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"Me Time": (Re)Presenting Self and Carceral Spaces

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Abstract:

Accounts of prison life consistently indicate a culture of aggression, fear, violence and general mistrust. These accounts also highlight how inmates adapt to prison, which typically occur in the form of men managing emotional 'fronts' or putting on 'masks' of masculine bravado to deter the aggression of other inmates and hide their vulnerabilities. The aim of this article is not to discount the truth of these descriptions, but to examine how inmates use space to readjust their self presentations and release emotions in order to endure prison life. Qualitative, semi-structured interviews were conducted with ten men who experienced periods of incarceration in Manitoba, Canada. By drawing upon carceral geography, prison sociology, and Goffman's work on impression management within confined spaces, I supplement the clarion call by researchers for a more detailed and nuanced spatial analysis of prison culture. My findings suggest that these men sought solitary confinement in order to rework their presentations of self. Additionally, solitary confinement became an "island of respite" (Crewe et al., 2014) which allowed these men to let their guards down and temporarily alleviate the constraint upon their behaviour that the presence of other inmates invoked. In effect, the men's experiences and reflections represent a challenge to depictions of prisons generally and solitary confinement specifically as carceral spaces which are emotionally undifferentiated, unwaveringly aggressive, and free from inmate subversion.

Introduction

Prison life is continually described as a culture submerged in fear, violence, and general mistrust. Often too is the case that inmates, in an attempt to adapt to the prison environment, put on emotional 'fronts' or 'masks' of masculine bravado "which hide their vulnerabilities and deter the aggression of their peers" (Crewe, Warr, Bennett & Smith, 2014, p. 57; see also Ricciardelli, 2014; and

Ricciardelli & Memarpour, 2016 regarding inmate adaptive practices). Such prison accounts indicate a hostile environment, one that is only aggravated by the use of solitary confinement. Indeed, the widespread practice of incarcerating inmates in solitary confinement and its damaging effects are increasingly well known throughout the current literature (cf. Grassian, 2006; Fathi, 2015; Metzner & Fellner, 2010; O'Donnell, 2014; Piché & Major, 2015; Scharff Smith, 2006; Shalev, 2011, 2015). Yet how do we attempt to reconcile the predominant image of solitary confinement with the unexpected representation that, through inmate subversion, this space could be used to temporarily relieve inmates from the troubling aspects of the prison regime?

To offer a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between solitary confinement and the experiences of former inmates, I first discuss Goffman's work on impression management in relation to the existing literature on carceral geography. Goffman's work, with its close attention to spatial detail, provides a valuable background for geographical research on the body, social interactions, and the hypermasculine prison culture. Following this I examine the use of solitary confinement within Canada, especially in terms of its use as an extreme and overused measure to handle inmates (cf. Kerr, 2015b). Researchers face consistent difficulty in gaining access to official documents concerning the well-being and treatment of inmates (Piché & Major, 2015), yet what is becoming increasingly known is that Canada is "way out of step with most developed countries" in its use of solitary confinement (Parkes, cited in Makin, 2013, n.p.).[1] I then establish the methodology implemented in the study, and by drawing upon experiences from ten former inmates, I

[1] While prison officials may object to the phrase 'solitary confinement' and opt for 'segregation' or 'isolation,' I agree with Kerr's (2015b) assertion that terminology here is not the point. The central concern is with "the removal of individuals from the ordinary prison community, including peer contact and programming, to be held in cells for the vast majority of the day and night, with no specified or reasonable release date" (Kerr, 2015b, p. 88). In Canada, the formal legislative term that covers much of this mode of isolation is 'administrative segregation.'

examine how solitary confinement, through inmate subversion, became a space for emotional release and to manage masculinity. For these men, solitary confinement became an "island of respite" (Crewe et al., 2014, p. 68) and an ephemeral escape from the inmate social orderings and the hypermasculine imperatives of the prison. I conclude my discussion by calling for the amelioration of the punitive prison climate as it exists. Considering solitary confinement differently requires us to understand how (re)presentations of self are reworked within and between carceral spaces, and how carceral spaces may be (re)presented in the process. These findings offer a conceptual entry point for criminologists and carceral geographers alike to further investigate and interrogate key issues of prison life.

Goffman and Impression Management

The work of Erving Goffman has been essential in sociological and social psychological understandings of prison life, especially in terms of how an individual (re)presents himself or herself (Goffman, 1959, 1961). However, his work has met with criticism in carceral geography (cf. Baer & Ravneberg, 2008; Moran, 2013b, 2014). In particular, Baer and Ravneberg oppose Goffman's concept of the so-called 'total institution' and dismiss it on the grounds that in Goffman's view the total institution is seen as "'totally' set apart from other spaces [which] postulates an isolated world" (2008, p. 205). They argue that Goffman works with "an overly simplistic dichotomy between inside and outside" which tempts researchers to view the prison as a single entity, a space which "emphasize[s] separateness and sharp[ly] contrasts from life on the outside" (Baer & Ravneberg, 2008, pp. 213–214). Moran's (2013b, 2014) work entrenches further critique of Goffman, arguing that when we conceptualize a carceral space, the "'carceral' is something more than merely the spaces in which individuals are confined" (2013b, p.176), as these spaces "exist alongside and perhaps in combination with an *embodied* sense of the 'carceral'" (2014, p.37; emphasis added; see also Moran, 2013a). However, these critiques, while insightful, fall short of appreciating the geographical complexity of Goffman's work, particularly his understanding of the varying permeability of

boundaries. Indeed, Goffman perceives permeability as a feature of total institutions, a feature which influences the "dynamic relationships" between the prison and the outside world "that supports [the institution] or tolerates it" (Goffman, 1961, p. 111). At the same time, his research recognizes the ways in which the social life inside the prison becomes characterized by and managed through semi-permeable boundaries, (re)presentations of the body, social interaction, and the institution (Goffman, 1961). Therefore, a fuller engagement with Goffman is beneficial to carceral geographical research, as his ethnography of confined spaces and their social situations offers a rich description of behaviour and rituals still relevant to understanding the complexity of human relations in prison.

Goffman understands the idea of life as a perpetual performance, with roles and scripts that are socially determined and enacted. He distinguishes between 'frontstage' and 'backstage' behaviour, arguing that daily interactions with other individuals required the former (i.e., the arena in which the performance is given to a social audience), while the latter exists as a hidden or private region where the public performance is relinquished, breached, or contradicted (Goffman, 1959, 1961; see also Crewe et al., 2014). Centring upon this dramaturgical metaphor, Goffman suggests that individuals will, to differing degrees and in different ways, incorporate 'front management' tactics to protect themselves from the potential exploitation of others (Goffman, 1959, p. 23). Such tactics were witnessed in Goffman's (1961) classic prison study, where he observed men attempting to masque their private, pre-prison selves while (re)presenting a public persona of bodily, verbal, and gestural codes demanded by the prison culture. Goffman's micro-scale account of institutional underlife is based on analyzing how inmates develop adaptive practices to integrate and endure the prison regime (cf. Weinrath, 2016). He makes clear that when managing a front, the individual must see to it that the impressions they are conveying in the situation "are compatible with role appropriate…qualities"

effectively imputed onto them (Goffman, 1972, p. 77). Put differently, the social interactions of inmates dictate that they must 'look tough' while 'acting cool,' compelling the inmate to control and monitor his behaviour and expressions to ensure consistent and appropriate treatment within the prison.

Empirical studies have demonstrated how Goffman's work underpins multiple dimensions of 'the carceral' in different kinds of institutional settings (cf. Schliehe, 2014, 2016, 2017). As Crewe and colleagues indicate, while Goffman is "often associated with the idea of the prison as a total institution, cut off from wider society, he himself drew attention to the *non*-total nature of institutional life," in which certain domains were more reworked, represented, and normalized than others (p. 4; emphasis in original). In effect, Goffman's ethnographic research is crucial in identifying "internal geographies" within prison, in which "complex and spatially differentiated emotional domains" could exist or be subverted for inmate use (Crewe et al., 2014, p. 4).

Similar experiences have been examined in Dolovich's (2011, 2012) accounts of the KG6 unit in Los Angeles (L.A.) County. Dolovich found that for more than two decades, the L.A. County Sheriff's Department had been systematically separating out the gay men and trans women admitted to the L.A. County Jail and housing them wholly apart from the general prison population. Because of this segregated unit—officially designated 'KG6'—these inmates were "relatively free from sexual harassment and forced or coerced sexual conduct that can be the daily lot of sexual minorities in other men's carceral facilities" (Dolovich, 2011, p. 4). By way of detailed interviews and surveys with KG6 inmates, Dolovich demonstrates that L.A. County "has managed to create a surprisingly safe space for the high-risk populations KG6 serves" (Dolovich, 2011, p. 5), and that KG6, as a space of "accidental humanity" (Dolovich, 2012, p. 1020), is free from the hypermasculine imperative witnessed in general population. Dolovich (2012, p. 971) argues that within KG6 there is no need for men to suffer from "belligerence, posturing, [or]

emotional repression" as seen in the general prison population culture. Instead, one can find in KG6 a "surprising sense of relative ease," the ability to adjust one's presentation of self, open emotional expression, and "a determined rejection" of any efforts to introduce into the space the gang politics or hypermasculine imperatives in force found in the rest of prison (Dolovich, 2012, p. 971).

Therefore, Goffman's in-depth work on the connections between closed institutions and social interaction illuminates diverse perspectives on carceral spaces, and certain spaces like solitary confinement can hold certain meanings beyond its intended use: "these places can represent an extension of the self and its autonomy, becoming more important as the individual forgoes other repositories of selfhood" (Goffman, 1961, p. 220). However, to acknowledge this unexpected representation of solitary confinement as a 'backstage' geography means that I must also recognize the current state of the practice as it exists in Canada, a discussion to which I now turn.

Presenting Solitary Confinement in Canada

The entrenchment of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* (1982) changed both the structure and culture of Canadian law and politics, and eventually triggered the passage of the country's first comprehensive prison legislation (Kerr, 2015b). In 1992 the *Corrections and Conditional Release Act* (CCRA) established in Canada the first detailed rules of solitary confinement or "administrative segregation" (S.C. 1992, c.20, s.31(1)). This practice is legitimated through the CCRA. According to the CCRA, the purpose of solitary confinement is to "maintain the security of the penitentiary or the safety of any person by not allowing an inmate to associate with other inmates" (S.C. 1992, c.20, s.31(1)). If there is no "reasonable alternative" to sanction the inmate, then the "institutional head" is bestowed the power to impose solitary confinement (S.C. 1992, c.20, s.31(3)). The institutional head must believe on "reasonable grounds" that the inmate is acting in a way which (1) jeopardizes the security of the penitentiary or the safety of any

person; (2) that provides the inmate the possibility of associating with other inmates and ultimately interfering with an investigation; or (3) that the inmate's own safety is in jeopardy (S.C. 1992, c.20, ss.31(3)(a)-(c)). In practice, however, solitary confinement typically involves 23-hour-per-day, single-cell incarceration for extended periods of time, and has been shown to induce psychological harm to inmates (for a review, see Shalev, 2011). In some instances, inmates have shown signs of not only psychological decomposition, but tendencies of intermittent disorientation, rage, resentment, and mental deterioration (Grassian, 2006; Scharff Smith, 2006).

Additionally, a brief distinction should be made here between administrative segregation and disciplinary segregation. In one form, solitary-as-administrative segregation is "officially imposed on the basis of general managerial rationales, like protecting the 'security and safety' of the institution" (Kerr, 2015b, p. 494). In its other form, solitary-as-disciplinary segregation is used to punish inmates for "violating specific prison rules" (Kerr, 2015b, p. 494). While inmates facing disciplinary segregation are afforded legal entitlements and rights protections, administrative segregation, conversely, can be imposed with little due process, for indefinite periods of time, and often for "highly general reasons that [inmates] do not know in advance" (Kerr, 2015b, p. 494). Disciplinary segregation is the most severe form of punishment that can be administered as a disciplinary sanction (Jackson, 2006). However, it is limited to a maximum of thirty days, which can be increased to a maximum of forty-five for multiple convictions. Administrative segregation, however, is not subject to legislative limits on duration, although it is subject to periodic review. As Jackson (2006, p. 158) argues, because the time spent in administrative segregation can extend to months, even years, this practice "represents the most powerful form of carceral authority…[and] is also the most intensive form of imprisonment" (see also Crawford, 2017).

Solitary confinement has been well scrutinized in Canada for both its overuse upon inmates and triggering mental illness within inmates

(Kerr, 2015a, 2015b), yet the reliance on solitary confinement by federal prison administration appears to be rising.[2] A report produced by the Office of the Correctional Investigator charting the trends of administrative segregation use by prison officials in federal corrections indicates a slow growth over a ten-year period (Office of the Correctional Investigator, 2015). Recent data suggests that federal inmates are being held in solitary confinement at a higher rate in Atlantic Canada than anywhere else in the country (cf. Crawford, 2017).[3] The problem may well be worse in provincial corrections (Kerr, 2015b). There is an unfortunate lack of accurate statistics reflecting this problem because "there are no meaningful mechanisms for accountability in provincial and territorial corrections" (Parkes, 2015: vii).

While a fuller engagement with the political and public policy debates surrounding solitary confinement is beyond the scope of the study, it is noteworthy that the persistent refusal of progressive penal reform by eliminating or reducing use of solitary confinement by Correctional Service Canada (CSC) and past Canadian governments indicate that a radical curtailment or even the abolishment of the practice may not come from the political realm (Jackson, 2006). Kerr is pessimistic, observing Canada's shifting politics of penal policy and "the refusal of both Liberal and Conservative governments to respond to multiple expert, non-partisan calls for reform" (2015b, p. 494). Nevertheless, action must be taken if we are to ameliorate the prison culture (cf. Piché, 2015, 2016). As I illustrate below, the prison culture is steeped in hypermasculine views, and if we are to

[2] Provincial and territorial prison systems also recognize a similar distinction between administrative and disciplinary segregation. Per Jackson (2006, p. 192), most provincial and territorial systems limit disciplinary segregation to a maximum of fifteen days; however, like the federal system, "administrative segregation can be of indefinite duration."

[3] As of May 15th, 2017, the rate of solitary confinement in the Atlantic region is five times higher than the Ontario region. The Atlantic region also accounts for more than one-third of all inmates who have been in solitary confinement for more than one hundred days. Yet in real numbers, federal Prairie prisons had the most inmates in segregation (cf. Crawford, 2017).

recognize that the interviewed men found ephemeral relief in solitary confinement, then an increased concern in prison life is warranted.

Methodology

This paper draws upon semi-structured interviews conducted with ten former inmates living within the city of Winnipeg, Canada, identified and recruited using snowball sampling. Noy (2008, p. 327) believes this method of sampling can generate a unique type of social knowledge that is emergent, political and interactional.[4] All men interviewed had experienced incarceration within correctional institutions in Manitoba, Canada. There are four correctional institutions in Manitoba that remand males into custody: Winnipeg Remand Centre is a pre-trial detention centre located in downtown Winnipeg, and this centre houses people waiting for court decisions on their charges or placement in correctional institutions; Milner Ridge Correctional Centre is a medium-security institution located in the Agassiz Provincial Forest; Headingley Correctional Centre is a minimum-, medium-, and maximum-security institution located in Headingley, Manitoba; and Stony Mountain Correctional Centre is a federal institution that offers minimum-, medium-, and maximum-security and is in Stony Mountain, Manitoba.[5]

The original study was an academic project (Gacek, 2015), and while I have discussed some of the project findings elsewhere (Gacek, 2017), the intention of this piece was to narrow the analytical scope upon the specific relationship between these men and solitary

[4] Recollections of time served in correctional institutions were approximations at best, as the men found it difficult to exactly remember the range of time spent for each prison sentence they had received or the total number of months or years spent within a correctional institution. The incorporation of the men's narratives into the study, coupled with an understanding of what the narratives are trying to say about carceral experiences, highlights the significance of acknowledging the human aspects that exist within data collection and analysis (for example, see Flyvbjerg, 2006).

[5] It is important to note that there are additional correctional facilities in Brandon, Dauphin, and The Pas, Manitoba, which house remand males. However, the men did not mention these facilities when they recalled their experiences in the interviews, and as such are not included in my discussion.

confinement, and the oscillation between self and spatial (re)presentation. The John Howard Society of Manitoba, a social service agency located in Winnipeg's inner city, provided a small office where these meetings between the men and myself could take place. Additionally, I am aware of the possibility that there may be a bias in snowball sampling, in which men interviewed could have similar ideas and experiences and give each other's references to the eager researcher (Flick, 2009, p. 110). Notwithstanding, the study generates "context-dependent knowledge" pertaining to the impact of incarceration through such experiences (Flyvbjerg, 2006, p. 222).

I incorporated aspects of Pierre Bourdieu and Loïc Wacquant's (1992) self-reflexive sociology to understand how to position myself in relation to the respondents, the research encounter, and the analytical themes that arose from the data. Doing so allowed me to engage in a critical and reflexive analysis of my own social location alongside my observations, interactions, and conversations with those interviewed (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). While the information obtained by the sample of men is in no way generalizable to the inmate populations in Canada generally, nevertheless I see the inherent value in recognizing and examining the small sample's experiences. In effect, the aim of this research was to explore how the presentation of self was managed in and between prison spaces, and whether spaces within the prison existed for the men to let their guard down. It became clear in the interviews that through subversion, solitary confinement became an "island of respite" (Crewe et al., 2014, p. 68). For these men, solitary confinement represented a partial, permeable boundary from the inmate social orderings and the hypermasculine imperatives of the prison. In effect, this space represented an 'internal geography' which provided the men a greater freedom to express emotion and extend an ephemeral sense of autonomy.

Findings

'Frontstage': Survival of the Hypermasculine

As Jewkes (2005, p. 48) indicates, all forms of masculinity "inevitably involve a certain degree of putting on a 'manly front.'" Unfortunately for men in prison, the "pressures to 'do' masculinity" are even more intense, exaggerated, and exacerbated (Comack, 2008, p. 10; see also Ricciardelli, Grills, & Craig, 2016 regarding inmate sexual identities and behaviours). Inmates mobilize and negotiate their masculine subjectivities to handle the uncertainty of imprisonment and the various risks encountered in prison (Ricciardelli, 2013, 2014; Crewe et al., 2014; Piché & Major, 2015; Ricciardelli, Maier, & Hannah-Moffat, 2015; Ricciardelli et al., 2016; Weinrath, 2016). In doing so, the "jostling for positions of power and status…is perhaps especially visible in prisons because they are such blatantly status-depriving environments" (Jewkes, 2005, p. 53).

Within the prison 'frontstage,' it is clear that the masculine imperative to conceal and manage emotions accordingly—restraining oneself from crying and concealing emotions overall—illustrates the gendered nature of incarceration. As several of the men[6] suggest:

> You got to act tough…you definitely can't take shit from nobody. Like even if the guy is bigger than you, it's like "fuck you man, I'm not scared of you," you know. You definitely got to act tougher…and guys act tougher too. Some guys like to *play their role right*, like a lot of big guys will pick on small guys, but then the small guys are like "fuck you, I don't care if you're big," you know. (Brandon; emphasis added)
>
> [S]ome guys *feel like they have to*, just so, you know, guys won't basically mess, you know, try to, *try to tower you or*

[6] Pseudonyms were used to ensure confidentiality.

> *tower over you*. Uh, guys feel like they have to work out more… (Eric; emphasis added)
>
> I see some guys, some big guys they're acting tough, you know, they're *acting solid there*. They talk, they talk solid, you know, they talk "oh fuck hey, fuck yourself, holy shit hey, you did that? Holy fuck." (Frank; emphasis added)

These experiences indicate the need to 'play the role' appropriately insofar as to have their masculine fronts compete with the fronts of others. Playing the hypermasculine role could either re-establish for inmates a sense of masculine self-esteem or force them to develop a persona that saves them from the exploitation of others (cf. Crewe et al., 2014). The dominant orderings and representations of the prison, coupled with the "forms and codes of masculinity" (Evans & Wallace, 2008, p. 486) such as acting, talking, and appearing 'tough' or 'solid' serve to legitimize hypermasculinity as a result. Routinely subjected to "character contests" against other inmates (Toch, 1998, p. 174), the inmate's front becomes a deep, internal defence against forms of "psychic vulnerability" which prison threatens to expose (Crewe et al., 2014, p. 62) and status is conferred upon those who best live up to the exacerbated prescriptions of the hypermasculine culture.

The double burden of hypermasculine front work and emotion management demonstrates how rules of navigating feelings and emotions are essentially scrutinized within the prison (cf. Hochschild, 1983). Such defensive posturing has also been noted in other studies, which have examined the inmate's 'conscious identity work' to avoid displaying emotion at all costs (Jones & Schmid, 2000); the necessity for inmates to maintain a 'hard' façade and a certain amount of 'controlled aggression' to survive the rigours of imprisonment (Jewkes, 2002, p. 56); or the 'front management tactics' connecting the prison regime to wider forms of performative masculine culture in society (cf. De Viggiani, 2012; see also Jewkes, 2002, 2005).

Drawing upon Hochschild (1979), Crewe and colleagues (2014) make a distinction between the language of 'fronts' and 'masks,' in which 'fronting' can be considered a form of evocation, "in which the cognitive focus is on a desired feeling which is initially absent" (Crewe et al., 2014, p.64), while 'masking' represents a form of suppression, "in which the cognitive focus is on an undesired feeling which is initially present" (Crewe et al., 2014, p. 64).

Furthermore, the men's experiences suggested an immense pressure to 'mask' or not show emotions in front of others. As Frank indicates:

> It's hard to show emotion there, man. You know, like, when you cry, you know, like, you don't have to show...But, you know, it's hard to show weakness there, you know, 'cause they're going to eat you, you know. They're going to eat you in there. They're going to tease you every day. Like, I seen guys, right, you can't show weakness there... (Frank)

> [W]hen you go into prison you can't be a wimp. You can't be weak, *you can't show your weakness* and you can't be a bitch 'cause you'll be treated like one and…if I spotted that on you…and I'm this fuckin big muscle guy, that's fuckin all toned up…[I would be] ready to kick the fuckin' shit out of you. (Chris; emphasis added)

The cognitive focus to suppress emotional expression was paramount to enduring the prison culture, or else face the wrath of the other inmates ("They're going to eat you in there"; kicking "the fuckin' shit out of you"). This concealment of emotion was more defensive and held in a version of the men that they felt was more 'authentic' than what was presented in prison. These accounts of not showing weakness are similar to those reported by men who 'lock up' or 'block off' their feelings in an effort to stifle or contain traces of pain, fear, weakness, and vulnerability (cf. Jewkes, 2005; Crewe et al., 2014).

While masking emotions helped the men avoid ridicule and predation from other inmates, it was not a permanent solution. Crewe and colleagues (2014, p. 67) have discussed in their research how the pressure to manage fronts and conceal emotions daily leads to emotional 'leaks' and 'cracks' in the masculine façade, which required a "sacred space of sorts" for the men to display authentic feelings. Such spaces included visit halls and classrooms. Yet the consensus among men interviewed in my sample was that, besides solitary confinement, there were no spaces in the prison where they felt safe enough to let their guards down. Several men had indicated that the sacred spaces of prison chapels and the sweat lodges assisted them in coping with the struggles of incarceration; however, such spaces were neither consistently or physically available to all inmates, and security and safety measures superseded furnishings, accommodations, and scheduling of events. Typically, these spaces were temporarily repurposed rooms or grounds which had little to no claim in prison operations (Gacek, 2015; see also O'Reilly-Shaughnessy, 2001).

'Backstage': Solitary Confinement as an 'Island of Respite'

Goffman's work helps to explain specific locations within carceral spaces, which he refers to as "geographies of license" or "free places" (Goffman, 1961, p. 205). Such places are characterized as bounded physical spaces that experience reduced levels of restriction and surveillance (Goffman, 1961, p. 205). At first glance, solitary confinement appears as a contradiction to this Goffmanian concept—a space which is predominantly restricted and surveilled by prison officials, such as solitary confinement, hardly seems 'free.' Yet I argue that, as an 'internal geography' separate but within the prison, solitary confinement functions as a 'backstage' to the usual performance of inmate self-presentations. "Licence, in short, [has] a geography" (Goffman, 1961, p. 205), and as my findings suggest, solitary confinement provided for the men interviewed "a marked reduction in usual [inmate] population density, contributing to the peace and quiet characteristic of [a free place]" (Goffman, 1961, p.

205). Through various inmate subversion tactics (i.e., working out, sleeping, and reading at their own leisure), solitary confinement became a space "ruled by less than usual staff authority" where the inmate temporarily reclaimed some aspect of control within the prison culture (Goffman, 1961, p. 204).

When arbitrarily used by prison officials, solitary confinement has the power to worsen the well-being of inmates within its walls and exacerbate their ongoing punishment. However, for the men I interviewed, solitary confinement became an "island of respite" (Crewe et al., 2014, p. 68) from the struggles they experienced daily. As several men explained:

> Some of the gentlemen I met, it was kind of like, the way they explained it was just "*me time*." It was kind of nice just to get away because you didn't have to deal with anybody's crap. (Jacob; emphasis added)

> You're living with criminals; you can't be safe around criminals…I don't care how "buddy buddy" you are with someone, they're going to stab you in the back if they need to and that's just the prison life. So it's not the safest place to be unless you could be locked in your room where you have no roommates, then you're safe because you're by yourself…[because] if you've got roommates they could kill you during the night. For me I, *I didn't mind the quietness* in the hole,[7] because it was just that: nice and quiet…yeah, segregation is the safest. (Isaac; emphasis added)

> [B]asically *it's the safest place you could be* (chuckle). Like, you know, if you have worries about, you know, debts or, you know, certain people that want to get you or fight and

[7] 'The hole,' 'solitary,' 'seg,' and 'segregation' were interchangeable terms the men used in the interviews, all of which refer to solitary confinement.

> whatever. Really that's the safest place for somebody. (Eric; emphasis added)
>
> You're in jail already, right? [So] what's the hole? It would…be better if you're in the hole, 'cause then you don't have to see people you don't like... (Brandon)
>
> If I had a choice, then hell yeah I would spend it alone in the 'seg.' I wouldn't have to deal with *other people's bullshit or drama* or whatnot. I mean I would get lonely sometimes…but yeah, I think I would cope with prison a lot better than having to deal with other guys—like having to act tough, getting into fights with guys all the time, and having to put up my guard at all times. And that's what makes prison life hard…it can be mentally draining, trying to keep up all this *false bravado* and all this crap. You can't really be yourself in prison because if you really were yourself a lot of guys would take advantage of that. (Frank; emphasis added)

As these narratives suggest, the men perceived solitary confinement in terms of its advantages relative to the general prison population, with the benefits of being placed in there outweighing the costs. Through inmate subversion, solitary confinement could be employed as a free place "for no other purpose other than to obtain time away" from staff, other inmates, and from "the noisy, crowded wards" (Goffman, 1961, p. 206). Even Goffman suggests that "the more unpalatable the environment in which the [inmate] must live, the more easily will places qualify as free ones" (1961, p. 212). Here, then, it was possible for the men "to *forge a space* that was comparatively free from the oppressive oversight of their peers" (Crewe et al., 2014, p. 70; emphasis added). The men presented solitary confinement in terms of the incentives it brought them, such as an escape from the mental exhaustion of false bravado and machismo, as well as the safety and quietness it secured from prison chaos. Subverting solitary confinement into a "refuge site" created an

ephemeral space of control where "the individual *feels* as protected and satisfied as is possible" while within its bounds (Goffman, 1961, p. 217; emphasis added).

Another emergent theme was how the men perceived the quietness and contentment of the space in relation to other inmates' needs and issues. In other words, should other inmates subvert the space (especially if such inmates are having difficulty in presenting their hypermasculine fronts, or they show no intention of engaging in hypermasculine performances with other inmates), there would be benefits to the seclusion this space provides. This could also include inmates who do not engage in physical exercise, or who prefer to pass the time in quiet, solitary activities. In effect, despite its restrictiveness, some inmates might be well-suited for this space:

> [Solitary confinement] is just for one person in a cramped space. So…you can't really move around a lot. [I know that] it's constricting and that's what it's meant for, to show you that this is how much freedom you have, which is pretty much not much. But, I mean, if you were a loner who works better without a crowd I would say isolation is actually just perfect for you instead. 'Cause, I mean, if you don't exercise much, if you're sitting around reading books all day or writing or drawing or something like that then being in a private cell, like, even [if] it's small or not would be a lot better. (Henry)

Eric managed to use the time in solitary confinement to rework his front. While he acknowledged that being in this space was new terrain for him, Eric appreciated the available time to engage in physical exercise:

> The first week in segregation was pretty rough for me because I had never been in 'seg' before…But by the end of the first week and into the second week time just flew by. I still got my three meals, plus I had the time to do push-ups

> and sit-ups like crazy…which I was grateful for when I got out. (Eric)

Even Jacob indicates that during his experience of solitary confinement he was still able to retain the personal items and small luxuries he had back in general population:

> You still got your tray given to you three times a day…But most of the time you had a TV there, books, you know what I mean. You're in there for ninety days or thirty days or whatever, how long you're there for, in segregation. You know, at first it's kind of bogus 'cause for the first week they say you're not allowed your TV, but then after a while they bring you—it takes a week to get your stuff packed out and then brought to you. But otherwise they said "yeah, you still get canteen." (Jacob)

Through subversion, these men were able to create an ephemeral "personal territory" which afforded them "some margin of control" while they were inside this space (Goffman, 1961, p. 219). Such subversion is a running theme throughout Goffman's free places, in which he suggests that all free places seem pervaded "by a feeling of relaxation and self-determination, in marked contrast to the sense of uneasiness prevailing on some wards. It is in here that *one could be one's own man*" (Goffman, 1961, p. 206; emphasis added). While the men took into account that not all inmates would perceive solitary confinement as beneficial, they demonstrated a relative understanding of how this space produced 'accidental humanity' for their individual situations.

Conclusion

As aesthetic statements of state and sovereign power, prisons have become "colossal enclosures" of space, discipline, punishment, and violence (Hancock & Jewkes, 2011, p. 616; see also Crichton & Ricciardelli, 2016; Piché, 2015, 2016; Weinrath, 2016). However, an

attention to (re)presentations of self and space tell a different story. The men's experiences and reflections not only represent a challenge to depictions of prisons generally and solitary confinement specifically, but of the ways in which they attempted to manage themselves in carceral spaces.

A fuller engagement with Goffman's potential input to carceral geographical research demonstrates that these carceral spaces are not emotionally undifferentiated, unwaveringly aggressive, and free from inmate subversion; in fact, short instances of solitary confinement provided the men I interviewed the capacity to recalibrate their bodies and spirits to continually endure incarceration.

Furthermore, as the abundance of prison literature indicates, it may be that much of solitary confinement has been used to exacerbate the punishment served upon inmates. Yet by drawing upon Goffman's work, the men's experiences reported here and in other research demonstrate how the enactment of space is never completely contained by dominant regulatory norms but, like power more generally, is open to "inventive reinterpretation, fluid negotiation, and subtle translation" (Allen, 1999, p. 205). The success within which the 'doing' of space occurs is always and ever conditional and contingent. While the use of solitary confinement by prison officials is to subdue and further punish misbehaving inmates, inmates may intentionally rework, contest, or subvert these spaces.

By weaving out "a more expansive spatial logic" (Springer, 2011, p. 93) of prison culture and the presentation of self, the aim of this paper is not to support the arbitrary or punitive use of solitary confinement. Rather, I supplement research investigating the meanings, interpretations, and representations of carceral space, all of which draw attention to the struggles of prison as experienced by inmates (Gacek, 2015, 2017). Inmate subversion of solitary confinement became a way in which to (re)present self and space differently. By providing a spatially informed view of the 'carceral,' my intention is to not only illustrate a concept, but to supplement the efforts of those

engaging in prosocial and progressive change in the Canadian correctional system.

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