



LJMU Research Online

Wilson, K

On a wing and a prayer: professional ethics and the prison library

<http://researchonline.ljmu.ac.uk/id/eprint/23600/>

Article

Citation (please note it is advisable to refer to the publisher's version if you intend to cite from this work)

Wilson, K (2024) On a wing and a prayer: professional ethics and the prison library. Library Management.

LJMU has developed **LJMU Research Online** for users to access the research output of the University more effectively. Copyright © and Moral Rights for the papers on this site are retained by the individual authors and/or other copyright owners. Users may download and/or print one copy of any article(s) in LJMU Research Online to facilitate their private study or for non-commercial research. You may not engage in further distribution of the material or use it for any profit-making activities or any commercial gain.

The version presented here may differ from the published version or from the version of the record. Please see the repository URL above for details on accessing the published version and note that access may require a subscription.

For more information please contact researchonline@ljmu.ac.uk

<http://researchonline.ljmu.ac.uk/>



**ON A WING AND A PRAYER: PROFESSIONAL ETHICS AND
THE PRISON LIBRARY**

Journal:	<i>Library Management</i>
Manuscript ID	LM-04-2024-0043
Manuscript Type:	Research Paper
Keywords:	Prison libraries, Professional ethics, Cultural value, Cultural policy, Collaborative work, Criminal justice

SCHOLARONE™
Manuscripts

ON A WING AND A PRAYER: PROFESSIONAL ETHICS AND THE PRISON LIBRARY

Abstract

Purpose

In response to instrumental cultural policy agendas in the UK, the paper explores the practice of collaborative cultural work in the criminal justice system through the lens of professional ethics in prison libraries. It seeks to balance narratives on the value of arts and culture in cross-government policy agendas with a nuanced consideration of the realities of such work in non-conventional organisational settings.

Research design and methodology

'Instrumental Values: Professional ethics in collaborative cultural work' was a two-year empirical study (2017-19), including ethnographic fieldwork in three case study sites representing prison library services in England. Following a 'communities of practice' conceptual framework, research methods included participant observation of day-to-day cultural work and specific events; successive research interviews with library and prison service staff and volunteers; and interviews with key collaborating organisations from extended professional networks.

Findings

Data from three prison library case studies show consistent ethical implications relating to the extent of collaborative complexity in the field and its impact on participants' emotional resilience; navigation of the prison regime by cultural workers; consequences for emotional labour and care in the field; and the re-negotiation of ethical boundaries and practices.

Originality

The research makes an original contribution to debates on the instrumental value of arts and culture via its intimate focus on prison libraries as microcosms of situated, truly integrated cultural work, both from a physical, organisational perspective and in their representation of a cross-policy function for arts and culture.

Introduction

Cultural policy makers in the UK have become increasingly focused on the instrumental value of arts and culture in recent years. This includes the cross-policy function and cost-effectiveness of arts and culture as a discrete form of Government spending, and the value generated for different public policy agendas including health and social care and criminal justice. More scholarly attention is subsequently being paid to both the measurement and articulation of cultural value in instrumental terms and to the ethical implications of appropriating arts and culture as a form of social justice and 'public good'. In response, *Instrumental Values: Professional ethics in collaborative cultural work* – funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC, 2017-19) – examined ethical dimensions of collaborative practice within and across museums working in health and social care settings (in the full study) and prison library services, which form the focus of this article.

The research complements and extends earlier work by the author on the increasing multi-disciplinary and collaborative contexts in which cultural work is undertaken. This includes for example research on public libraries and social inclusion (Anon for review), and on the value of museums in dementia care (Anon for review), which focused on the value and outcomes of such work for those accessing and participating in relevant cultural services. In undertaking this research, gaps in the evidence base and subsequent cultural policy debates were incrementally identified concerning the impact of cross-sector collaborative work on the *cultural sector itself*, including implications for professional identities, values and practices.

1
2
3 Other researchers in the cultural policy field have been critical of the ideological assumptions made by
4 policy makers on the social value of arts and culture, and the subsequent advocacy claims made by its
5 professional community (Belfiore and Bennett, 2008). More recently, particular attention has been paid
6 to the implicit contradictions of such promotion of social value when there are persistent inequalities in
7 who gets to work in, participate in and directly benefit from the cultural and creative industries (Brook
8 et al, 2020). Before any true assessment of ‘success’ can be made regarding the cross-policy value of
9 any cultural intervention, it is important to give equal attention to the practice-based characteristics and
10 complexities of affective cultural work, and how these in turn inform any interpretations of success or
11 social value. Through the lens of professional ethics, we can begin to question and explore the
12 underpinning conditions, as far as they exist, of moral responsibility and public accountability in arts
13 and cultural practice.
14

15 The article extends and reconsiders emerging findings from the *Instrumental Values* study, which were
16 shared and debated during a research seminar – Cultural Policy, Professional Ethics and the Public
17 Good – in collaboration with the Institute of Applied Ethics (IAE) at the University of Hull (summarised
18 in Anon for review). Following a description of the ethnographic research process and its
19 methodological rationale, research findings are discussed under key headings, including the extent of
20 collaborative complexity in the field and its impact on participants’ emotional resilience; navigation of
21 the prison regime by cultural workers; consequences for emotional labour and care in the field; and the
22 re-negotiation of ethical boundaries and practices. Ultimately, the article makes the case for more
23 explicitly ethnographic and values-based approaches to research in the cultural policy field, questioning
24 the real-world accuracy of technocratic measures of impact and value, and the authenticity and
25 usefulness of claims to independence and objectivity in academic evaluation research with arts and
26 cultural sectors.
27
28
29

30 **Research context, design and methodology**

31
32 The concept of professional ethics is described by Lane (2017) as a relatively modern invention that
33 has developed in tandem with the professionalization of a range of occupations and roles throughout
34 the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, which do not have the historical gravitas of law or medicine.
35 According to Durkheim (1957), ‘special groups’ differentiate professional ethics from other codes of
36 civic morals through the ‘legitimacy, autonomy and regulation of collective power’. Professional ethics
37 are subsequently ‘more developed, and the more advanced in their operation, the greater the stability
38 and the better the organization of the professional groups themselves’. Banks and Gallagher (2008)
39 describe professional ethics in practice as ‘the norms of right action, good qualities of character and
40 values relating to the nature of the good life that are aspired to, espoused and enacted by professional
41 practitioners in the context of their work’.
42

43 As an example of Durkheim’s legitimation and regulation of professional ethics in cultural professions,
44 the Museums Association published a revised Code of Ethics for Museums in 2015, following a
45 substantial public consultation with members. Described as the sector’s social contract with the public,
46 the code is structured around three core themes including Public engagement and public benefit;
47 Stewardship of collections; and Individual and institutional integrity. Each theme includes a set of
48 defined principles that should be upheld by ‘museums and those who work in and with them’ throughout
49 their work. Under ‘Public engagement and public benefit’ for example, these include treating everyone
50 equally, with honesty and respect, and supporting freedom of speech and debate. Guidance on
51 upholding such principles includes ensuring editorial integrity, resisting attempts to influence
52 interpretation or content by particular interest groups, including donors and funders and resisting bias
53 in research undertaken by the museum.
54

55 Similarly, the UK’s Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP) launched a
56 revised Ethical Framework during the *Instrumental Values* research period in 2018, following extensive
57 consultation with members. The framework covers seven ‘ethical principles’ including human rights,
58 equalities, and diversity; public benefit; preservation; intellectual freedom; impartiality; confidentiality;
59 and information skills and information literacy. In various studies of consistent or ‘enduring’ values
60

1
2
3 across different organisational codes and consultations, definitive principles of librarianship include
4 stewardship; service; intellectual freedom; equity of access; privacy; literacy and learning; rationalism;
5 and democracy (Gorman, 2000; Hauptman, 2002; Koehler, 2015). In their study of the role and
6 development of ethics and values in librarianship, Koehler (2015) questions the ‘endurance’ of such
7 principles considering different social and environmental contexts, including the post-modern
8 organisation and institutionalisation of the profession; development of information technologies and
9 systems; and reinterpretations of the public value of libraries in the civic sphere. As such, it is timely to
10 further consider the relevance and impact of instrumental cultural policy narratives and agendas on the
11 endurance of core professional values and contemporary ethical practice in the sector.
12

13 The *Instrumental Values* research study adopted a ‘communities of practice’ (CoP) conceptual
14 framework, drawn from the critical management field and studies of organisational learning, in order
15 to “develop sector-specific case studies, working across multiple research sites, on the relationship
16 between defined, sector-specific Codes of Ethics and those serendipitously developed between
17 collaborating professionals and organisations as cross-sector communities of practice mature” (Anon
18 for review).
19

20 CoPs are defined as ‘vehicles for situated learning’, which generate knowledge and share practices
21 within and across a range of (physical and virtual) work-related and organisational spatial settings
22 (Brown and Duguid, 1991; Gherardi *et al*, 1998; Amin and Roberts, 2008). An earlier review by the
23 author of the literature on communities of practice (Anon for review) presented the concept as a valid
24 multidimensional research framework for the study of collaborative cultural work. Dimensions of the
25 CoP, including reflective practice, social capital, professional identity, tacit knowledge transfer,
26 creativity and innovation are especially relevant to the study of multi-disciplinary cultural work. It was
27 anticipated that applying these operational dimensions to situated forms of cultural work in prisons and
28 health and social care settings would create deeply contextualised, original insights on the reciprocal
29 benefits and ethical implications of *collaborative practice* itself.
30

31 Specific research questions and objectives – as described in the original research design (Anon for
32 review) - were modelled on functional elements and indicators of effective CoPs, including:
33

- 34 • The extent of work assimilation across professional boundaries;
- 35 • Identification of shared repertoires, artefacts and symbols of collaborative professional
36 learning;
- 37 • The social construction of embodied professional knowledge and skills;
- 38 • The articulation and representation of unique professional identities in creating collaborative
39 ‘added value’;
- 40 • The reciprocal value of defined codes of ethics to collaborating professional communities;
- 41 • Each set within the context of public policy agendas and their influence upon developing cross-
42 sector professional communities.
43
44
45

46 This article focuses upon data drawn from ethnographic fieldwork with three case study prison library
47 services, as microcosms of situated, truly integrated cultural work, both in terms of their physical
48 location on the prison estate and in their representative embodiment of a cross-policy function for arts
49 and culture. The research used the prison library’s contribution to prison education reform as its policy-
50 led starting point in its original design, but fieldwork also highlighted the library’s role and function in
51 meeting multiple service objectives in the criminal justice system, including prisoner mental health and
52 wellbeing and other more nuanced aspects of the rehabilitation process (Anon for review). In this
53 context, the author/researcher adopted ‘modes of ethnographic intervention’ described by Hauge
54 (2021), including ‘organizational development’ through an interest in informing future professional
55 practice in prison libraries, and ‘intervening description’ through an interest in providing an objective
56 commentary on cultural policy discourse versus the reality of cultural work in the field.
57

58 A degree of stratified sampling was used in determining case study sites and inviting prison libraries to
59 take part in the research, to include state prisons run by Her Majesty’s Prison Service (HMPS); private
60 prisons run by contractors; both men’s and women’s prison services of similar categories; each in

different geographical locations across England. Reputable prison library services (e.g., award winning) were purposefully targeted, where possible, to start from a relatively established position of service effectiveness and subsequently use the research to understand the underpinning collaborative contexts and conditions for such successes (Anon for review). Prison library case studies include:

- Library A - HMPS-run category B/C men's prison, opened in 1887, East of England (capacity approx. 800). Library run by [county] local authority.
- Library B - Privately run category B men's prison, opened in 2012, South-East London (capacity approx. 1,300). Library run in-house.
- Library C - HMPS-run closed category women's prison, opened in 1962, North of England (capacity approx. 500). Library originally run by local authority, sub-contracted during the research to a commercial education services provider.

Specific research methods used across the full study included repeat site visits to selected case study organisations, including the three prison library services described above and throughout the article. These included participant observation of day-to-day cultural work and participation in specific events and activities (e.g. reading groups), along with successive research interviews and group discussions with prison library staff and volunteers, prison service staff and key collaborators and organisations from extended professional networks. Interviews with prison library staff for example have incrementally posed questions on career trajectories and experience in the sector, including perceptions of formal codes of ethics and their relevance to collaborative cultural work; the day-to-day experience of relevant communities of practice; and the ethical challenges or implications of such situated and collaborative type of work (Anon for review). Data consists of extensive field notes and interview transcripts where it was possible to record conversations off-site.

An ethnographic, qualitative approach was essential to capture the complexities of the relationship between policy, ethical codes of practice and the lived experience of cultural workers, and to add authority and authenticity to the research via the collection of detailed, autobiographical professional narratives (Riessman, 1993; Robson, 2002). Rigorous discourse analysis of professionals' social construction of their worlds enables a greater exploration of the 'pragmatic function of language' and how talking translates into doing (Wood and Kroger, 2000). An ethnographic methodology furthermore enabled an in-depth, observational consideration of the *situatedness* of collaborative practice and its ethical implications, inspired by situated learning theory as a central principle of communities of practice research, which is described as learning through goal-directed activity in the situation where the learnt or acquired knowledge is to be deployed (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Billet, 1996).

Summary of key findings

A summary of key findings, drawn from thematic analysis of field notes and interview data, is presented below under the following headings:

- Collaborative complexity and emotional resilience
- Navigating the prison regime
- Emotional labour, care, and the prison librarian
- Re-negotiating the ethics of collaborative practice.

Collaborative complexity and emotional resilience

The first key finding relates to the complex practice of collaboration in the field, its varying degrees of success, and subsequent impact on cultural workers' emotional resilience in the sector. The range and volume of collaborating organisations; the integral supporting role of third sector and voluntary organisations; and the range of 'life-course' professional skills and experiences held by community members reflect this trend. By way of example shared during the IAE seminar discussion (Anon for review), the prison library based in the East of England (Library A) leads an award-winning, weekly Cognitive Stimulation Therapy (CST) group for prisoners with dementia. The prison librarian

1
2
3 (employed by county council library services) runs the group in collaboration with a group of volunteers
4 from a local church-based charity. The group sessions take place in a HMPS prison, but on a dedicated
5 health wing that is sub-contracted to a commercial provider, meaning that four different types of
6 organisations are effectively working together. With regards to collaborators' prior professional
7 experience, the prison librarian had previously worked as a mental health nurse. Similarly, two regular
8 volunteers from the church-based charity organisation had a wealth of clinical professional experience,
9 having worked as an NHS nurse and psychotherapist prior to taking retirement. In discussing their role
10 as a volunteer in prisons, the former psychotherapist somewhat poignantly commented on their moral
11 obligation to "give something back" in retirement having been professionally trained in the NHS.
12
13

14 Across all prison library case studies, a core group of charitable organisations and volunteer groups
15 underpins many examples of effective, reputable cultural work in prisons, as per the therapeutic work
16 with prisoners with dementia described above. These include for example The Reading Agency; The
17 National Literacy Trust; Prison Reading Groups and Give a Book; The Reader organisation based in
18 Liverpool; the Shannon Trust; National Prison Radio; and Storybook Dads. Other examples
19 encountered throughout the research include a London-based charity providing legal advice to
20 prisoners, who were running a drop-in session during a visit to the private men's prison participating in
21 the study. There is a wealth of collaborating organisations therefore, routinely working with prison
22 libraries, each having an impact on the values underpinning their work and its value to prisoners.
23
24

25 This creates risks however in seeking to maintain ethical standards within and across the CoP, when
26 working with and as volunteers without the same levels of responsibility and accountability as paid
27 members of a workforce or of the host organisation. Those working as volunteers for example
28 commented on their work and contributions not being taken seriously sometimes by prison officials,
29 which could adversely affect confidence and morale. At the same time, there were numerous examples
30 of projects and activities stalling or being problematic due to the unreliability of volunteers. Where
31 collaborative projects involving volunteers work well however, this is a source of great emotional
32 resilience for library staff, who then invest enhanced trust in and dependence on successful collaborative
33 relationships. Equally, staff reflected on feelings of disappointment and guilt when collaborative
34 projects fail, having "let the lads down" (interviewee). This reflects the risk taken in collaborative
35 endeavours that rely on trust in something being achieved through the collaborative process that would
36 be otherwise unachievable, and faith in collaborators' willingness and ability to contribute (Huxham
37 and Vangen, 2005). Such risks inevitably disrupt the stability of the 'special' professional group, as
38 espoused by Durkheim.
39

40 *Navigating the prison regime*

41
42 On a day-to-day basis, navigating the prison regime presents the most significant professional and
43 ethical challenge for library staff, requiring a high degree of work assimilation across prison processes
44 and procedures and tenacious promotion of libraries' unique value to that system. Statutory expectations
45 and responsibilities of prison libraries are defined by Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service
46 (formerly National Offender Management Service (NOMS)), under Prison Service Instruction (PSI)
47 02/2015. The document explains 'the processes for the provision of a library service in prison
48 establishments to support prisoner resettlement, rehabilitation and purposeful activity', emphasising
49 provision that supports literacy and reading for pleasure. Mandatory actions for prison Governors
50 include ensuring that prisoners' statutory entitlements to library provision are met, including access to
51 books and audio-visual materials on a weekly basis for a minimum of thirty minutes, including when
52 unable to physically visit the library.
53

54 In reality, there is widespread variability in the meeting of statutory requirements across the prison
55 estate. The National Foundation for Educational Research conducted a review of the implementation of
56 a new Prison Library Specification (as part of the Offender Learning and Skills Service) in 2006. The
57 research highlights a number of challenges in implementing changes and meeting associated targets,
58 linked to operating within the prison regime, including variation in how the library is viewed and valued
59 within individual prisons; communication issues between library service providers (usually Public
60

1
2
3 Library Authorities) and Offender Learning and Skills Units; and variability in other prison
4 circumstances (White *et al.*, 2006). This creates implications for professional identities, skills, and
5 training of prison library staff, and for the ethos of library services when required to meet specific (more
6 formal) educational objectives and outcomes.
7

8 This variation in service provision was noticeable during fieldwork, linked to the different funding and
9 governance models represented across the three case study sites. Library A, as a service provided by
10 the county-level local authority alongside its public library network, has the hallmarks of a statutory
11 library service including service-level agreements that fit with the county library services' strategic
12 priorities and values. These include a health and wellbeing agenda that has enabled and supported the
13 prison library's work with life-serving prisoners with dementia, as discussed above and below. Housed
14 on a Victorian prison site in an annexe of a residential wing, the physical library space is also resonant
15 of a small, community-based branch public library service. In contrast, Library B forms part of a
16 separate building dedicated to educational services. These include state-of-the art facilities, including
17 print and textile workshops that are often showcased by the private business providers as an example
18 of contemporary, rehabilitative prison services. The library space itself is similar or comparable to those
19 provided in further education sites, with an equal emphasis on study and reading for pleasure. During
20 one visit for example, three young men were using the restricted IT facilities to prepare for a driving
21 theory test and to learn a language (French). Library C was much more symptomatic of the current
22 operational realities of statutory library services after a sustained period of fiscal austerity measures, as
23 it was transitioning from being a local authority-run service to being delivered by a sub-contracted
24 private educational provider. This involved a period of no or limited access to library services as new
25 staff were recruited.
26

27 Due to the complexity of collaborative practice involved, there is considerable work assimilation across
28 professional boundaries in the prison-based cultural community of practice, which subsequently affects
29 the provision of and access to library services. On a mundane level, there is a discernible vernacular
30 appropriation of prison life by library staff, including for example in the language used to describe
31 prison systems and regimes. To a non-acclimatised researcher, this was noticeable and unusual at first
32 but something that became more familiar and relatable as the research progressed. From a professional
33 practice point of view, there are more challenging examples of work assimilation in prison libraries that
34 arguably go 'above and beyond' conventional cultural work. This includes the fact that librarians are
35 key holders and will often escort groups of prisoners to and from the wings, particularly if there are no
36 officers available. This responsibility was acutely felt during fieldwork, with the researcher's presence
37 adding an extra logistical responsibility in that library staff could not leave them alone at any point.
38 During a visit to Library B for example, the researcher had to accompany the librarian to a wing to
39 escort a group of men to the library for a consultation with a visiting legal services charity. During the
40 same visit, the librarian had to ask another member of the prison education team to stay with the
41 researcher in the library after he and the attending officer were required elsewhere. From an
42 ethnographic perspective, this created a constant frisson of anxiety and self-awareness, including guilt
43 at creating an extra burden for library staff, who must be hyper-aware of security, risk and vulnerability
44 at all times.
45

46 Returning to the study's core research questions, the 'repertoires, artefacts, and symbols' of
47 collaborative learning in the community of practice therefore invariably relate to the value of its work
48 to prisoners in relation to their safety and wellbeing and to the health and wellbeing of the community
49 of practice itself. In more homogenous cultural communities of practice, conventional symbols of
50 collaborative learning would be the cultural 'products' themselves (e.g., exhibition; film; performance).
51 In our contextual sites of study here, cultural objects and activities (e.g., books and reading) provide the
52 medium through which other objectives are met. Often these objectives are short-term and blunt – "if
53 we give them something to do for 30 minutes, then they're not fighting or self-harming" (interviewee).
54 Similarly, there is a complete lack of professional judgement, selectivity, and quality control in the type
55 of books – or cultural repertoires - used for example in reading groups and author visits, with an
56 acceptance that prisoners "like crime fiction" (interviewee).
57
58
59
60

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25
26
27
28
29
30
31
32
33
34
35
36
37
38
39
40
41
42
43
44
45
46
47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

Bowe (2011) reflects on the extent of professional accountability that exists in prison libraries when working with ‘disaffected’ service user communities with diverse needs, situated in complex structural environments that are continually subject to legislative change. Another more ethically complex example is the formal requirement of librarians as prison staff to comply with Assessment, Care in Custody and Teamwork procedures, whereby immediate reporting action must be taken for any prisoner deemed to be at risk of self-harm or suicide (Anon for review). This is a stark example of the heightened tensions in prison life, and enhanced moral responsibilities of its full workforce, in keeping people safe. As such, the operational challenges and requirements highlighted above form part of a complex package of both professional and moral obligations for prison library staff.

Emotional labour, care, and the prison librarian

Care emerged as a defining shared value and abiding principle for prison librarians and collaborators, including care for one another and the prison community, and practising carefully (particularly for women) in morally challenging custodial environments. There is evidence for example of how professional practice is socially constructed and sustained within the CoP through careful navigation of the prison system (“keeping people onside”) and the ways in which the cultural CoP supports, cares for and nurtures itself through critical reflective practice (Anon for review). Library A’s group for prisoners with dementia is a useful example. CST is an established psychological therapy based on the principles and benefits of group interaction, focusing on using group activities to stimulate cognitive engagement ‘in the moment’. The group running the sessions apply a set of principles to their organisation and just as significantly, to their support of one another. A typical session involves meeting off-site to plan the session beforehand, including activities and allocating roles and responsibilities within the group; travelling to the prison together, and once the session is over, regrouping to review the session. During a fieldwork site visit, this took place in the café run by ex-offenders just outside the prison grounds. The review includes evaluation of the session, including levels of engagement from participants and what worked well or could have perhaps been done differently. They will also reflect on their own experiences of the session, including any individual anxieties or concerns.

When taking part in one of the full CST sessions during fieldwork, the depth of feeling experienced by staff and volunteers delivering the programme became particularly palpable during the ‘de-brief’ meeting. This included empathic reflections on the deteriorating health of one elderly participant, and how other group members were responding to that. This caused further reflection on the realities of dying in prison and providing what is in effect palliative or end-of-life care. The mood for this part of the conversation was inevitably sombre, and notably in stark contrast to the group’s demeanour when delivering the session itself, which had been remarkably upbeat and hopeful. As an ethnographic observation of the personal and emotional effort that goes into this form of cultural work, it had a profound impact on the researcher’s own feelings towards undertaking research in the field and ethical responsibilities entailed (discussed in more detail below under ‘Discussion points and conclusion’). Further to the points raised above about prison library staff’s attention to risk, security and vulnerability, time spent with this group also exposed the extent of care that is practised for one another and extended members of the community of practice, including the researcher herself. During the debrief discussion, this included mindful questions about, and subsequent reflections on, her own contribution to the session with prisoners, how she had felt throughout the session and the group’s responsibility towards her.

In this context, the ‘situatedness’ of integrated cultural work is especially important, linked to enhanced experiences of emotional labour in communities of practice operating under different circumstances. Burkitt (2014) describes emotional labour and professional ‘feeling rules’ in the nursing sector, for example, as the “collective management of the situation in which people become affected, rather than the management of emotion as an individual act”. As such, “different communities of practice in different settings [develop] their own emotional culture and ways of dealing with patients and relatives” (in the nursing example). This is also uniquely relevant in criminal justice settings, where “the instrumental and administrative processes of criminal justice are the visible workings of the system, but of equal importance are these emotional processes, or ‘underground emotion work’ undertaken by

1
2
3 practitioners which remains largely suppressed, invisible and unacknowledged” (Knight, 2014).
4 Liebling (2004) states that “the emotional tone of prison life is raw, real and distinctive”, and “the
5 emotional climate within an organization... will impact on perceptions of one’s treatment. It is, if you
6 like, part of the moral climate”.

7
8 Such ‘underground emotion work’ was particularly evident amongst women in the *Instrumental Values*
9 study. The experiences of women working in and with prison libraries reflect very particular ethical
10 challenges and practices, both in relation to consciously managing their own behaviours and
11 rationalising the behaviour of others towards them. Women working in men’s prisons reflected on how
12 their female identity can help or potentially hinder their engagement with prisoners and (male) prison
13 staff through our discussions (Anon for review). Women library staff and volunteers frequently
14 commented for example on how the men address them as ‘Miss’ and are unfailingly courteous overall,
15 which helps them to engage the men in library activities but is obviously quite a dated and contrived
16 interpersonal experience. Similarly, a group of women volunteers and librarians working together
17 described how male officers on the wing ‘probably’ see them as “daft women coming in to do fluffy
18 things” (interviewee), but that they have admittedly used this to their advantage in gaining regular
19 access and a relationship of relative trust with prison staff. This results in considerable amounts of
20 reflection on compromise and risk in being a woman doing this kind of work, as what may be interpreted
21 as courtesy and casual indifference in one such context would arguably be inappropriate and potentially
22 harmful behaviour in another.

23
24
25
26 Other uniquely gendered experiences of cultural work occur in women’s prisons. Heightened feelings
27 of empathy and emotional connection can occur for example between female prison library workers
28 and volunteers, and prisoners linked to their experiences of separation anxiety from family; of having
29 or caring for young infants on mother and baby units; and at the opposite end of the scale, experiences
30 of ageing in prison and the menopause. Again, this was acutely observed during a reading group session
31 in Library C, with a group of four women prisoners, a volunteer reading group coordinator and prison
32 librarian (both women). The group had been reading a contemporary novel by a woman author, about
33 relationships and parenthood in an urban setting. Reflecting typical group dynamics, the atmosphere
34 had been subdued and polite, with one prisoner making the most active contributions to discussion in
35 response to the text. When the conversation turned to one passage concerning an adult character’s
36 relationship with her own mother, this triggered a much more engaged and inclusive conversation, with
37 both prisoners and facilitators sharing their own personal, familial experiences and how these have
38 impacted on their own attitudes and aspirations towards motherhood. This was a moving moment that
39 showed explicitly the therapeutic value of prison library activities, and in particular, moments of
40 genuine solidarity and affinity between different groups of women.

41
42
43
44 Conversely, other moral challenges attached to work in men’s prisons have revealed themselves through
45 research conversations, particularly concerning the ways in which attitudes towards or feelings about
46 sex offenders are articulated and, in some cases, repressed, leading to a heightened consciousness of
47 risk, safety and moral compromise when working with vulnerable prisoners, which has to be
48 ‘controlled’ on site. This results in additional practices of self-care in relation to how women library
49 staff and collaborators reconcile (or not) their professional experiences ‘through the gate’ with family,
50 friends, and wellbeing activities.

51 *Renegotiating the ethics of collaborative practice*

52
53
54 Although all prison library staff participating in the research expressed an awareness of CILIP’s ethical
55 framework and its earlier iterations, professional sector codes are of little practical relevance in day-to-
56 day prison library work. For library professionals working in such contexts, it is often a fine-balancing
57 act between upholding the values of librarianship as a cultural profession and maintaining a ‘place’ in
58 the prison system. Discussions revealed the difficulties for example in upholding principles of
59 intellectual freedom and equality of access to information, when books and reading materials are heavily
60

1
2
3 censored in prisons and access to information is so limited to begin with (e.g., no access to internet).
4 One volunteer working for a literacy charity organisation, for example, described the challenge of
5 “[needing] to be compliant, neutral and empathic versus a strong inclination to be subversive and try to
6 stimulate more critical thought – it can be difficult to square that circle” (interviewee). Research on the
7 information needs of prisoners using prison learning centres (Canning and Buchanan, 2018), shows that
8 prisoners have a broad range of information needs, many of a sensitive nature, particularly those related
9 to coping with crime and punishment. Many needs appear unmet, particularly those related to health
10 and rehabilitation, through reluctance to seek information and guidance through issues of trust and
11 stigma.
12
13

14 Any reflexive analysis of own ethical practice by research participants mostly related to personal, moral
15 standards of ‘right and wrong’ rather than any adherence to professional standards. As such, the research
16 was subsequently steered towards a more ‘virtues-based approach’ to understanding ethics in integrated
17 professional environments, including a consideration of shared *moral* qualities and virtues amongst
18 practitioners, rather than occupational traits and practices (Banks and Gallagher, 2008). In this context,
19 the research found that cultural work across the prison library case studies is more discernibly informed
20 by personally held moral values; political ideology and orientation; other professional training and
21 development; faith and religious beliefs; and ‘life-course’ values connected with formative social and
22 cultural experiences (Anon for review). As researchers in health and social care, Banks and Gallagher
23 (2008) comment further on organisational trends towards integrated services and inter-professional
24 working, and the potential for ‘ethical tensions’ between collaborating services with particular sets of
25 values, codes of ethics, organisational cultures and systems. As cultural communities of practice create
26 and work within profoundly responsive ethical codes, through uniquely situated shared values and
27 emotional experiences of working together, how can these be more carefully integrated into
28 representative, relevant and useful ethical frameworks by professional governing bodies?
29
30
31

32 Lane (2017) argues for a transformation in the understanding of contemporary professional ethics,
33 requiring a shift away from prioritisation of clients or employers to a more expansive articulation of the
34 role and moral responsibilities of the professions towards the ‘greater public good’. Conventionally
35 within the professions, there are three levels of ethical engagement with the ‘social whole’, ranging
36 from an individual’s acts and practices within the existing constraints of their given role; ethical
37 frameworks and codes of practice set by the profession itself; and then a ‘third order’ of public
38 accountability. Observing collaborative prison library work in practice helps to shape our understanding
39 of this ethical ‘third order’ of culture-led interventions in the criminal justice system. When asked to
40 describe the main ethical challenges experienced in their work, research participants invariably referred
41 to operational issues within the prison estate, including for example recurring staff shortages on the
42 wing and persistent low morale within the wider prison workforce. Professional cultural work for the
43 ‘greater public good’ therefore arguably happens *in spite* of situated prison systems, structures and
44 regimes. This requires a spontaneous tenacity from prison library workers and volunteers that stretches
45 beyond conventional skills and competencies defined by the profession of librarianship.
46
47

48 Data across the full *Instrumental Values* study, including case studies on museums working in health
49 and social care settings, substantiate the need for a shared values base across collaborating sectors.
50 Writing on the social work of museums for example, Silverman (2010) has previously observed that
51 ‘museums must expand or revise their existing code... or move swiftly to adopt or develop related
52 documents that are appropriate for the social work in which they have engaged’. To this end, next steps
53 for the research programme include development of an international online training programme for
54 professional ethics in multidisciplinary cultural work, based on *Instrumental Values* research data, for
55 gallery, library, archive and museum (GLAM) sectors, covering topics including Navigating ethical
56 boundaries across sectors; Organisational culture and values; Emotional labour and the ethics of self-
57 care.
58
59
60

Discussion points and conclusion

The ethnographic experience of undertaking the *Instrumental Values* study has encouraged careful re-consideration of the role of academic cultural policy researchers, and our ethical responsibilities in narrating the social value of such important but demanding cultural work. This includes remaining mindful of the wider political contexts in which we are operating. Unavoidably, health and social care services have experienced increasing pressures as a direct result of austerity-driven fiscal policy in the UK. Austerity measures have been distributed unevenly across government departments, creating differing levels of impact across different groups of society, with budget cuts being acutely felt by local government with real implications for public services (Hitchen, 2019). Arguably, notions of the integrated public sphere, especially in relation to essential public services, have been born of necessity rather than choice, with increasing demands on third sector and charitable organisations to fill the gap left by reductions in core services. Previous research on community engagement work in the museums sector (Morse and Munro, 2018) for example, discusses evolving ‘practices of care’ through a greater sense of networked allegiance with wider social care services, with an emphasis on cultural organisations providing an alternative to gaps in provision created by austerity measures.

Thus, when researching professional ethics in particular, “... ethnographers as social scientists need to recognize that they are workers, and that the concepts and theories that they have applied to other domains of labour apply within the scholarly workforce” (Wellin and Fine, 2007). For cultural policy researchers, this exposes the need for a more values-based approach to cultural value research. On a personal level, the author is indebted to participants in the *Instrumental Values* study for their time, generosity, wisdom and care, particularly as a researcher new to the prison environment. The same levels of care and courtesy should be afforded to scholarly representations of their work, requiring a balance between ‘independent’ academic research with necessary objective, critical distance and more connected, empirically engaged research to understand the practice-based nuances of cultural work that has real (social) value. This inevitably leads to certain subjectivities, both in delivering an honest appraisal of the work under consideration and in balancing our own emerging care for this work and our research partners (Anon for review). Research on ethnographic practice itself advocates the value of emotions in the field as ‘valid sources of understanding’ (Tallberg *et al*, 2014) and of “using emotions as important methodological tools that should be used as part of the methodological and analytical process” (Knight and Zempi, 2020).

There is a bigger responsibility for those instrumentalists interested in economic value and cost benefit to reframe narratives of cost-effectiveness that seek to position arts and culture as ‘cheaper’, community-based alternatives to statutory public services. With reference to the sheer scale of voluntary work and assimilation of other roles and responsibilities in the field, affective cultural work in criminal justice and health and social care settings is likely to be ‘cost-effective’ when much of it is unpaid and involves doing the work of other professionals. The truth is that third sector organisations need just as much infrastructural support as any other and it is vital to acknowledge the various forms of investment that *people* delivering cultural projects make in their work. In reality, people give infinite amounts of their own time, energy, commitment, care and emotional resilience. Ultimately, in considering the value created by instrumental cultural work, policy makers also need to acknowledge the true costs of making a difference, and the real-world investment required.

References

- Banks, S. and Gallagher, A. (2008) *Ethics in Professional Life: Virtues for Health and Social Care*. Macmillan International: London.
- Belfiore, E. and Bennett, O. (2008) *The Social Impact of the Arts: An intellectual history*. Palgrave Macmillan: Basingstoke.

- 1
2
3 Billet, S. (1996) 'Situated learning: bridging sociocultural and cognitive theorising'. *Learning and*
4 *Instruction* Vol. 6 No. 3, 263-280.
5
- 6 Bowe, C. (2011) Recent Trends in UK Prison Libraries. *Library Trends*, Vol. 59 No. 3, pp. 427-445.
7 [10.1353/lib.2011.0006](https://doi.org/10.1353/lib.2011.0006)
8
- 9 Brook, O., O'Brien, D. and Taylor, M. (2020) *Culture is Bad for You*. Manchester University Press:
10 Manchester.
11
- 12 Burkitt, I. (2014) *Emotions and Social Relations*. Sage Publications Ltd: London.
13
- 14 Canning, C. and Buchanan, S. (2019) The information behaviours of maximum security prisoners.
15 *Journal of Documentation* Vol. 75 No. 2, pp. 417-434. [10.1108/jd-06-2018-0085](https://doi.org/10.1108/jd-06-2018-0085)
16
- 17 Durkheim, E. (1957) *Professional Ethics and Civic Morals*. Routledge Sociology Classics. Routledge:
18 Abingdon.
19
- 20 Ganga, R. and Wilson, K. (2020) Valuing carers: The impact of House of Memories as a museum-led
21 dementia awareness programme for family caregivers. *International Journal of Care and Caring*, Vol.
22 4, No. 4, pp. 573-593. <https://doi.org/10.1332/239788220X15966470811065>
23
- 24 Gorman, M. (2000) *Our Enduring Values: Librarianship in the 21st Century*. American Library
25 Association: Chicago.
26
- 27 Hauge, A.M. (2021) How to take sides: on the challenges of managing positionality. *Journal of*
28 *Organizational Ethnography* Vol. 10 No. 1, pp. 95-111. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JOE-06-2019-0023>
29
- 30 Hauptman, R. (2002) *Ethics and Librarianship*. McFarland & Co.: Jefferson.
31
- 32 Hitchen, E. (2019) The affective life of austerity: uncanny atmospheres and paranoid temporalities.
33 *Social and Cultural Geography*. Vol. 22 No. 3, pp. 295-318.
34 <https://doi.org/10.1080/14649365.2019.1574884>
35
- 36 Huxham, C. and Vangen, S. (2005) *Managing to Collaborate: The Theory and Practice of*
37 *Collaborative Advantage*. Routledge: Abingdon.
38
- 39 Knight, C. (2014) *Emotional Literacy in Criminal Justice: Professional practice with offenders*.
40 Palgrave Macmillan: Basingstoke.
41
- 42 Knight, V. and Zempi, I. (2020) Embracing the emotional turn: responding to researchers' emotions.
43 *Emotions and Society* Vol. 2 No. 2, 139-156. <https://doi.org/10.1332/263169020X15925529968217>
44
- 45 Koehler, W. (2015) *Ethics and Values in Librarianship: A History*. Rowman & Littlefield: Maryland.
46
- 47 Lane, M. (2017) *A New professional Ethics for Sustainable Prosperity*. CUSP Essay Series on the
48 Morality of Sustainable Prosperity No. 1. January 2017. Accessed 21st June 2021:
49 <http://www.cusp.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/01-Melissa-Lane-Essay-online.pdf>
50
- 51
- 52 Lave, J. and Wenger, E. (1991) *Situated Learning. Legitimate Peripheral Participation*. Cambridge
53 University Press: Cambridge.
54
- 55 Liebling, A. (2004) *Prisons and Their Moral Performance: A Study of Values, Quality and Prison*
56 *Life*. Clarendon Studies in Criminology. Oxford University Press: Oxford.
57
58
59
60

1
2
3 Morse, N. and Munro, E. (2018) Museums' community engagement schemes, austerity and practices
4 of care in two local museum services. *Social and Cultural Geography*, 19 (3), 357-378.
5 [10.1080/14649365.2015.1089583](https://doi.org/10.1080/14649365.2015.1089583)
6

7 Riessman, C.K. (1993) *Narrative Analysis*. Qualitative Research Methods Series 30. Sage
8 Publications: Thousand Oaks.
9

10 Robson, C. (2002) *Real World Research*. 2nd edition. Blackwell Publishing: Oxford.
11

12 Silverman, L.H. (2010) *The Social Work of Museums*. Routledge: Abingdon.
13

14 Tallberg, L.C., Jordan, P.J. and Boyle, M. (2014) The "Green Mile": crystallization ethnography in an
15 emotive context. *Journal of Organizational Ethnography* Vol. 3 No. 1, pp. 80-95.
16 <https://doi.org/10.1108/JOE-11-2012-0047>
17

18 Wellin, C. and Fine, G.A. (2001) Ethnography as Work: Career Socialization, Setting sand Problems.
19 In: Atkinson, P. et al (Eds) *Handbook of Ethnography*. Sage Publications Ltd: London pp. 323-338.
20

21 Wood, L.A. and Kroger, R.O. (2000) *Doing Discourse Analysis: Methods for Studying Action in Talk*
22 *and Text*. Sage Publications: Thousand Oaks.
23
24
25
26
27
28
29
30
31
32
33
34
35
36
37
38
39
40
41
42
43
44
45
46
47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60