, their struggles with the marginalization they experienced based on their relationship with their incarcerated family member, and knowing that we would soon be leaving.

> I have begun to worry about the children and people here in this community when we leave. I think that the parents and family members like to have a chance to vent to someone who wants to hear what they are saying and care about them. To not be ignored or treated badly because they know they have a family member in jail. I think that we show these people that there can be a different side, a side where people…The parents, I think have learned to trust us. I feel badly that by leaving we are in some way not living up to the faith they have given us. (April 14th)

We had feelings of guilt and unease about leaving, not knowing what would happen to participants after our departure; we felt as if we had taken more than we could give back. We discussed these feelings during debriefings and research team meetings and expressed our anxiety in field notes. Latanya commented:

> Joyce had said she feels guilty at the prospect of just leaving. . . .I hadn't thought of having an impact. I imagined the room after we leave--after they are back alone--with each other. I would hate to turn out to be part of a hypocrisy-one that used them to get the information they needed and then left them high and dry. (April 13th)

We had filled a void during our data collection, and it was the visitors' return to it that most concerned us. We knew once we left, there would be no one to play with the children--no one to listen to the parents and hear their stories or offer referrals for much-needed services. Mostly, there was the feeling that we would not be able to make any concrete changes for the families and that their situations would simply remain the same. Jennifer articulated the unease of pulling out:

> I keep wondering what it must be like in the waiting room now. I just pulled out two surveys of people I only saw once--wondering what happened to those two-having only seen them one time. [I] wonder how long I will keep wondering stuff like that. It almost feels like a dream now. I almost want it to. The prospect of changing things--the work involved--seems overwhelming and daunting--and I keep wondering what we missed. (June 6th)

Karen took leaving particularly hard and worked through her guilt and sense of powerlessness in her field journal via poetry:

> I see them now
> Though I can't comprehend
> The impact of our visits
> And the holes that could not mend
>
> I am free to go
> But they must stay
> I am happy to be home
> So very far away
>
> I cannot concede
> The complexities I feel
> In knowing we did nothing
> To help their wounds heal
>
> Once again abandoned
> Though they ever shall remain
> A reminder to each of us
> Of those who live in pain

Indeed, qualitative methodologists point out that leaving the field can be difficult, especially when close relationships are established between the researchers and the researched (Rossman & Rallis, 1998). Our pain, however, seemed to have more to do with the despair of the place we were leaving rather than our relationships with study participants. Consistent with a feminist qualitative consciousness, we were irrevocably changed as a result of our field experience (Delamont, 1992).

Still, through our research, we hoped to give voice to families affected by incarceration; an important step toward promoting social justice and facilitating change.

Without an understanding of the experiences of these families, change could not and would not occur. Such a consciousness is an implicit aspect of a feminist epistemology that seeks to expose disadvantage and multiple jeopardy (Few et al., 2003) that we found certainly applies to families of prisoners—not only were their partners incarcerated, the children were negatively impacted by no-contact visits, and families who were already on the fringe of economic marginalization were now living in abject poverty. Thus our assumption, that the criminal justices system must change, connects with our guilt upon pulling out of the jail, and the knowledge that we could not change the system. We note published recommendations for change center around sweeping policy reform and clinical intervention that supports and empowers family members responsible for the care of the offender's children (Arditti, 2003; Arditti et al., 2003). Could our guilt and our own need for relief, inform our take on what families impacted by incarceration needed? We think so.

Discussion

At the onset of jail research, we understood on a superficial level that personal feelings have often been censored or dismissed in scientific research (Wincup, 2001). As we collected data, our sensitivity to the role of emotions heightened. Through self-study, we gained a genuine understanding of how our emotional life relative to the interview setting could potentially deepen subsequent data interpretation, flesh out participant experiences, and contribute to developing recommendations for change and intervention relative to families impacted by incarceration.

Because of the strong emotions evoked by the jail setting and the social interactions occurring therein, our feelings were an important source of knowing— particularly with regard to social justice. Despair, guilt, fear, anger, and then hope—our feeling range was broad and nuanced. Field notes were more about *what we felt*, than what we saw and heard, and were a means to document our outlaw emotions. The expression of these feeling states transformed our field notes from a "systematic noting and recording of events" (Rossman & Rallis, 1998, p. 136) to a narrative in its own right. Our emotions were a bridge whereby we became *involved with the struggles* occurring at the jail (and therefore similar institutions throughout the country), fulfilling Foucault's rationale for self-study work (cf., Bullough & Pinneger, 2001).

Further, our assumptions, as well as the feelings connected to them, drove focus and interpretation throughout the research process. We confirm then that in exploring emotion, study findings resonate and become more understandable. Further, using field notes as a source of understanding seems to be an essential aspect of conducting and disseminating controversial or sensitive research. It is helpful for authors and consumers of research to get a good sense of what is behind the empirical results that emerge from a data set and ultimately get published. Our sense was that had we not acknowledged those feelings derived from our journals and debriefings, a major source of information and understanding for those who read the disseminated findings from the work we did would have been missing. The process undertaken in this paper is an important means of closure and may prove helpful to other researchers in similar field settings. It was difficult to reconcile how to ethically complete our research process, knowing that families with profound difficulties were being left behind. And yet, as we left the jail we

clung to our hope that families would somehow overcome as our involvement demonstrated the study participants were much more than victims.

    To some extent, this paper suggests the utility of self-study and bringing a feminist qualitative sensitivity to any family research undertaken in correctional settings. Rather than attempting to *empty ourselves* when entering these settings to conduct research, we may be better served by saving ourselves the effort (and the likelihood of failure). Rather, we might consider directing our energy toward reflexivity (Allen, 2000) and understanding how emotions can have a positive impact on our research, how it might inform our work, and ultimately who we become as a result of it. Strong emotions such as the ones we reflected on here (i.e., anger, despair, hope) are an energy source to fuel a line of inquiry, research, and intervention aimed at justice-involved families. In sum, perhaps the most transformative aspect of our work here is that our experience of intense and often painful emotions deepened our convictions to participate in a discourse about the negative impacts of incarceration on families and to challenge our own underlying epistemological assumptions regarding how we practice research (Stacey & Thorne, 1985). Exploring our emotions ultimately highlighted the importance of studying families and children in criminal justice settings, and further deconstructed the myth of emotionless fieldwork.

Implications for Conducting Research in Correctional Settings

    The emotional and ethical tensions we experienced have certain implications for conducting family research in correctional settings. Clearly, these settings pose special challenges to field workers. Participants are likely dealing with emotional pain and issues related to traumatic separation. Interviewers must be skilled in responding to participants' duress and prepared with resource and referral materials. In addition to any difficulties with which respondents are dealing, it is equally important to recognize the impact the field setting may have on the interviewer. Our content analysis of field notes illustrates the difficulty involved for even the most experienced interviewers to bracket their emotions and detach from the interview setting. Thus it is important to acknowledge the limitations of bracketing given the very real possibility that emotions will spill everywhere while writing field notes. Subsequently we recommend going back to those notes to examine and identify any implicit (unwritten) assumptions that might connect with what has been written. It is important to use these notes as a data source which can then be analyzed regarding content and feelings to inform, and better understand any conclusions that arise from the empirical data collected directly from participants.

    Processing emotions: Progress notes, debriefing, and conceptual mapping. Our experience as interviewers in the jail study suggests three important ways fieldworkers might process emotions connected to conducting research in corrections settings. First, fieldworkers would do well to keep careful progress notes. These notes should be written up after each interview (some of the information may be the same for all interviews and pertain to a full session of data collection on a particular day). Shorthand is acceptable with full elaboration after each session if there are time constraints between interviews. Notes, for example, may include the following, although

based on our experience we acknowledge it may not be possible for notes to be written in discrete sections:

1. Summary of interview experience
2. Description of interview setting/prison facilities
3. Observations of prison personnel/participants/other people
4. Interruptions
5. Methodological observations/theoretical notes (focused on interview process, participant)
6. Overall, gut level impressions (not included above)
7. Self-reflection (information pertaining to how interview felt, emotions that crop up while conducting interview, self-exploration relative to data collection; creative ways to externalize pain such as through poetry or free-writing/journaling).

Second, in addition to keeping progress notes, debriefing after each interview session with fellow interviewers, support staff, and supervisors of the study is also an important way to process any emotions that relate to data collection, observations, and how to fine-tune the interview process. Our experience in the jail study suggested debriefing is an effective way to manage and explore reactions to the interview setting and process, and to discuss how we may be viewing things differently. Debriefing, which includes focus on content and process, allows researchers to more fully integrate and externalize their experiences. Our debriefings allowed us to explore our feelings and consider how our emotional experience might ultimately inform our work. We recommend that debriefing sessions occur immediately following a block of interviewing or as soon thereafter as possible. Finally, given the intensity of feeling often associated with entering jails and prisons, we find the use of a pre-conceptual map (Hipsky, 2006), or some modification of this format as we have presented here, to be extremely useful. The map should link closely with field notes, identify central content areas and implicit assumptions related to that content, and specify findings from both feeling and empirical sources. Ideally, this type of reflexive work can be done prior to and during the research process. However, we believe the development of a conceptual map inclusive of emotions has value even if constructed post hoc. The information contributes to the trustworthiness of the research process by giving the scholarship an unusual level of transparency that could be useful in providing greater theoretical depth in both family and criminology/corrections research to augment both quantitative and qualitative findings. Emotions have a certain way of conveying the urgency of a particular problem and are especially relevant in criminal justice research where tough questions are asked, insurmountable challenges are noted, and scholars push for reform (see for example research and commentary on the consequences of mass imprisonment by Austin & Irwin, 2001; Hagan & Coleman, 2001; Travis, 2005).

Informed Consent as a Means of Affirmation

In addition to reflexive work, we also recommend an awareness of how human subjects policies, designed to protect participants, may arouse strong emotions for both

fieldworker and interviewee.   While implementing informed consent procedures, fieldworkers may become anxious about scaring participants off and inhibiting a sense of trust between the researcher and the researched.   Indeed, scholars (e.g., Moser et al., 2004) have pointed out the spirit of overprotection of prisoners as research subjects may have gone too far in that they may now make research so onerous that participation on the part of prisoners, or similar classes of vulnerable participants, in research has inadvertently been discouraged.   The difficulties inherent in obtaining access and conducting research in prisons and jails not only have "critical implications" (Byrne, 2005, p. 224) for prisoner welfare, but may also serve to further marginalize prisoners and their kin by unintendedly encouraging their invisibility and silence.

Our experience confirms the possibility that human subjects' provisions have an impact on the research process and may serve to discourage the family of the offender's involvement—at least initially. We also note some benefit: human subjects requirements such as informed consent can also be an important means to develop trust between the researcher and prospective participants as well as provide authenticity and affirmation to researchers in the field. For example, the informed consent process is a concrete and visible means by which marginalized participants may become empowered given the rights and protections afforded to them via participation in a research project. Informed consent documents contain not only information about the risks of participation in a research project, but also the benefits. Participation, and in particular, receipt of the study findings, can give the interviewee a sense of being part of something bigger and lessen isolation.

In our team meetings, we did discuss several participants who became angry and/or emotionally withdrawn when we introduced the informed consent process. It is particularly important to recognize that individuals involved in the criminal justice system are often mistrustful toward law enforcement and other bureaucratic institutions. Thus, the informed consent may signal a red flag for potential study participants. It is crucial that interviewers are sensitive to the issue of mistrust and careful with regard to explaining the informed consent, empathizing with the participant as to the feelings the process may evoke, as well as emphasizing the benefits of the study or advocacy that may emerge from its findings relative to incarceration to the extent that is an authentic goal of the research.

In order to put interviewees at greater ease, we emphasized the neutrality and separateness of the university relative to the criminal justice system, the anonymous and confidential nature of their responses (permitted by state law), and that the project director had personal experience with the system and an interest in improving things for prisoners and their families. This strategy seemed to relieve discomfort for even the most reluctant participants and affirmed our ethical intent in conducting the research. The sharing of insider experience with potential participants is controversial (cf., Arditti, 2002) and may not be applicable to certain research situations; our suggestions for relieving potential participant discomfort is to personalize the study somehow (via insider status or a genuine concern for participants) and cast the university as a credible vehicle for positive action based on study results.

In sum, the expectation of the objective and distanced relationships that typically define the researcher-researched roles in positivistic science may not be possible when conducting research in corrections settings, particularly if that research involves extended

contact between the researcher and participants in the field. Embracing and subsequently utilizing feelings such as fear, despair, anger, and powerlessness, as a source of knowing has the potential to enliven corrections research, and provide a sense of authenticity and transparency that is generally not obvious in our scholarship. By utilizing tools such as bracketing or a conceptual map to closely examine field notes, both quantitative and qualitative results have a context that extends beyond the data to the researchers themselves. Through the development of a conceptual map which examines relational content, researcher assumptions, and findings (feeling states and empirical conclusions), we gained a genuine understanding of how our emotional life relative to the interview setting could potentially deepen subsequent data interpretation, reporting, and flesh out participant experiences. We embraced a "conscious partiality" whereby our emerging connectedness to the study participants resulted in a blurring of the boundaries between us and them. It is this process, this transformation of understanding of our own emotional responses that provides depth and meaning to the work we do in the name of social justice.

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Article Citation

Arditti, J. A., Joest, K. S., Lambert-Shute, J. J., & Walker, L. (2010). The role of emotions in fieldwork: A self-study of family research in a corrections setting. *The Qualitative Report*, *15*(6), 1387-1414. Retrieved from http://www.nova.edu/ssss/QR/QR15-6/arditti.pdf