

# Mobilizing Metaphors in Criminological Analysis: A Case Study of Emotions in the Penal Voluntary Sector

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Metaphors pervade media and political constructions of crime and justice, provoking responses and shaping actions. Scholarship in adjacent disciplines illustrates that emotion-metaphors offer unique insight into emotional and interpretive processes, valuably illuminating sense-making, problem solving and action. Yet, metaphors are rarely analysed within criminology, leaving an important opportunity for theorizing emotions and their implications largely unrealized. We explore the analytical and theoretical potential of emotion-metaphors for criminology, using empirical research conducted in the penal voluntary sectors of England and Scotland. Drawing on focus groups with volunteers and paid staff, we analyse the metaphors that non-profit practitioners mobilized to convey how their work felt: (1) absurd and unstable, (2) vulnerable and constrained, (3) devalued and discarded and (4) risky and all-consuming.

**KEY WORDS:** penal voluntary sector, emotion, metaphor

As De Haan and Loader argued over 20 years ago, ‘it is hard to see how the analysis of crime and justice can adequately proceed... without some serious attention being paid to the place of emotions in social life’ (2002: 243). Despite Durkheim’s (1893) early writings on punishment, emotion and social solidarity, criminological attention to emotions in the intervening years has been sparse and sporadic (Jacobsen and Walklate 2019). The discipline’s attention to emotions remains ‘cautious and circumspect’ (Karstedt *et al.* 2011: 1). Within *The British Journal of Criminology*, a growing body of literature has indicated the importance of emotions within criminological domains including fear of crime (Gray *et al.* 2011; Dodsley and Gray 2021), explanations of criminal behaviour (Ray *et al.* 2004; Meenaghan *et al.* 2020), desistance (Halsey *et al.* 2017; Hunter and Farrall 2018), experiences of imprisonment (Umamaheswar 2021), the work of criminal justice practitioners (Gunby and Carline 2020; Perry and Ricciardelli 2021) and conducting criminological research (Wakeman 2014). Although much criminological scholarship has yet to grant serious weight to emotions (Young 2011; Jacobsen and Walklate 2019), literature in this journal makes clear that emotions ‘pervade penal law and the criminal justice

system' (Karstedt 2002: 300) and, in turn, their analysis can facilitate cutting-edge advancements in criminological knowledge.

The broader social scientific literature on emotions expends much attention on definitional debates. There are now nearly as many definitions of emotion as there are scholars of these phenomena, a reality that is further complicated by numerous taxonomies of overlapping affects, feelings and moods, in addition to finer-grained distinctions (Barbalet 1998; Jasper 2011). Settling on a definition is difficult because emotions are both of trans-disciplinary interest and are 'part of an active process ... [involving] multiple and enigmatic transmutations that are both ... conscious and unconscious' (Bericat 2016: 494). As James (1913: 448) explained, 'the internal shadings of emotional feelings ... merge endlessly into each other', limiting the analytical value of (re)seeking precise definitions and descriptive taxonomies.

Transcending these definitional debates is a group of inter-disciplinary scholars focused on how individuals use metaphors to express how they feel (Kövecses 2000; Stanley *et al.* 2021). They advocate for mobilizing metaphors as an analytical tool and as a means of preserving the complexity, dynamism, overlap and blurriness of emotions that the pursuit of concrete definitions too often obscures (Malvini Redden 2017; Stanley *et al.* 2021). Analysing emotion-metaphors holds great promise as an alternative means for 'uncovering hidden or ambiguous meanings, probing taken-for-granted assumptions and working with groups who may have difficulty speaking' (Malvini Redden 2017: 5). And, emotion-metaphors offer unique insight into emotional and interpretive processes, valuably illuminating sense-making, problem solving and action (Thibodeau and Boroditsky 2011; Flusberg *et al.* 2017). Given that metaphors pervade political and media constructions of crime, law and justice<sup>1</sup>—provoking responses and shaping ideas for action—emotion-metaphor analysis has clear resonance for criminological scholarship. The rare analysis of these metaphors, within and beyond scholarship published in this journal, leaves an opportunity for theorizing emotions and in turn, sense-making, problem solving and action largely unrealized within criminology (but see: de Castelbajac 2014; Umamaheswar 2022).

In this article, we explore the analytical and theoretical potential of emotion-metaphor analysis for criminological scholarship on emotions using empirical research conducted in the penal voluntary sectors (PVSs) of England and Scotland. Drawing on focus groups conducted with volunteers and paid staff within non-profit organizations, we examine (1) the emotion-metaphors that these practitioners used to make sense of their work and (2) what these metaphors illustrated about the emotional terrain of this sector. In synthesizing the experiences of a variety of PVS practitioners, this article provides insight into when and how the emotional terrain of this sector differs by organizational role (Quinn 2020).

This article is structured as follows. First, we provide contextual details about our empirical case: the PVSs in England and Scotland. Then, we explore the literature on metaphor and emotion in greater depth, underscoring the significance of emotion-metaphors for problem solving, sense-making and action. Next, we introduce our theoretical framework which combines symbolic interactionism and emotional reflexivity. Following this, we describe our focus group data and analytical process. Our analysis highlights four clusters of emotion-metaphors that PVS practitioners mobilized to characterize their work as (1) absurd and unstable, (2) vulnerable and constrained, (3) devalued and discarded and (4) risky and all-consuming. Our conclusion summarizes these insights and underscores the value of metaphor analysis for criminological understandings of emotion—within and beyond the PVS.

1 Consider that the media frequently characterizes crime as occurring in *waves, surges, sprees, plagues or epidemics* and those convicted of crimes are regularly portrayed as *animals, beasts, monsters and predators* (Armstrong 2009). US politicians have wielded *wars* against crime and drugs (Simon 2001) and police are constructed as *warriors* and/or *guardians* (Simon 2021), to name a few examples.

## THE PVS

The PVS encompasses non-profit, non-statutory organizations and agencies working with criminalized individuals, families and victims, through prison, community and policy advocacy programs (Tomczak 2016). As governments around the world continue to cut state funding for social welfare programs and shift toward neoliberal, marketized alternatives, PVS organizations have been tasked with a large and growing role in the provision of social services to marginalized people (Corcoran 2011; Quinn 2020). Reflecting their central role in criminal justice, PVS organizations around the world offer a wide range of services to criminalized individuals, including housing, drug and alcohol treatment, employment training programs, mentoring, legal support, spiritual guidance and mental health care (e.g. Kaufman 2015; Halushka 2016; Miller 2021; Quinn and Goodman 2023).

In England (and Wales), the PVS's workforce encompasses over 145,000 paid staff and 540,000 volunteers (Clinks 2019). This sector's importance is widely acknowledged: 'hardly... a prison in the country... could continue to work as it does if there was a large-scale collapse of voluntary, community and social enterprise services for people in custody' (Martin 2013). In Scotland, the PVS provides 30 per cent of the services listed in the Government's *Directory of Services for Offenders* (Audit Scotland 2012) and the Community Justice (Scotland) Act 2016 requires voluntary sector engagement with community justice plans and performance reports (Scottish Government 2016).

The literature detailing the neoliberal economic and policy context of the PVS in the United Kingdom is extensive (e.g. Corcoran 2011; Tomczak 2016). Most significantly, funding is austere and often volatile (Corcoran *et al.* 2018), service user need far outweighs the sector's capacity (Clinks 2019) and recent policies prioritizing market logics and managerialism (e.g. *Transforming Rehabilitation*) have significantly impacted PVS organizations (Maguire *et al.* 2019).<sup>2</sup> Amidst these challenging conditions, it is surprising and problematic that more research has not already been devoted to structural impacts on PVS practitioners' emotions (Quinn and Tomczak 2020a; Tomczak and Quinn 2021; Burke *et al.* 2020).

## METAPHOR AND EMOTION

Language is a powerful tool for the study of emotion (Kövecses 2000). Metaphors, 'figures of speech used to compare one thing to another' (Malvini Redden 2017: 1),<sup>3</sup> in particular, are a common way for individuals to communicate their emotional experiences (Soriano 2015). Some estimate that English speakers rely on metaphors as frequently as once every 25 words (Thibodeau and Boroditsky 2011). Metaphors also offer individuals a way of expressing deeply felt emotions or traumas that would otherwise be rendered undiscussable in everyday work and life (Stanley *et al.* 2021). Kövecses (2000: 20) explained, 'metaphor not only pervades the language people use [to talk] about the [ir] emotions', it is also 'essential to the understanding of most aspects of the conceptualization of emotion and emotional experience'.

Beyond this communicative function, metaphors also inform how people interpret their social realities through a complex interplay of cognitive, affective and social-pragmatic factors (Thibodeau *et al.* 2019). Metaphors have been connected to a wide range of interpretive functions, including how individuals 'understand possible options, view the future, conceive of

2 Criminal justice practitioners in these contexts operate within distinct professional and policy climates. Social work is embedded in Scotland's approach to criminal justice, whilst England and Wales employ risk focused probation officers (Grant and McNeill 2014). Scotland's penal policies adopt a socially inclusive approach to rehabilitation in contrast to England and Wales' punitiveness (Grant and McNeill 2014).

3 Whilst literary study distinguishes between types of figurative language (e.g. metaphors, similes, idioms, allusion), we follow social science conventions that use 'metaphors' to capture a broad range of comparisons not intended to be taken literally (Lakoff and Johnson 1980; Malvini Redden 2017).

personal agency, and understand challenges' (Malvini Redden *et al.* 2019: 502). Research has examined how individuals use metaphors as they perceive problems and develop plans of action (Lakoff and Johnson 1980; Thibodeau *et al.* 2019). Kelling's (1991) work provides an early example of what it means to view metaphors as constitutive of social reality, linking the failure of crime prevention efforts to their reliance on an inappropriate metaphor.

In another study, Thibodeau and Boroditsky (2011: 2) performed experiments to understand how people rely on metaphors as they engage in social problem solving about crime. Participants read about crime as either 'a beast preying' or 'a virus infecting' a fictitious city and were asked to offer potential solutions. Participants who read the 'beast preying' metaphor suggested harsher enforcement should be applied to catching and jailing criminals. Participants who read the 'virus infecting' metaphor proposed solutions to root causes and social programs to protect the community. Far from being mere rhetorical flourishes, scholarship demonstrates that metaphors influence how individuals understand and act regarding social issues, within and beyond criminal justice (Thibodeau and Boroditsky 2011; Bougher 2012; Flusberg *et al.* 2017). In focusing on what metaphors *do* to and for the PVS practitioners who use them, our work also shares some resonance with narrative criminology (Fleetwood *et al.* 2019) which pursues similar analytical goals with a focus on stories.

## SYMBOLIC INTERACTIONISM AND EMOTIONAL REFLEXIVITY

Symbolic interactionism is a 'bottom-up' interpretive perspective that seeks to uncover how social realities and overarching social structures emerge from micro-level interactions (Joas and Knobl 2009). Applying this approach to the PVS means envisioning this sector—and its individual organizations—as the 'ongoing accomplishment' (Dennis and Martin 2005: 208) of dynamic interactions between frontline workers, organizational leadership, policymakers, activists and criminalized individuals, rather than stable or static entities. These (inter)actions occur through ongoing processes of interpretation (Becker 1953) and meaning making (Mead 1962), amidst which emotions play a key role (Holmes 2010). As Burkitt (2012: 458) explains, emotion 'infuses our perception of others, the world around us and our own selves'.

The priority granted to emotion under symbolic interactionism aligns with critical developments in social service practice that centre the role of practitioners' emotions in knowledge production at work (D'Cruz *et al.* 2007; Dore 2016). Rather than casting emotional responses as inherently problematic or in need of containment, reflexive approaches recast practitioners' emotions as an avenue for enhancing social service practice (D'Cruz *et al.* 2007; Sjølie *et al.* 2017). Reflexive practitioners strive to cultivate a critical awareness of themselves (and their power) within workplace interactions, acknowledging the role of their emotions in the interpretive processes at play in micro-encounters. Reflexivity must go beyond questions such as 'how did this make you feel?' to make space for these feelings to be 'prodded and poked' (Dore 2016: 469). It is our contention that interrogating the emotion-metaphors that flow from and (re)create PVS practitioners' (inter)actions should become a crucial part of their reflexive practice, providing one way that we might meaningfully 'poke' at practitioners' emotions in order to cultivate critical awareness of how individuals understand and act regarding social issues, from the frontline to CEO level.

## METHODS<sup>4</sup>

In this study, we combined perspectives from PVS practitioners across diverse organizations and roles, in two jurisdictions: England and Scotland. This combination of contexts

4 This study received University ethics approval, participants gave informed consent and pseudonyms are used throughout.

and national domains ‘adds rigor, breadth, complexity, richness, and depth’ to our analysis (Denzin and Lincoln 2000: 6). However, we claim neither to offer a multiple case study with strictly replicable findings nor a representative account of the heterogenous PVS organizations in either jurisdiction. Our research agenda centred practitioners’ emotions and the metaphors they used to describe them over the intricacies of either jurisdiction—the details of which are available elsewhere (see: Tomczak 2016 re. England; Helminen 2019 re. Scotland). The emergence of shared themes across jurisdictions amplified our confidence in our approach.

Mobilizing the symbolic interactionist contention that social life is best studied in (inter)action (Blumer 1969), we gathered data through focus groups, which placed multiple perspectives and emotional processes in dialogue. Focus groups can also offer critical reflective value for practitioners (Kamberelis and Dimitriadis 2013) by generating interactive, in-depth discussions and potentially realizing collective power amongst marginalized workers (Liamputtong 2011). We conducted six focus groups with 32 PVS practitioners from England ( $n = 24$ ) and Scotland ( $n = 8$ ) (See Table 1).<sup>5</sup>

Participants were drawn from varied PVS settings in both jurisdictions, including prison monitoring initiatives; organizations working towards penal reform; and charities supporting older prisoners, imprisoned mothers and their children and criminalized people seeking employment. Focus groups were themed by identity and role (i.e. strategic leaders, frontline workers, lived experience workers) and geography (i.e. England and Scotland). They were guided by three main questions: What do you do and why?, What does it feel like? and What power do you have? Supplementary questions included: What do you enjoy about your work?, What are its challenges?, How are you supported in your work? and How could things be different?

Emotion-metaphor analysis emerged as part of the analytical process. We adopted an idiographic approach, deriving metaphors from the *in situ* talk of participants (Grant and Oswick 1996).<sup>6</sup> We began by conducting line-by-line coding of transcripts to ‘identif[y] all words and phrases that are not absolutely literal’ (Stanley *et al.* 2021: 6). From there, we differentiated between ‘live’ and ‘dead’ metaphors, as the latter have become so common in speech (e.g. tables having ‘legs’) that they ‘offer little insight for researchers’ (Stanley *et al.* 2021: 2). We then coded all live metaphors, following grounded theory’s open, axial and selective phases (Strauss and Corbin 1998). Open codes focused on how emotion-metaphors were being used or what they were meant to convey in the context of the focus group. Examples included: ‘proximity to suffering’, ‘having to fight to have work taken seriously’, ‘loss of control’ and ‘powerlessness’. Examining relationships between open codes, in the axial phase we agreed on four overarching themes that practitioners were mobilizing metaphors to convey: collectively constructing PVS work as (1) absurd and unstable, (2) vulnerable and constrained, (3) devalued and discarded and (4) risky and all-consuming. We then selectively re-coded all our transcripts through these lenses to support and elaborate these themes.

In the analysis that follows, we explore these four themes as different facets of the emotional terrain of PVS work. For clarity, relevant metaphors in quotations are italicized. Given our article’s focus on metaphors and our respective skillsets, our findings prioritize a linguistic reading of our focus group data over fine-grained interpretations of participants’ tone, delivery and body language. However, we do judiciously include some of these contextual details in parentheses to provide readers with a richer portrait of the emotional quality of our focus groups. In each section, we are also careful to differentiate shared and distinct experiences across organizational roles.

<sup>5</sup> To accommodate one participant, we interviewed them separately.

<sup>6</sup> The ‘forced metaphor’ approach, by contrast, asks participants to assign metaphors to their experiences (Tracy 2020).

**Table 1.** Participant characteristics

| <b>Pseudonym</b> | <b>Location</b> | <b>Role</b>                | <b>Compensation</b> | <b>Lived experience of incarceration</b> |
|------------------|-----------------|----------------------------|---------------------|--|
| Andy             | Scotland        | Organizational Leadership  | Paid                | No                                       |
| Angela           | England         | Organizational Leadership  | Paid                | No                                       |
| Avery            | England         | Multiple Roles             | Both                | No                                       |
| Clive            | Scotland        | Organizational Leadership  | Paid                | No                                       |
| Colette          | Scotland        | Frontline Service Delivery | Volunteer           | No                                       |
| Connor           | England         | Frontline Service Delivery | Volunteer           | Yes                                      |
| David            | England         | Management                 | Paid                | Yes                                      |
| Donea            | England         | Organizational Leadership  | Paid                | No                                       |
| Frances          | England         | Frontline Service Delivery | Volunteer           | No                                       |
| Finlay           | England         | Multiple Roles             | Both                | Yes                                      |
| Harper           | England         | Frontline Service Delivery | Volunteer           | No                                       |
| Isaac            | England         | Management                 | Paid                | Yes                                      |
| James            | Scotland        | Management                 | Paid                | Yes                                      |
| Jill             | England         | Organizational Leadership  | Paid                | No                                       |
| Jules            | Scotland        | Frontline Service Delivery | Volunteer           | No                                       |
| Kendall          | Scotland        | Multiple Roles             | Both                | No                                       |
| Kyle             | England         | Frontline Service Delivery | Paid                | No                                       |
| Laura            | England         | Frontline Service Delivery | Volunteer           | Yes                                      |
| Libby            | England         | Management                 | Paid                | No                                       |
| Lydia            | England         | Management                 | Paid                | No                                       |
| Megan            | Scotland        | Organizational Leadership  | Paid                | No                                       |
| Mike             | England         | Organizational Leadership  | Paid                | Yes                                      |
| Natalie          | England         | Organizational Leadership  | Paid                | No                                       |
| Phoenix          | England         | Frontline Service Delivery | Volunteer           | No                                       |
| Rowan            | England         | Frontline Service Delivery | Volunteer           | Yes                                      |
| Rory             | England         | Frontline Service Delivery | Paid                | No                                       |
| Ryan             | England         | Frontline Service Delivery | Volunteer           | Yes                                      |
| Sandra           | Scotland        | Organizational Leadership  | Paid                | No                                       |
| Sidney           | England         | Frontline Service Delivery | Volunteer           | No                                       |
| Susan            | England         | Organizational Leadership  | Paid                | Yes                                      |
| Tabitha          | England         | Organizational Leadership  | Paid                | No                                       |
| Victoria         | England         | Frontline Service Delivery | Both                | No                                       |

## THE EMOTIONAL TERRAIN OF PVS WORK

### PVS work as absurd and unstable

To highlight the absurdities and instabilities of PVS work and the emotions these realities evoked, practitioners across roles mobilized a cluster of emotion-metaphors related to ‘madness’

or mental illness, otherworldliness and imagery centring movement and change. Regarding the mental illness metaphors, although we reproduce participants' stigmatizing language, we do not endorse such use of mental health diagnostic terms and note that these terms were used in relation to experiences of systems rather than being directed at individuals.

Avery (multiple paid and volunteer roles), for example, introduced Lewis Carroll's (1865) novel *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, which centres absurdity, irrationality and disorder, as a way of describing her frontline work in prisons as well as the 'annoyance, frustration, aggression, and anger' she felt as a result:

This is *Alice in Wonderland*; you're going *through the looking glass*. Leave all rational thinking at the gate or *it will drive you mad* (emphatically) ... each jail is different ... and you get different rules on different days.

In invoking this novel, Avery likened prisons to an absurd and inconsistent world that was maddening and disorienting to engage with. This point resonated with others in the focus group, as Avery noted: 'a few other faces are nodding'. Laura, a lived experience volunteer, similarly described how the 'official way' within prisons was 'a bit imaginary and make believe'. As a counterpoint to these maddening experiences, frontline volunteer Harper offered a positive spin on these metaphors to describe her work: 'I love my prison days. It's like *walking into another world* and I just find it so uplifting that I've left my day-to-day life being a mum, working, my phone ... all behind me ... so that's my *through the looking glass*, picking up on what you said Avery, in a different way'.

For PVS practitioners in leadership roles, 'madness' metaphors helped them express their exasperations with the policy and funding decisions that defined their realities. For instance, Tabitha likened leading a charity to schizophrenia, conveying the absurd, contradictory and frustrating influences on her work:

The most draining thing is that you have to live a *schizophrenic* existence because you know that what the government does, what everybody does is actually rubbish and yet you have to cower down to them and pretend it's alright ... when they introduced Payment by Results<sup>7</sup> I thought 'oh that is great because we are a charity we get results' (excitedly) ... not a penny did we get (knocking forcefully on the table) ... it goes to contracts where people produce no results. Some women have been on the same training courses five times (with exasperation), because all of these charities getting government money have to tick their boxes, they just keep sending people round and round and round (animated agreement from the group) ... it's so ridiculous ... unbelievable the money that's wasted. We all know it's farcical, but we carry on, *it makes you schizophrenic*.

Extending Tabitha's critique of Payment by Results funding, organizational leader Donea highlighted the absurdity of prisons and rehabilitative strategy, stating: 'rehabilitation in a macho, alpha, dominating, authoritarian environment isn't possible (with frustration) ... I suppose that that's why I talk like this ... because I find it very hard to be calm and objective about it (murmurs of agreement from the group)'.

'Madness' metaphors also helped PVS practitioners convey the instabilities of their work. For instance, PVS practitioners with lived experience of criminalization or incarceration used 'madness' metaphors to highlight that they experienced pressures to present different versions

7 Payment by Results is a public policy instrument whereby payments are contingent on the independent verification of results. *Transforming Rehabilitation* (2013) argued that this type of funding would improve the competition, performance and effectiveness of penal services (Author 2016).

of themselves to different audiences. Connor (frontline volunteer) likened the instabilities and emotional toll of code-switching<sup>8</sup> between contexts and audiences to schizophrenia:

*You feel schizophrenic ... we do a resident's [of temporary accommodation] forum every month and I'm the one who goes and speaks to them and sees if there are any issues because I was in one. So, when I'm talking to them, I've perfected the lingo and slang ... and then when I go back and speak to my colleagues, I try to articulate it a bit better. And then when I speak to management I try [to] improve it again. You're constantly shape shifting.*

Isaac expressed similar feelings about the code switching his role required by alluding to dissociative identity disorder:

It's a real battle and I've found myself sometimes thinking *how many personalities do I have?* (with exasperation) The way that I engage with colleagues, the way I engage with service users, and the way I engage with management.

Lived experience work frequently requires 'bridge work' wherein individuals must simultaneously be read as 'street authentic enough' to represent criminalized people, yet 'professional enough' to stay employed (Voronka 2019: 577). For PVS practitioners with lived experience, mobilizing 'madness' metaphors helped them express how the instabilities of straddling these distinct realms and audiences left them feeling disoriented, exhausted and overwhelmed.

Reflecting a different kind of instability, Andy likened his experience in organizational leadership to bipolar disorder, emphasizing how his work oscillated between extremes beyond his control:

In terms of emotion, *it's totally bipolar*, one moment it's catastrophe, I don't know how I'm going to sleep... I don't know how I'm going to face tomorrow, to: this is great, somebody has given us £5, yay.

Conveying a similar point using a different metaphor, another organizational leader, Tabitha, described PVS organizations as being at the whim of the fluctuating '*flavor of the month*' for funders. PVS funder priorities are continually in flux, shifting focus, for instance, from services for women to those supporting racialized groups and so forth. As Tabitha explained, 'you're either in or you're out, and then you wait and you're back in again'. At the same time, PVS organizations must also navigate an unstable policy environment.<sup>9</sup> Amidst these conditions, practitioners in leadership roles mobilized metaphors centring movement and change to highlight these instabilities. For instance, Andy characterized PVS organizations as '*lurching from pilot to pilot*' and '*floundering around* trying to find little pockets of money', whilst the fact that the criminal justice system '*changes faces constantly*' exacerbated these instabilities. Amidst this flux, PVS leaders had to 'go through things again and again' (Clive, organizational leader) with different funders, different people and different policies, impeding progress. To capture this infuriating reality, Clive drew parallels with a 1993 film depicting the absurdities of re-living the same day when he described his '*Groundhog Day* frustration' with organizational churn, suggesting that 'it's beyond frustration, it's proper heart sinking ... [it] drives you to *pull your hair out*'.

8 Code switching refers to people's abilities to switch their language or dialect between contexts. Linguistic transformations are frequently imposed on marginalized people as they navigate dominant culture and expectations (Johnson et al. 2022).

9 For instance, in England and Wales, the Ministry of Justice allocated £12m to provide diversionary community support for women in response to the *Corston Report*, but later this budget was reduced to £1m. Under *Transforming Rehabilitation* (2013), the government sought to expand the provision of penal services by the PVS, yet not one charity was successful in their bids to own and run Community Rehabilitation Companies (Tomczak 2016).



Collectively, this cluster of emotion-metaphors drawing comparisons to ‘madness’, other-worldliness and various forms of movement or change helped PVS practitioners express how the irrationalities and continual flux of their work environments impacted them, revealing the absurdities and instabilities they experienced. For organizational leaders, the inconsistencies, irrationalities and contradictions of the nebulous ‘system’ they work within felt like an external force that flattened possibilities for action, made long-term organizational planning difficult and impaired their abilities to fulfil personal and organizational missions. And for those with lived experience, these metaphors allowed them to describe the instabilities and pressures of their liminal position in PVS organizations, straddling multiple realms, audiences and expectations. Notably, these types of metaphors were nearly absent among volunteers who did not have lived experience of criminalization or incarceration. Instead, they tended to underscore ‘the feel-good factor’ (Colette) associated with their work. Volunteers noted that they were ‘optimistic’ (Frances) and ‘had a really jolly time’ (Sidney). These stark differences are perhaps attributable to the fact that volunteer roles typically prioritize ‘rewarding and satisfying experiences’ (Eliasoph, 2011: 128) to encourage unpaid participation. Accordingly, volunteering is often seen as a rewarding leisure activity. As Jules, explained: ‘I’ve retired so it’s given me something worthwhile to do’.

### PVS work as vulnerable and constrained

A distinct cluster of emotion-metaphors illuminated the vulnerabilities and constraints PVS practitioners experienced in their relationships with others (e.g. correctional officials, colleagues, funders, policy makers). These metaphors included comparisons to victimization or abuse, being treated like a child, experiencing physical violence or bullying and being trapped or shackled, among other imagery related to control and force.

Organizational leaders and managers mobilized these metaphors to convey the vulnerabilities and constraints they experienced in their relationships with external actors. Donea described feeling trapped and hopeless by her organization’s entanglements with the criminal justice system: ‘without it we can’t actually continue to function ... *we’re shackled to the system* (with frustration) ... How do we get out of it? There is *no escape* (with despair)’. Tabitha’s declarations of being forced to ‘*cower down*’ to the government also resonate here. Speaking about his organization’s unstable relationship with government funders and power asymmetries, Isaac explained: ‘Left and right hand. We will give it to you with one hand, *we will slap you with the other*’. Regarding government policymaking, Andy highlighted the challenges of trying to enact real change through a metaphor that emphasized the power of external constraints: ‘you try and make the best of what you can, but in the long run *the red pen would come in from above* ... [and] you end up getting the sort of bland rubbish that we’re used to ... and it doesn’t get anywhere’.

For practitioners with lived experience of criminalization or incarceration, this cluster of emotion-metaphors helped them convey the distinct vulnerabilities they experienced as stigmatized people and often with constrained employment alternatives (Buck et al. 2022). Connor explained, ‘I basically have to stay in this sector ... I can never go back to a normal job because of ... my past’. James agreed, stating ‘we can’t migrate ... because [employers] are not wanting to take a chance on you’. Given these frequently constrained employment options, the threat of being dismissed or discredited at work was palpable for practitioners with lived experience. Susan shared an example of a friend with a criminal record who ‘*felt like he has lived with a trap door underneath him* ... at any minute it’s going to go (opening sound)’. Susan described similar feelings in her own work, suggesting that if ‘at any minute [she] caused a bit of tension’, she would be perceived as a problem due to ‘hav[ing] a track record’. Laura recalled an instance where she was humiliated during her volunteer work for having a criminal record and barred

from delivering educational programming in a prison—despite being specifically invited to do so. The emotional weight of this story was obvious in Laura’s slow and tremulous delivery:

They told me in front of the students that I couldn’t come in because of my criminal record (sharp inhales from the group) ... It was really embarrassing (pause) ... *I was being chastised like a child* (slowly) ... It reminded me that no matter what you do ... there’s always some dickhead in power that (pause) can take you right back ... it was mortifying and (pause) and probably the biggest (pause) *bump back down to earth* that I’ve ever had in erm in this career.

Laura’s experiences resonate with Purser’s (2021: 219) characterization of criminal records as ‘a permanent badge of dishonor and a warrant for public belittling’. In Purser’s (2021) research, criminalized people described the ‘routinized personal humiliation’ (219) and ‘status degradation’ (220) they experienced at work.

Furthermore, practitioners with lived experience also spoke about the emotional vulnerabilities of doing this work given its proximity to their own experiences of incarceration—a reality they sometimes likened to abuse. Susan drew these parallels directly:

How do you navigate this space when you’re a person who’s been to prison? (long pause) It’s the deepest and gravest thing that’s ever happened to me (emphatically) and I’ve been through lots (laughs) ... The long-term impact ... is really *scarring* (long pause) and so then to ... activate that experience for social purpose (pause), and want to work with a system (pause) that has caused that harm? That’s like *working with your abuser*, isn’t it? (wryly)

Others with lived experience indirectly signalled a similarly abusive dynamic with their work. Isaac spoke about the challenges of working within a system that has ‘*brutalized*’ him. James likened his work to being ‘*bullied by the system*, not physically bullied, but, you know’. And Laura spoke about being ‘*gaslit by the criminal justice system*’ because of the way her lived reality of the criminal justice system was regularly denied by people who ‘have no idea of what it’s actually like in practice’.

The vulnerability of PVS practitioners with lived experience meant that they also felt constrained in how they could express themselves at work. As Susan explained, ‘I need a job, so it’s horrible ... you’re [ ... ] having to *close yourself down* and *be somebody else* ... it’s so exhausting emotionally’. Laura likened her experience volunteering in the PVS to being trapped: ‘you’re allowed to be *in that box*, and we’ll let you go so far, but *don’t step out of the box*’. Isaac similarly lamented being:

Very *tightly* controlled ... you’re so *constrained* ... the system doesn’t understand the lived experience, the system *tries to shoehorn* what it thinks is the best thing.

Collectively, this cluster of emotion-metaphors—of being abused or victimized, being treated like a child, experiencing physical violence or bullying, being trapped or shackled and other imagery focused on control or force—revealed the vulnerabilities and constraints that PVS practitioners experienced in their work. These metaphors helped practitioners in leadership and management roles express the vulnerabilities and constraints they experienced working with powerful actors (e.g. government, institutional staff) that frequently made unilateral decisions and demanded deference. For those with lived experience, these metaphors helped convey the difficulties of being stigmatized workers practicing within the system that has harmed them. Volunteers’ without lived experience, by contrast, scarcely utilized these emotion-metaphors or characterized their work as vulnerable or constrained. This difference

is perhaps partially attributable to the fact that most volunteers had limited engagement with the external actors (i.e. government or correctional officials) that others in this sector experienced as constraining and abusive. As Sidney (volunteer) explained: ‘a prison officer is nowhere near when [I] go in ... so I think my experience is quite a bit different’.

### PVS work as devalued and discarded

PVS practitioners across organizational roles mobilized emotion-metaphors related to rubbish or pollution, of being beneath others, abandoned or pushed to the margins to express how their work sometimes left them feeling devalued or discarded. James, a PVS manager, described it plainly: ‘as a third sector we’re not taken seriously’. Organizational leader Angela explained that PVS practitioners were ‘belittled’ by government officials who ‘*pat [them] on the head*’ and characterize them as ‘nice little do gooders ... who can’t possibly know how difficult and complicated this [work] is ... because all we do is knitting (with distain)’. Connor, a frontline volunteer, also described the dismissal of the PVS, saying: ‘[it’s] us *on the ground*, we’re at the *bottom of the pyramid*’.

Others echoed these characterizations using a variety of metaphors. Practitioners across organizational roles described PVS organizations as ‘*pushed to the margins*’ (Finlay, multiple paid and volunteer roles), ‘*put on the backfoot*’ (Colette, frontline volunteer) or ‘*on the outside looking in*’ (David, manager). Others explained that they were ‘*the poor relations at the table*’ (Clive, organizational leader) getting ‘*scraps* of what everybody else is getting’ (David). James (manager) amusingly added that PVS practitioners were seen as ‘*amateur pests*’—to which the group responded with hearty laughter. Clive later linked James’ metaphor to PVS practitioners’ poor treatment: ‘Yes, *amateur pest* because ... people working in the third sector ... are certainly not treated as equals, but actively treated with contempt’.

Other practitioners mobilized metaphors of rubbish or waste to convey how (ex-)prisoners were seen as ‘unpopular causes’ and ‘unworthy’ recipients of support (Quinn and Tomczak 2020b: 83), which impacted how PVS work was perceived overall. As frontline volunteer Colette described:

There’s nobody prepared to take this on ... you don’t have the sympathy of the people ... the public just look at prisons and say, ‘oh well, that’s where they go to get punished and whatever they get that’s just what they have to put up with’ (dismissively).

Amidst these conditions, practitioners regularly envisioned the PVS as a ‘*dumping ground*’ for criminalized individuals who were navigating ‘all sorts of horrific abuses’ yet were abandoned by other social institutions and welfare mechanisms (Donea, organizational leader). Tabitha (organizational leader) similarly characterized the prisons she worked within as ‘*dumping shit on*’ criminalized people. Andy (organizational leader) highlighted the challenges of working in an environment and with a population that was deprioritized, explaining that the PVS was ‘treated abysmally and taken for granted ... it’s just assumed that somebody somewhere will *pick up the pieces*’.

Across organizational roles, practitioners extended the metaphorical use of rubbish or pollution to describe the impact of these persistent devaluations and dismissals on organizational cultures. For example, PVS manager Libby positioned her organization’s daily briefings as a ‘*dumping ground*’ for colleagues’ trauma, matter-of-factly suggesting that: ‘sometimes just getting through the day can be a traumatic experience, before they have even sat at their desk’. Frontline worker and volunteer Victoria spoke about the ‘load of *toxicity*’ within her organization. Organizational leader Andy described how his workplace ‘*became a cesspit*’. And James, a PVS manager, characterized his job as ‘just *dealing with the crap* that comes along’.

Although working in environments characterized as ‘*dumping grounds*’ and associated with notions of ‘*crap*’ and ‘*shit*’ was undoubtedly difficult, some participants mobilized these descriptors to frame their work positively. Organizational leader Donea, for example, flipped the terms ‘*dirty*’ and ‘*murky*’ to contest demeaning characterizations of this sector:

So often our work is demeaned as ‘chats’... on the one hand it is as simple as having a chat and on the other hand it is really specialist, lifesaving... highly skilled, dangerous, *dirty*, *murky*, tricky bit of a chat (defiantly).

Donea later contrasted the value and importance of her role with those of academics who ‘don’t get *dirty*’. Other practitioners similarly differentiated their work from the ‘*ivory tower*’ which was criticized for ‘not listening to *the ground floor*’ (Isaac, manager). In another example, Avery (multiple paid and volunteer roles) advocated for the value of working in ‘*dark*’ and ‘*hard*’ environments precisely because this type of work is so often dismissed:

The world is full of people who want to be bloody doctors, so I want to do the stuff that other people don’t want to do. The area that’s least supported, that’s most vilified... It’s *the dark end and the hard end* (softly), that’s where you can make the most difference.

Frontline worker and volunteer Victoria employed a similar strategy to position working in the PVS as an honourable profession, stating: ‘you have to be a particular kind of person to want to work within these *crap* environments’.

Beyond general examples of PVS practitioners and organizations being devalued or excluded, participants with lived experience of criminalization or incarceration recounted dismissals of a different magnitude. Susan bitterly described how she was ‘treated like *the scum of the earth* (group speaking over each other in agreement)’. Finlay and Connor conveyed similar experiences at work:

As a former drug user and someone who grew up in the criminal justice system, I’ve got transferable skills... but my experience was *being kicked to the curb*... [in] every interaction, the system reminds people that they’re not worth anything. (Finlay, multiple paid and volunteer roles)

People all assumed I was just an ex-riff-raff *scumbag*, ex-con fucking homeless scumbag prick (boisterous laughter from the group) ... no one cares ... they will *kick you over on the street* (indignantly) (Connor, volunteer).

Even though the value of lived experience within criminal justice settings is increasingly recognized and often actively sought out (Buck *et al.* 2022), harmful and stigmatizing assumptions about criminalized people still very much impact those working in these roles: the previous analysis section highlighted how practitioners with lived experience felt vulnerable, constrained and victimized by their work in criminal justice, and this section highlighted how embodied expertise is regularly devalued, ignored and diminished.

Collectively, these emotion-metaphors—of rubbish or pollution, being beneath others, abandoned or pushed to the margins—helped PVS practitioners occupying frontline, leadership, volunteer and lived experience roles convey the fraught and unequal relations between PVS organizations, the government and the criminal justice system, that left practitioners feeling belittled, ignored and excluded from decision making. In mobilizing these emotion-metaphors, PVS practitioners also highlighted their position as the last line of defense for criminalized people who have been abandoned by other social institutions (Quinn *et al.* 2022). Additionally,

they underscored the role of stigma within this work, impacting the PVS as a whole and practitioners with lived experience in particular, as they navigated harmful assumptions and dehumanizing treatment at work.

### PVS work as risky and all-consuming

As with many helping professions, PVS work routinely involves discussing service users' 'traumatic pasts filled with violence, substance abuse and poverty' (Jacobi and Roberts 2016: 353), along with their potentially traumatic and/or austere present realities (Tomczak and Quinn 2021). Although it is commonly assumed that 'helpers are there to serve others and should be well able to cope with any burdens such caring might entail' (Gibson *et al.* 1989: 2), extensive literature describes the negative emotional impacts of seeking to help others (see Tomczak and Quinn 2021). To express how their work was emotionally risky and all-consuming, PVS practitioners relied on a variety of emotion-metaphors including absorption or osmosis, heaviness, entanglement, going over to the dark side and haunting. Collectively, these metaphors helped PVS practitioners express that their work with criminalized people involved experiencing vicarious trauma and/or re-living their own traumatic experiences.

References to '*osmosis*' (Natalie, organizational leader) evoked the movement or diffusion of molecules across a semi-permeable membrane. When used as a metaphor—either directly or through related processes of absorption, diffusion or permeation—osmosis signalled the emotional risks that PVS practitioners faced in proximity to the trauma of others. Libby, a PVS manager, described this as especially concerning for frontline staff:

I go in to the prisons quite frequently and [I'm] in awe of what our staff go through... they relate to what the actual offenders go through... the trauma, the noise, the drug abuse, the violence, the self-harm... some of our workers burn out because *they absorb the trauma and chaos themselves and don't have that clear boundary* of 'I'm the case worker, you're the individual I'm supporting.'

Organizational leader Tabitha also described the emotional impact of working within prisons—of being unable to maintain protective boundaries, absorbing the pain of others and needing to find coping mechanisms:

I don't drink at all because I think I would go home and get drunk every night (restrained laughter from the group)... I was in [prison name] all day... and you come out and you just think (sigh) 'oh god I need to get drunk' (with dread)... it would be so easy after days of what we do to just *drown your pain... their pain comes on to you and you take the pain in*. How are you going to get rid of this pain? A lot of people start by *killing the pain* by alcohol and drugs... if you work with people in prison a lot... you *absorb it*.

PVS manager Lydia similarly spoke about taking on the pain of others: 'it always *lays very heavily on me* (softly)... you feel it and you take it home'. Frontline worker and volunteer Victoria agreed, underscoring the need to develop coping strategies: 'you have to develop mechanisms to leave it. Otherwise, you can't go on holiday. You can't get drunk... where is the *off switch*?' PVS practitioners' use of these metaphors conveyed the often all-consuming emotional impacts of their work. These depictions are also consistent with clinical descriptions of vicarious trauma, wherein exposure to the suffering of others profoundly alters the way that practitioners perceive, experience and interact with the world (Kadambi and Ennis 2004).

Other practitioners sought to convey the emotional risks of over-identification with the suffering of service users. As organizational leader Natalie declared, 'you have to really *disentangle*

your own stuff and this stuff'. Donea, another organizational leader, spoke about the challenges of helping her frontline staff navigate these risks, explaining that it was her role to:

Help people clarify what is [their] personal, emotional response to stuff and what is someone else's...and where do those things both intersect and diverge because if you get them confused this is life and death (emphatically) ... this is really serious.

Other PVS practitioners made sense of these emotional risks using metaphors of the 'dark side' or someone's 'shadow side'. Organizational leader Tabitha explained:

I don't know how many members of staff over the years... I have this phrase I say 'when they go over to the dark side' ... they become one of the people we're trying to help... they associate so much with the person that *they move over to the dark side* ... so you have to be very careful.

Avery (multiple paid and volunteers roles) elaborated on these perceived risks in the context of her paid role, suggesting that:

This work can attract people who are *touching their dark side, or their shadow side* ... something deep and traumatic within them and they reach out to help others when they haven't (short pause) quite resolved that in themselves ... that's really dangerous.

These metaphors helped PVS practitioners to articulate a well-documented phenomenon in the helping professions, wherein 'personal abuse history [can act] as a possible motivator to enter the caring professions' (McFadden *et al.* 2015: 551) and in turn 'the client's despair involves an act of being with and enduring one's own' (Picardie 1980: 489).

Like others, practitioners with lived experience of criminalization or incarceration relied on varied metaphors to convey how PVS work could trigger strong emotional responses, memories and traumas. For instance, Isaac explained that 'talking about things' with service users was often difficult because of the '*ghosts that come back to haunt [him]*'. In likening his work to being haunted, Isaac foregrounded the ever-present emotional risks for practitioners with lived experience who, whilst seeking to help others navigate imprisonment, are continually confronted with their own experiences of criminalization. Similarly, Connor underscored how his volunteer work could provoke distressing memories, triggering his own traumas:

While I'm talking to somebody... *the bottle will pop open* and that will be a memory... *everything [is] flying around* (gesturing with arms) *like a bingo hall machine* ... switch[ing] from one trauma to another, one issue to another, one anxiety to another (increasingly quickly).

Reflecting Connor's bottle depiction, Isaac compared the risks of retraumatization in this work to '*opening [a] can of worms*' to highlight the complexities and difficulties of managing his emotions once they had been reactivated.

Collectively, this cluster of emotion-metaphors—including absorption or osmosis, heaviness, entanglement, going over to the dark side and haunting—helped PVS practitioners convey the emotional risks and all-consuming nature of this work. For many practitioners, routinely working alongside the suffering of others entailed absorbing some of this suffering themselves, experiencing vicarious trauma and struggling to maintain emotional boundaries. For PVS practitioners with lived experience, these risks were especially pronounced because they were not only helping others navigate imprisonment and its effects, but also often re-living their own traumatic interactions with the criminal justice system and adjacent institutions. By contrast,

volunteers without lived experience were the least likely of our participants to characterize their work as risky or all-consuming. Instead, volunteers emphasized how they could utilize a ‘detachment mindset’ (Harper) or were able to ‘let go’ upon leaving their shifts (Phoenix). The emotional distance from which volunteers without lived experience could approach their work may be attributable to the part-time and flexible nature of these roles which may protect them from the emotional exhaustion commonly observed among other PVS practitioners.

## CONCLUSION

Despite growing recognition of the importance of emotions across a variety of criminological domains, very little is known about the emotions of PVS practitioners who play a significant role in delivering criminal justice services (Burke *et al.* 2020; Tomczak and Quinn 2021; Buck *et al.* 2022). This oversight is problematic because research in adjacent social welfare domains has underscored how practitioner emotions impact service delivery, service users and the implementation of social policy (Collings and Murray 1996; Schmidt and Datnow 2005; Blomberg *et al.* 2015; Lynch and Haney 2015). How practitioners feel impacts how they interpret, and ultimately act upon, the social problems, human suffering and challenging conditions they are confronted with in their work. In advancing our understanding of PVS practitioners’ emotions, then, we stand to gain a means to enrich thinking, action, service delivery and outcomes for the benefit of practitioners, service users and societies.

Synthesizing a diverse set of emotion-metaphors, this article offered a multi-faceted portrayal of PVS work in England and Scotland<sup>10</sup> as absurd and unstable, vulnerable and constrained, devalued and discarded and risky and all-consuming. Recall that a diverse group of practitioners relied on emotion-metaphors of ‘madness’, otherworldliness and imagery centring movement and change to convey their frustration and exhaustion working in a volatile, often irrational, system. They also likened their work to being abused, controlled or victimized to illuminate the vulnerabilities and constraints they experienced in their relationships with other actors. Emotion-metaphors of rubbish or pollution, of being beneath others, abandoned or pushed to the margins were regularly mobilized to describe the fraught and unequal relations between their organizations and external actors that left PVS practitioners feeling belittled, ignored and on the outside. And, others relied on metaphors of osmosis, absorption, heaviness, entanglement, going over to the dark side and haunting to convey their struggle to maintain protective boundaries in close proximity to the suffering of others.

Although there were many shared experiences amongst our participants, this article also illuminated the ways in which the emotional terrain of this sector differed by organizational role. For instance, for PVS leaders and managers, the emotion-metaphors highlighted in this article helped them convey the exasperation, powerlessness and constant flux they experienced in their relationships with funders, policymakers and correctional administrators that made unilateral decisions and demanded deference. For frontline workers, these metaphors helped them express the emotional risks they experienced in close proximity to the suffering of others. For paid and volunteer lived experience workers, these emotion-metaphors highlighted the vulnerability and precarity they experienced as stigmatized workers practicing within the system that has harmed them. A notable contrast to the difficult emotional experiences of the vast majority of PVS practitioners in this study, were the largely positive and affirming experiences of volunteers without lived experience who, in turn, also infrequently relied on the emotion-metaphors detailed in this article to talk about their work.

10 Despite their fairly distinct penal policy climates, our findings support Helminen’s (2019) earlier declaration that there is convergence across the experiences—and, as we add, the emotions—of PVS practitioners in England and Scotland. Future research entangling *why* we see this convergence across different contexts would be especially valuable (see Grant and McNeill 2014).

The emotion-metaphors that PVS practitioners used to describe their work also revealed what they see as the possibilities and barriers for action within their present environments (Malvini Redden *et al.* 2019). Consider, for instance, that although we asked about both rewarding and challenging aspects of their work, nearly all of the emotion-metaphors used in these discussions highlighted PVS practitioners' limited power, agency, control and protection at work. The overwhelmingly grim portrait of PVS work depicted in this article speaks to the especially harsh context of the voluntary sector in the criminal justice domain—particularly for organizational leaders, frontline workers and those in lived experience roles. Recall that in recent years UK-based PVS organizations and their staff have experienced intersecting structural challenges, including welfare state retrenchment, an austere and unstable funding environment, rising service user need, a turbulent policy landscape, efforts to privatize criminal justice and often antagonizing relationships with criminal justice institutions (e.g. Corcoran 2011; Maguire *et al.* 2019). Amidst these conditions, our research offers valuable insight into the experiences and emotions of those on and near to the frontlines of these difficult social, economic and policy changes.

In analysing the emotion-metaphors that PVS practitioners relied on to describe their work, this article also underscored the value and potential of metaphor analysis for understanding emotion in criminal justice practice. For instance, although it was clear in our focus groups that for most PVS practice was emotionally charged, participants rarely used direct emotion words (e.g. anger, sadness, fear) in these discussions. Difficult and deeply personal experiences, like many of those presented in this article, are among the most difficult to articulate, making metaphors a common strategy for expressing these emotions (Stanley *et al.* 2021). By focusing on the emotion-metaphors that practitioners used to describe their work, our research was able to excavate deeper meaning from our data whilst also preserving the complexity, contradictions and blurriness of how PVS work feels.

Although this research focused on PVS practitioners, the criminological literature is rich with other examples of emotion-metaphors to be further interrogated. Consider the dehumanizing metaphor used by one mock juror to advocate for the death penalty in Lynch and Haney's (2015: 388) research on emotions and jury decision making: 'It's like a rabid dog or a dog that gets a taste of killing chickens... once they get a taste for it, the only thing you can do is take them out and shoot them... you don't put a rabid dog in a cage'. Or the metaphor Dagan and Zimran's (2023: 8) participant used to describe how it felt to receive his sentencing remarks: 'I felt like a small child that looks for his mom'. In Crewe *et al.*'s (2014: 64) research, one participant described their experiences in prison as follows: 'Everyone's emotions are in all these little boxes... when you come in, you park it beside the TV or near the cupboards'. Elsewhere, a participant described the monotony of imprisonment as 'a robot's life... it's Groundhog Day' (Laws and Crewe 2016: 558). These handful of examples illustrate the generative possibilities of emotion-metaphor analysis for criminology well beyond our present focus on PVS organizations.

Emotion-metaphor analysis across criminological domains holds potential to illuminate black-boxes of experience: deeply felt emotions or traumas that would otherwise be rendered undiscussable in everyday work and life (Stanley *et al.* 2021). In turn, emotion-metaphor analysis opens up criminological opportunities for theorizing emotions, and in turn, understanding sense-making, problem solving and action, as emotion-metaphors are constituted by and constitutive of social reality (Thibodeau *et al.* 2019). Emotion-metaphor analysis presents new modes of analysis and action, facilitating the cultivation of a critical awareness of how criminal justice practitioners—and potentially other actors such as activists and academics—conceptualize problems, conceive of their agency and develop plans of action regarding workplace interactions and social issues more broadly (Lakoff and Johnson 1980; Thibodeau and Boroditsky 2011; Malvini Redden *et al.* 2019; Thibodeau *et al.* 2019). It is our hope that other criminologists



may also find it rewarding and productive to interrogate the emotion-metaphors present in their data sets.

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