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## **Changing Bodies, Ambivalent Subjectivities, and Women's Punishment**

*The boundaries between 'us' and 'them' provide for the maintenance, via distinction, of identity*  
(Bauman and May 2001: 183).

More than twenty years ago, the feminist scholar Adrian Howe called for a feminist critique of penalty via an examination of the 'punishment-body relation' (1994: 3). She argued that without it, the study of punishment would '[remain] imprisoned within a masculinist theoretical stronghold' which has had several implications. One of these implications, according to Howe, is that there has been a 'radical disjunction' between masculinist critiques of punishment and the feminist project that seeks to '[map] the differential impact of disciplinary power on lived female bodies' (Howe 1994: 3). Howe goes on to argue that feminist scholars themselves have often prioritised the study of disciplined rather than punished bodies, and this has created an impasse within feminist discussions on women's bodies in the context of the prison and the absence of a clear, feminist critique on punishment. In the many years that passed since Howe's *Punish and Critique*, we have seen a dedicated attempt among feminists to study penalty (cf. Carlen 1998; 2002a; 2002b; Bosworth 1999; Hannah-Moffat 2001; 2010; Hedderman 2010), and while much progress has been made to bridge the gaps between feminism, criminology, and the sociology of punishment (cf. Gelsthorpe 2004; 2006; Gelsthorpe and Morris 2002; Heidensohn and Silvestri 2012), the 'radical disjunction' identified by Howe twenty-two years ago arguably has not yet been bridged. It is still observable in recent analyses on punishment, both theoretical and empirical. For this reason, Mary Bosworth and Emma Kaufman (2013) have recently suggested that scholarship on punishment still has much to derive from feminist and gender-aware perspectives. Like Howe, they also identify theorisation on bodies and embodiment to be one of the most significant discussions to emerge from feminist writing, and invite scholars to engage with it in order to study punishment in all its complexity and contradictions (Bosworth and Kaufman 2013: 191).

This article seeks to explore the punishment-body relation by looking at women's experience of imprisonment and their embodied identities. It traces the situational construction of bodies and subjectivities, and maps changes in women's self-perceptions and body-image in and out of prison. I adopt a phenomenological perspective that is attentive to the lived-experiences of women, and aim to illustrate both how women cope with punishment

through their bodies as well as how they use their bodies to resist prison-specific and social pressures. I pursue an investigation into the punishment-body relation in order to understand the ‘pains of imprisonment’ (Sykes 1958) and how these are survived through an embodied sense of self, drawing on a notion of embodiment informed by the phenomenological work of Maurice Merleau-Ponty. Within this tradition, embodiment is a concept that encompasses ‘the bodily aspects of human subjectivity’ (Audi 1999: 120) and attends to the capacity of the body to be both an ‘objective’ entity, and an embodied subject. Following this phenomenological framework, I start from the premise that bodies form the foundation of our ability to perceive and give meaning to the world and to ourselves (Merleau-Ponty 1962).

Through examples from a qualitative study I conducted with women who experienced punishment in England, I aim to show that while punishment targets the prisoner’s body and often succeeds in inscribing and stigmatising it with painful experiences and scarred identities, the prisoner maintains a sense of subjectivity and self in custody through her body. She relies on it to make sense of her lived experiences, to survive punishment and often to resist its lasting effects, and uses it to reconstruct and manage an ambivalent, embodied identity. From this perspective, I propose that the prisoner body is understood as both the object and as the subject of modern punishment.

The article starts with a brief discussion of the methodology I employed in my study and an overview into the backgrounds of my research participants. The second part of the paper presents themes that emerged from interviews with women ex-prisoners and shows that a key element in understanding the complex relationship between bodies and punishment is that of *bodily change*. Due to their complex narratives and experiences, women’s bodies undergo several transformations in custody, and I use the meanings attached to these various physiological changes they experienced to illustrate how women perceived and coped with incarceration, as well as how they adjusted and managed their identities and presentations within this shifting and ambivalent process. I focus on the meanings attributed to change occurring as a result of ageing and the broader experience of “loss” in prison, the meanings ascribed to scars on the skin caused by self-injury, and the meanings attached to weight gain and the changing morphology of the prisoner body in terms of size. Then, I go on to discuss the politics of dress and self-presentation in prison as a way of illustrating women’s active engagement with their bodies and their efforts to manage a self-identity under pressure. I

conclude with a discussion on the bodily stigma of incarceration affecting women's lives after released from prison, focusing on the long lasting effects of punishment on women's bodies and subjectivities.

### **Methodology**

The themes outlined in this paper emerged out of a study I conducted on embodied experiences of imprisonment. This study sought to understand how women articulate their lived experiences in custody, and focused on examining the bodily effects of imprisonment on their overall identities. It includes a discussion of themes such as medicalisation and health in prison, prison food and addictions, body-image and dress and bodily survival strategies during and after incarceration. The larger study included questionnaires with serving prisoners as well as a historical analysis of the embodied aspects of the prison experience since the nineteenth century, but this paper focuses on findings from the largest part of the study that comprised 24 case studies with female former prisoners. The study found that the punishment-body relation starts and ends *outside* the prison, incorporating significant aspects of women's backgrounds and overall life experiences (see also Carlen 1998; 1983). I argue that the embodiment paradigm can encompass the social control of women, their double oppression, and their pained experiences, with reference to both the outside world and the prison and suggest that understanding the corporeal identities of women prisoners involves a study of subjectivity, as *both* social as well as biographical (Gadd and Jefferson 2007: 5). The main research question pursued in this project was: *How can an embodied-experience perspective elucidate understandings of women's experience of imprisonment?*

As part of this project, I conducted 24 case study interviews with female former prisoners. I adopted a case study approach because it allowed for breadth and depth into life-narratives and offered the opportunity to discuss at length aspects of the participants' embodied identities. Adopting a case study approach also meant that I had to engage profoundly with a small sample that showed interest in engaging with the specific elements of this project. To do this, I advertised the study in advance through posters placed at several charitable organizations working with ex-prisoners, and allowed the participants to reflect independently on the study before deciding to take part. The participants were offered an information sheet with details of the research and were asked to read it before signing the

consent form. Admittedly the study was subject to the limitations of self-selection bias, but since the it sought to adopt a phenomenological perspective, self-selection was necessary to allow for the collection of thicker qualitative data. Thus, participation in this study was voluntary and the project took place in various urban centres mainly in the North and the South East of England. During semi-structured interviews, which were audio-recorded, the women described how their bodies changed while incarcerated. They also spoke of the crucial role their bodies played in mediating their subjectivities and shaping their coping strategies behind bars. The location of the interviews varied: the majority of the participants were interviewed in private rooms within the organizations which helped me make contact with the women, whereas other interviews took place in coffee shops or in the participants' homes.

During both the collection and analysis of my data I was conscious that the interviewer–interviewee relationship is unequal (see also Bosworth et al., 2005; Phillips and Earle, 2010). Therefore, I tried to be attentive to the power dynamics of the interview process and was sensitive to the participants' confessions. I negotiated consent throughout the interviews, and ensured confidentiality to my participants. My collection of data during the interviews also included observations of non-discursive articulations, including some notes on the participants' gestures, dress and bodily presentation (Bachman and Schutt, 2007: 281). And, while such observations alone could not provide concrete conclusions (because doing so would entail several ethical dilemmas), I did consider these during my thematic analysis as they allowed for a more reflexive account of how lived experiences, identities and power relations are interpreted in research situations. The women, whose real names are not used here, came from a range of backgrounds. Aged between 19 and 42, eight of them identified with an ethnic minority group. All had served a prison sentence in closed conditions and some had also spent time in open prisons. Each woman had been released for six months or less at the time of the interview (see Table 1).

**Table 1: Selected characteristics of the interviewees**

<b>Participant</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Ethnic Background</b>	<b>Time since release</b>	<b>Time in Prison<sup>1</sup></b>	<b>Number of prison sentences</b>
Anna	23	White British	2 weeks	9M <sup>2</sup>	2
Berta	35	White British	2 weeks	24M	8
Carmen	19	Asian British	3 months	4W <sup>3</sup> (R) <sup>4</sup>	2
Denise	34	White British	1 month	3 M	1
Eve	37	Mixed	4 months	4 M	2

<sup>1</sup> Length of time spent in prison the last time the participant was in prison: approximated to whole weeks/months

<sup>2</sup> M=Months

<sup>3</sup> W=Week(s)

<sup>4</sup> R= Remand prisoner

Fiona	29	White British	4 months	4 M	1
Gemma	26	White British	6 months	2 M	1
Hayley	37	Mixed	3 weeks	3 M	1
Iris	29	Black British	4 months	3 M	1
Katherine	28	Black British	6 months	6 M	2
Laura	39	White British	6 months	6 M	1
Magda	23	White British	5 months	8 M	5
Natasha	41	White British	2 weeks	18 M	5
Olga	24	White British	4 months	4M	4
Pauline	23	White British	3 months	6M	1
Erika	24	White British	6 months	18 M	2
Regina	26	White British	1 week	18 M	6
Susan	35	Mixed	2 weeks	3 M	1
Tanya	37	Mixed	2 months	2 M	1
Emily	22	Black British	6 months	6M	1
Vera	23	White Other	5 months	12 M	1
Alicia	42	White British	4 months	6 M	2
Natalie	42	White British	3 months	5 M	1
Yolanda	37	White British	6 months	5 M	1

Although to some extent my participants' backgrounds varied in terms of the different life experiences they had and the demographic factors that brought them to prison, it appeared that they all entered prison in what they described as '*a bad state*'. A '*bad state*' referred to drug and alcohol addictions, serious mental health issues, regular lack of accommodation, traumatic experiences of abuse and attempts to escape violent partners or family members, or, as in the case of one of my younger participants, Gemma, a prison sentence came after a suicide attempt and the shocking experience of verbal abuse from police officers. Others, like Natalie, explained that her experiences led to self-loathing and constant attempts to demean herself which meant that going to prison confirmed her view of her already damaged, self-mutilated and suffering body.

Goffman's (1968: 12) notion of '*spoilt identity*' suggests that individuals who are socially stigmatised, either for failing to perform in a certain way or for participating in "*deviant*" behaviours, experience a sense of fracture from their self-identities because they '*tend to hold the same beliefs about identity that we do*' (Goffman 1968: 17-18). For example, as my participant Laura explained, her perception of how she was seen by society resulted in her not only feeling labelled, but as a result of this, she felt self-hatred and wanted to punish herself. Arguably, this is an attitude she received and internalised from her social environment since as Goffman (1961) clarifies, inmates tend to categorise themselves in similar terms as others see them: '*inmates tend in some ways at least, to feel inferior, weak, blameworthy and guilty*' (1961: 18).

Such histories of internalised stigma were common among the interviewees. Thus, in seeking to understand and map out my participants' lived experiences in prison, I was conscious that I also had to attend to their broader biographies. The diverse experiences of social injustice that they endured before entering prison connected all their narratives under one common thread. Not all of them were addicts, and not all were homeless, but the entire group of women I interviewed described entering prison in a 'bad state'. In other words, a custodial sentence was often not the beginning of a narrative on punishment, but rather, prison often emerged in their life-stories as a consequence of long lasting exposure to ill-health, socio-economic deprivation and exclusion and a general lack of wellbeing.

### **Bodily Transformations in Prison**

Nonetheless, the experience of imprisonment constituted a unique situational moment in my participants' life narratives. Entering prison was a highly emotional and volatile moment, and many explained that their experience of imprisonment made them "notice" their bodies more than they would outside. This made them more aware of themselves as embodied beings, but also emphasised aspects of prison life. They noticed and felt their bodies more acutely due sometimes to the effects of drugs detoxification, but mostly to the prison's pains and punishments being inscribed directly onto their bodies. Drew Leder's (1990) concept of the '*dys-appearing body*' resonated with many of the participants' experiences of re-embodiment in prison. Indeed, contemporary phenomenological scholarship on embodiment has suggested that awareness of the body is most likely to occur among individuals who experience ill-health, physical or emotional pain (Williams and Bendelow 1998) and thus endure physiological and emotional transformation. Being in prison can be seen as one such embodied experience.

It should be highlighted, however, that many of the participants' life narratives were accustomed to regular and significant bodily changes, particularly in regard to addictions developed prior to imprisonment. They described a constant "changeability" in their appearance and bodies, reflecting an ongoing *ambivalence* and *distrust* towards their own bodies. This is an aspect of embodiment ascribed more broadly to the late-modern woman (Tyner and Ogle 2008). The participants experienced the decay of their bodies through varying addictions, impoverishment and diseases, they then endured the pains of withdrawal and imprisonment as a vengeful reminder of their embodiment, and in some instances they

also experienced the power and resilience of their bodies to ‘get clean’ and survive the ‘pains of imprisonment’. In this process, the ambivalent and changing relationship between self and body meant that coping and living prison life through the body entailed a desire also to act against the body in an attempt to control it. The case of self-injury is exemplary in this sense.

### Self-Injury

Women’s ambivalent and affective relationship towards their bodies is particularly well illustrated in the context of practices of self-injury in prison, where they are rife. Many of my interviewees admitted practicing self-injury prior, during or after their release from prisons. Those women whose self-injury started during imprisonment explained their actions as a response to prison-specific emotions. For example, Tanya recalled that cutting started in prison as a way of coping with the consequences of punishment:

It started because I was far away from my family, I felt alone and helpless, I didn’t want to be in prison, so I used a razor. When you first go in, they ... ask you if you self-harm and I said ‘no’. And so they gave me a razor to shave when [I] shower, so I used that. But then one night I cut myself too deep, and I was bleeding too much, so I pressed the buzzer. They kept asking me how I did it, I wouldn’t tell them at first, but then ... the nurse told the officers [...] Most of the times I did it, it didn’t even help me to be honest ... it helped to watch it happen I guess, to see the blood run, to know I could do it, that helped for a bit. (Tanya)

For Tanya the bodily outcome of self-scarring and especially seeing the ‘blood run’ allowed a temporary sense of self-control, and relieved tension.

But, as Gemma explained, while self-harm was an obvious coping strategy, expressing women’s relative lack of self-control, freedom and choice in prison, it was also used by some women as a means of presenting their individuality, resistance to gender norms and perseverance to pain. In other words, scarring the body was used as a visual representation of prisoner resistance, highlighting the body’s communicative and social nature:

When I first went in, I was completely gobsmacked [...] it took a while to sink in really. The first prison I was sent to was proper HMP, old, stuffy, everything was metal. Metal bars, metal doors, keys jangling all night, keeping you up all night... And they put you in this block for people who just got in, and that was quite upsetting... It was like listening to a different story every night with the crying and the cutting [...] and the next morning, some girls wouldn’t even try to hide [the scars], the younger ones would kind of show off, you know it was like their *survival mark*. (Gemma)

As this testimony makes clear, the material, sensory and visual elements of self-injury are not only shared among those prisoners who self-injure, but also create the conditions for all

prisoners to experience, feel, hear and see the inscription of the body through self-injury (see also Chamberlen 2016). However, unlike the scars caused by self-injury which carried value because they were self-imposed, other changes and marks on the body, which emerged naturally, were often less welcome among the women.

### Sensing “Loss” of Time and Ageing in Custody

Ageing emerged as an important theme in the study, as it is especially relevant in pursuing a phenomenological approach to how women experience punishment and how they perceive themselves within these lived-experiences of bodily transformation (Wahidin 2002; 2004). The study of ageing in custody is also critical because, as Wahidin and Tate (2005:61) explain, such evaluations ‘make the experiences of elders under the penal gaze central’, as they help demonstrate ‘how ageist and gendered typifications of femininity operate’ in the context of criminal justice.

Though most of my research participants were relatively young and had spent comparatively short periods in custody, all of them still talked about ageing and the changes it brought on their bodies and sense of self. Some explained that the ‘pains of imprisonment’ were directly visible through their ageing bodies and flesh. This experience of feeling and seeing one’s body age inside prison was described in relation to a sense of personal “loss”. The participants talked about losing their youth, their sexual appeal and their health as a reflection of a broader loss of freedom and individuality. As Eve explained, ‘time passes too slowly in prison’, but the effects of time in prison are ‘very quickly visible’ on the prisoner’s body:

You are not doing much in there, so you have time to notice what time’s done to you. You get old in prison before your time. For me it was the drugs [I used before], but prison [too]. [It] takes life out of you. (Eve)

Similarly, Natasha related her sense of ageing to the negative emotions associated with the experience of imprisonment. The visual representation of feelings associated with anxiety and depression seemed to have a cyclical function in that the image of the ageing body not only manifested prison-related emotions but also perpetuated them through the impact such physical changes had on the women’s sense of ‘doing time’:

[Prison] is a very stressful place, so it makes you old. Your skin is old, your hair is grey, and your energy’s gone. You know what time you’ve done in jail by just looking at yourself in the mirror. (Natasha)

Some interview participants talked about growing older in prison as a process of ‘maturing’, whereby their vitality and risk-taking youth was replaced by a numb and pessimistic approach towards the future. For instance, Olga explained growing-up as a process whereby she learnt to conform to her gender role by avoiding aggressive behaviour:

It was mainly that [prison] pushed me to be a different girl. I used to be a lot more violent. And the fear of getting locked up again stopped me from going out to fight. I used to be an angry person. But that means I also used to be a lot more confident. I used to not care what others thought, or of going to prison. I was more independent with the fighting, I guess. I wouldn’t care what I said or to who ... Now, I’m a lot calmer ... I sort of have to regulate myself now. (Olga)

Growing older in prison, therefore, entailed a process of normalisation, particularly for younger women, whereby the punishment they experienced inside prison acted as a motivation to conform and comply with accepted social norms, many of which were learned in a particularly gendered manner (see also Heidensohn and Silvestri 2012). This process of growing up often entailed a sense of personal loss among the participants and alluded to a perpetual sense of lack of control. However, while the transformation of the prisoner body outlined women’s sense of regulation and oppression, it also entailed shifts that required women to actively engage with their bodies in order to manage a sense of body-image, and that contradicted and resisted ideals often ascribed to women in popular culture.

#### The changing concept of “fat” in prison

Body-image in prison did not necessarily reflect similar attitudes observed in the community, as it entailed a complex, dialectic relation to the specific experience of imprisonment. This was particularly noticeable through the participants’ unique perspective on the concept of fat, which many perceived as a positive attribute. Being prison-specific, however, this more positive approach towards the growing body tended to change towards the end of women’s sentences, highlighting the importance of changing perceptions as constituted by the ordering of time through custodial sentences. As the interview participants explained, their emotions about physical changes were also constantly changing, depending on the particular moment in their prison sentence, or their life and interactions outside of prison.

Thus, the participants’ ideals did not express the common appraisal of slenderness and dieting regimes to the degree that studies reveal that middle-class women do in the western world (Bordo 2003; Bartky 1990). This may be because, for many of the participants, the

experience of having a “fat” body came only after having a rather malnourished, deprived, “thin” body, giving them a different perspective in regard to their embodied identities. This different perspective on body-image emerged at several moments in my conversations with the participants. For example, Katherine connected a sense of personal improvement and wellbeing with the image of gaining weight after being released from prison. In seeing her weight gain as her ‘success marker’, she compares her post-release appearance with her bodily appearance before incarceration to illustrate the situational dynamics of her more personalised perspective on body-image that is unaffected by popular and media perspectives on young women’s body-image:

When I came out of prison, I was putting more and more weight on and that was, my *success marker*. Because the drugs had stripped everything away from me, I was so skinny and ill, so when I came out of prison I was proud of my fat; I thought it showed how well I was doing. (Katherine)

Therefore, while the literature illustrates that the late-modern woman strives for slenderness (Giddens 1991; Nettleton and Watson 1998; Bordo 2003), some participants in this study exemplify an entirely different understanding of such values of body-image and femininity, alluding to the importance of the situational construction of bodily ideals and to the subjectivities that perceive and perform bodily identities (Messerschmidt 1999; 2012).

At the same time, a number of the participants commented on how their *fluctuation* in body size and weight during imprisonment – rather than the actual growth of their body mass – became an additional burden during and after prison, particularly as such fluctuations raised practical issues, especially in terms of the availability of clothing to prisoners:

But then you put on these massive amounts of weight. It was quite bad actually, because my mum couldn’t afford to buy me new clothes so if it wasn’t for my friends [in prison], I wouldn’t have clothes to wear inside. Even though you are not supposed to lend your clothes to other girls, but I had to borrow some, there was no other way. (Erika)

These fluctuations and the lack of suitable clothing to address changes in body size often caused anxiety and frustration to the participants. This was also because such situations were seen to trigger bullying and labelling among inmates. Fiona described such situational dynamics within inmate culture as stressful and emotive:

Because you know that the moment you wake up and get out of the cell, if you look fat and you are wearing a tiny top that used to fit months before, and now they can see fat popping out of it, and you look like a stuffed sausage in it, *you know* someone is going to say something, you can hear them giggle behind your back, or they might even say it to your face, and that really didn’t feel good. (Fiona)

But, these restrictions and frustrations are managed by women prisoners. The lack of material props for self-making result in the development of more creative processes of self-presentation and identity formation, while at the same time requiring simpler, less individually informed, processes of accepting the fate of the body and the self within prison. For example, purchasing plastic jewellery from the canteen, visiting the hair salon regularly, or secretly exchanging clothes were presented as examples of the ways prisoners find to manage their prisoner identities and resist their regulation.

### **Reconstructing the self through appearance and dress**

Today, feminine and heteronormative standards expect women to engage in disciplinary regimes of diet, exercise, regular beauty and health-care procedures. Such pressures also dictate that women engage with fashion trends and are concerned about dressing their bodies with what is, at any given time, considered aesthetic and sexually attractive clothing. Such disciplinary technologies are said to affect women from all class backgrounds, but are particularly embraced in this normative, non-negotiable format, by women of more affluent socio-economic backgrounds (Bordo 2003).

The difference for women of more impoverished backgrounds, such as the majority of prisoners, is that, although they may feel this pressure to adhere to feminine standards and ideals as much as other women, or as my research participants referred to them as, 'average women', incarcerated women do not possess the material means to internalise this technology of discipline to the same extent as more affluent and consumer-orientated communities of women. This, in turn, often (unintentionally) results in the making of unique and situationally-specific subjectivities (Messerschmidt 2012) which defy and go beyond the accepted categories of gender/sex (Moi 1999). Thus, and rather ironically, the prison can often become a space which visually defies gendered norms.

Women's appearance was managed in various ways while in custody, but *dress* was discussed by my participants as one of the most important tools which they employed to both adapt to prison culture and to also *resist* it. It is worth noting that since a 1971 reform, women in English prisons are permitted a 'limited choice' of their own clothes instead of a uniform, so long as their clothes adhere to prison regulations on safety and appropriateness<sup>5</sup>. At the

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<sup>5</sup> This was and still is a vital difference on prison regulations for men and women since flexibility on prison garment rules came much later for male prisoners and still today, men can wear their own clothes only through earned privileges and in lower security prison categories.

time of this reform, it was thought that allowing women their own garments would aid compliance to prison life and raise “self-esteem” among women by giving them a ‘degree of fashionability’ (Ash 2010: 118). Nonetheless, many of my interviewees believed that prison regulations and limitations on clothing deliberately invoked a ‘stripping of identity’ (Goffman 1963). They described the regulation of clothing as a form of indirect punishment, adding to their humiliation, low self-esteem and stigmatisation. This echoes Ash’s (2010) argument that prison dress is a direct reflection of the prison’s punitive character even in the instances where it pursues rehabilitative principles.

Pauline explained that clothing becomes one of the prisoners’ first problems, as lack of clothing is often the result of their failure to anticipate a custodial sentence after trial. Once received into prison, access to their own clothes is dependent upon their visitors and outside contacts bringing or sending clothing to them.

When I went in, I went with what clothes I had on at court. Some people take a bag with them if they know they will get sentenced, but I really didn’t expect to be sentenced. So I only had my clothes that I was wearing in court and then they can lend you some clothes until you get someone to send you some. And obviously my dad had to send my clothes, he didn’t know what clothes I liked, so you are just wearing the same clothes all the time, so it’s not what you would *choose* to put on together, it’s not what you would like. It’s just what my dad had put together, and he is a man, he doesn’t know what clothes to send me. (Pauline)

In our conversations, Pauline drew a connection between personal choice, individuality and aesthetics in dress, and associated the ability to choose what to wear with the achievement of femininity, and possibly even with a sense of freedom. Thus, the limitations she experienced in terms of dress in prison manifested her sense of lack of self-control in custody. Her father’s inability to reflect her own choices further emphasised for her the sense of displacement and disempowerment she felt when forced to wear the clothes he had chosen for her.

Overall, it could be said that the women in this study appeared somewhat ambivalent in their attitudes toward gender performances, and especially on notions of femininity in prison. While some admitted that the reduced pressure to appear feminine in prison was a welcome break from their routines, others seemed more uncertain, explaining prison’s feminising services and normalisation strategies as both oppressive but also necessary for survival in custody. Some participants tended to discuss physical difference as a positive, but also necessary, means through which to resist normative standards of femininity and the

controlling power of the prison. Iris, for instance, explained how in prison she had to let her hair be 'natural' because the lack of suitable products to keep her hair 'down' meant she had to accept and eventually embrace the difference her hair represented:

The first couple of weeks I was getting quite nervous about [the hair] [...] because I didn't have all the stuff I use at home, it had to stay natural, you know? My hair gets quite big and out of control if you don't do anything to it. So in jail I couldn't keep it down. They did have straighteners but, with my hair I'd need 2-3 hours to do just that [...] So I decided to just let it be. Eventually, and because the other girls would tell me too, I started liking it. It started feeling more like me, you know? I'd associate with it and think it showed more the *real* me. (Iris)

Similarly, participants talking about how they resisted the normalising structures of prison explained that they relied on the negative freedom of consumption. During some interviews, it was clear that efforts to keep a feminine appearance were described as forms of resistance to the prison's institutional elements (see also Bosworth 1999). Doing gender as a form of resistance, together with the materially dependent and consumptive character of many of these women's experiences of imprisonment, reflected their sense of double deviance (Carlen 1998; 1983). Working on the body and engaging with gendered practices and consumption, therefore, meant that the participants were actively attempting to defy the (gendered) stigma of their imprisonment. In a sense, the representation of the canteen or the hair salon as places of pleasure acted as particular exceptions to the prison's overall oppressive atmosphere. These exceptions are significant symbols of the interaction between prison control and broader social controls imposed on women. Together, these represent the neo-liberal prison as a site of women's double oppression, and highlight the contemporary-consumerist focus on the modification and management of bodies as forms of identity-keeping (Shilling 2003) operating both inside and outside prison.

### **Changed bodies and stigmatised identities after prison**

Although many women prisoners serve only short prison sentences in England, these have several detrimental implications, particularly due to the prison's symbolic function in labelling and "othering" its inmates in an embodied way. As a number of interviewees explained, the lack of support post-release meant that their perpetuated sense of helplessness often left them to perceive no other choice but to return to crime soon after their release. A combination, therefore, of women's perpetuated sense of vulnerability and their continuous stigmatisation and exclusion post-release means that, often, their punishment carries on, limiting and confining their potential and opportunities beyond imprisonment.

Anxious preoccupation with one's physical appearance was something that participants claimed persisted after their prison release, highlighting, as Moran (2012) argued, that the inscription of the body by "doing time" in prison continues during reintegration into society. Indeed, women prisoners leaving prison face several anxieties regarding the *stigma of imprisonment* and more broadly the prejudice of offending attached to them. For instance, Berta described her sense of isolation from society and her perception of being othered in a rather emotive way:

You walk down the street and people look at you, you know, they know you were a waster once, and they go on with their lives, they don't know what it's like to be hungry, they don't know what it's like to go without, and because we haven't got the best of everything, no decent clothes, no opportunities to be tidy and clean [after prison], I feel like everyone is judging you all the time, it's so hard. (Berta)

Being corporeally aware of the marks of their criminal past and of the effects of prison on their bodies, many of my participants explained that they employ several strategies to conceal the stigma of crime and punishment. Gemma told me that she worked hard to make sure members of her own family did not know she was incarcerated:

Sometimes you'd feel the [prison] record is written on your forehead. People can just look at you and tell. And you are frightened certain people will find out, you don't want certain people to know, like my mum doesn't even know I've been to prison, my brother and grandma don't know ... yeah because they'd be really ashamed. (Gemma)

As these participants demonstrate, dealing with prison stigma is an emotionally draining experience that perpetuates their sense of exclusion when they leave prison. Efforts to conceal their deviant backgrounds mean that women present themselves differently in public space and make efforts to "fit in".

The main aim of ex-prisoners is to normalise their appearance in order to look non-criminal and trustworthy; they consider this bodily reconstruction essential for social reintegration. This entails a conscious process of self-surveillance. For those who cut themselves, the scars on their bodies acted both as enduring reminders of their painful experiences and as reflections of their sense of self. Such physical signs continued to affect women's self-perception and their interactions after they left prison. Some, like Magda, concealed their marks after prison, considering their scars as stigmatising symbols of deviance and imprisonment. She explained that the visibility of scars on her body meant she felt she had to conceal parts of her body on a regular basis:

Definitely, I think about [the scars] a lot. Because I have scars from using [drugs], I have scars from cutting and scratching myself, my body is just covered in all sorts of wounds. So I always have to cover myself. My daughter hasn't seen them, I always

hide it, I will never wear anything that will let it show, my partner has seen it, which isn't ... well, I obviously don't feel very sexy, I mean, look [rolls her jeans up to show me scars on her legs] that doesn't look very sexy, does it?... I know that's not what most girls look like. It sets me apart and not even in a good way. (Magda)

For Magda, her bodily appearance compromised her gender identity by confronting her ability to enact her role as heterosexual partner and mother. She compared herself to other women, emphasising her sense of otherness. The marks on her body now separated her from a gender reality that she considered normal or average.

Efforts at reintegration post-release often entailed looking less “different”, attempting to make their bodies look like the bodies they are socialised to see as “normal” and socially acceptable. For example, Denise explained that she changed both the colours of her clothes as well as the props she used:

When I was stealing, the size of my bag would be bigger; I would wear darker clothes and have my hair down onto my face so that they couldn't tell who I was. I would wear trainers so that I could run if I had to. But since I've been out, I've become 'normal', at least gradually, whatever 'normal' is. Like see now [points to herself] I will wear jewellery, skirts, I'll add more colour. (Denise)

The most telling example of bodily transformation for purposes of reintegration and to avoid stigma was described to me by Alicia, who explained that she consciously pursued a different appearance and style after she left prison. This new style alluded to her appreciating that particularly gendered norms and stereotypes were not only dominant and seen as more acceptable, but also carried a certain currency in society, and therefore opened up opportunities.

I've been trying to change the way I look the past few months just to avoid [looking like an offender]. I'm forty-two now, so I'm a middle-aged woman, but even 5-6 years ago, I've started to dress differently. Before my first prison sentence, I would always dress as young as possible. When I came out of prison, I made a conscious decision to dress as a middle-aged woman, even before I was. Because I felt that people took me more seriously. I felt I would be less judged, I would have more opportunities, maybe I could even get a job or go places I wouldn't otherwise go to. I've tried to make myself look more like a 'mum', less track suits and trainers and more serious, feminine and pure look. Even the shops I shop from now are more like Marks & Spencer rather than Topshop. I tried to dress a bit older, because it makes people automatically think you are a different person. Before when I dressed like a young girl ... I got more ... well, certain people around here know I shoplift anyway, but even if I went to another town, if I dressed that way, I would get followed in a shop anyway. If I dress the way I do now, even here where people know I used to shoplift, people don't recognise me anymore, because after prison I look fatter, I dress more feminine, I look more normal I guess. (Alicia)

Dress was thus central to my participants' coping and self-reconstruction both inside and outside of prison. Being an aspect of physical appearance that is relatively easy to control and alter, dress was used by participants to conceal their background identities, and to recreate performances they thought would grant them more opportunities and social acceptability. The participants tended to compare themselves to a notional "average" or "normal" woman, who was attributed features of hyper-femininity, seriousness and composure. In terms of age, some chose to deny the popular desire to appear younger. All in all, it seemed that particular uses of dress allowed women to appear more mature and respectable, and more feminine, so also less dangerous.

Thus, dress and its ability to situationally reconstruct the presentation of the body, allowed women to develop a range of different, situationally-specific subjectivities both during and after their incarceration. The changeability of the body and of the meanings attributed to it varied depending on the specific situation women found themselves in and on its social dynamics. This meant that their perception and attitude towards their bodies and selves varied noticeably in their live narratives before, during and after their incarceration. This fluid and situationally specific relation between self and body raises questions over the very conceptualisation of bodies (Shilling 2008) and of their impact on identities, action and behaviour (see also Messerschmidt 2012).

### **Conclusion: Punishment and the Embodied Subject**

Our late-modern societies have been described as 'somatic societies' (Turner 2008) within which individuals are said to be preoccupied with body projects (Shilling 2003; 2008) as a way of controlling the uncertainty and insecurity prevailing our times (Giddens 1991). Similarly, increased reliance on the use of punishment has been ascribed to the same anxieties and insecurities (Garland 2001). But criminology has avoided discussion on bodies, even though its very subject-matter is about offending and punished bodies. Neglecting the wide range of interdisciplinary scholarship that considers the bodily aspects of both self and human conduct (cf. Meloni et. al 2016; Shilling 2003; 2008; Williams and Bendelow 1998; Fraser and Greco 2005; Grosz 2005 Leder 1990; 2004), much of sociological criminology has denied the body its centrality in the making of the self (Messerschmidt 2012: 2).

Both feminist and nonfeminist sociological criminologists established (at different times) and continue to maintain (in different ways) specific types of perspectives on crime in which the body is completely untheorized, as the concentration for the most part is on the gendered mind. Consequently, there has developed an inevitable

reluctance by sociological criminologists to incorporate in their theories aspects of human embodiment. (Messerschmidt 2012: 20). Partly as an attempt to remedy this problematic disengagement with the concepts of the body and embodiment within criminology, this paper attempted to contribute towards a 'body friendly criminology' (Messerschmidt 1999: 200) by theorising the lived body in the context of punishment. The paper sought to show that there is a relationship between the concept and practice of punishment and the bodies of those who are subjected to it. Understanding this relationship is not only essential for understanding what effects imprisonment has on prisoners, but it can also provide a wider frame through which to conceptualise the phenomenon of punishment in its modern context. The punishment-body relation is also important because it puts into question the assumption that the punishment of incarceration is only limited within the physical boundaries of prison walls, and lasts only as long as a prison sentence does. In other words, this relation challenges the space-time dimension often ascribed to a prison sentence in criminal justice contexts.

The punishment-body relationship is also important for feminists; it allows an exploration of how subjectivities and agency operate in highly oppressive and controlling environments like the prison. This paper has sought to present women's lived experiences of punishment as *embodied*; in so doing, I have suggested that the embodied experience of punishment marks not only the skin but also transforms the identities of women prisoners. It doesn't only impact the performances and outer appearance of women, but also, and perhaps more importantly, shapes their self-perceptions. In being corporeally marked through imprisonment and other painful experiences, my research participants expressed their sense of self being lived and felt as ambivalent and as situationally specific. In other words, they couldn't articulate a concrete sense of self that they trusted to be true independently of their lived experiences and the different phases of their biographical narratives. This is because, in its on-going changes, the prisoner's body becomes an ambivalent site and an untrustworthy means with which to transform the self. This notion should, of course, raise questions about the possibilities of rehabilitation in prison.

In addition, the development of this ambivalent attitude towards the body adds to an increased interest in the "look" and presentation of the body within prison. The reason for this is that the more uncertain the individual is about her body-image, the more eager she will be to control it (Shilling 2003; 2005; Gatens 1996). Moreover, the quality of the body to be both

an empirical object as well as a lived subject means that we can imagine how our own bodies are seen by others, and we can evaluate and scrutinise our appearance in order to suit our particular surroundings and social standards. In other words, bodies are not only socially inscribed, but also seek to communicate with these social contexts. Thus, imprisonment makes the prisoner both aware of her body's positive potential and wary of the body's limitations and stigmatising function. In this paper, I sought to present some examples where the ambivalent relationship women have with their bodies both reflected how they chose to survive and cope with imprisonment's demands and restrictions upon them, as well as illustrated how deeply painful punishment and its aftermath can be, especially when it is focused on normalising, feminising and stigmatising women's bodies.

But the power of ascribing a negative label on prisoners is not solely held by the prison institution. All of the themes discussed in this paper allude to the *permeability* of prison values and the power of heteronormative, gendered norms (Butler 1990; 1993) and patriarchal commodity aesthetics (Baudrillard 1998) to forge embodied identities for women both during and after their imprisonment. This is clear in the participants' explained instances of resistance to the inscription of the deviant, ex-prisoner label, which highlighted their sense of subjectivity and agency, but also revealed the pervasive power of gendered and consumerist norms in perpetuating their oppression. Attention to the embodied dimension of punishment can thus also highlight how oppressive structures from both inside and outside prison walls enmesh to create a sense of double oppression for these women.

Moreover, to talk about the embodied aspects of subjectivities also entails acknowledging the affective and emotional dimension of self-perceptions. It is this emotional dimension that connects body and self and can link the effects of punishment on the body with prisoners' sense of self. Our bodies and appearance reflect aspects of our individuality, and this attributes a series of emotional meanings to the image of our bodies (Gatens 1996). Bauman and May explain this in relation to the social character of our identities:

[...] if something in our bodies, and especially in the appearance of our bodies, stops short of the ideal, the repairing of the situation seems to remain within our power to alter. In this way our bodies fluctuate between being objects of love and pride to sources of annoyance and shame. (Bauman and May 2001: 105)

In an earlier work, Bauman (1991:2) talked about 'ambivalence' as a key characteristic of modernity in which societies attempted to manage uncertainty and ambivalence through strategies that reproduce and perpetuate states of ambivalence. He explains ambivalence as

the outcome of systems of classification and exclusion. This analysis can help explain succinctly why women experience such ambivalence in terms of their own appearance and identities both inside and outside prison. Bauman and May (2001) give an apt example of how such classification may create exclusion and thus emotional ambivalence through dress:

Those who have more disposable income than others can afford to dress in particular ways and these act as codes for classifying persons by the splendour, misery or oddity of their appearance. (Bauman and May 2001: 39)

As the authors suggest, the production of self-identity relies on aesthetic classifications or 'boundaries' which, through their distinctive symbols, determine one's identity *in relation* to that of others (Bauman and May: 183).

The painful awareness of the body during and after imprisonment defines the body-punishment relation (Howe 1994) and ascribes prisoner bodies as socially undesirable and marginal to society's ideals and norms. In our visual world they are denied the "normal" status due to the inscription of prison time and its effects on the former prisoner body. This can be seen either through the passage of time, and the experience of ageing in prison, or through practices of self-injury and the skin's scarring, or through the changing shape and size of the body in custody affecting appearance and dressing routines. I suggested in this paper that the body is the object and target of punishment, and that this contributes to punishment being felt as an embodied experience. Since punishment is an embodied experience connected to broader forms of othering and social control, its affective, bodily and situationally-specific qualities have consequences that are worth considering and critiquing, especially at a time when we rely so unreservedly on the use of incarceration.

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