

Balancing Sympathy and Empathy in an Emotive Discipline

Helen Nichols & Victoria Humphrey

Introduction

Studying Criminology involves exploring the nature, causes and extent of crime, and incorporating critical examination of responses to criminal activity through the criminal justice process. Navigating through the criminological discipline, students frequently encounter emotive topics including, but not limited to, violence, victimisation, trauma, harm, and vulnerability. Despite the often-challenging nature of criminological study, topics of a sensitive nature can also be the stimulus for students' desire to learn (Dalton, 2010). Dalton (ibid.) argues that teaching such topics has pedagogical value in raising students' consciousness and promotes an 'enhanced respect for human difference, tolerance, and empathy for the plight of others' (p. 15). In teaching and learning practice, criminology educators can encounter polarised student attitudes towards people who commit crime, from the punitive to the sympathetic. Presenting the ideal of rehabilitation and the principle of punitiveness as two ends of one spectrum, rather than an either/or dichotomy, Tajalli et al. (2013) found in their survey of criminal justice college students in the United States that students with conservative political values, and those who worried about becoming victims of crime, were more likely to favour a punitive approach towards people who commit crime. As students progress through their higher education journey, their interaction with critical debate and discussion of criminological research findings can change their attitudes and shift their mindset and position on the punitive spectrum. This observation, combined with being encultured into the predominantly left-wing university setting (see Bailey and O'Leary, 2017), can sometimes present the development of sympathetic views, including towards people who have committed offences.

This chapter will consider the challenges of balancing sympathy and empathy in the emotive discipline of criminology. With a focus on the study of prisons, the chapter will consider some of the oppositions between media and academic illustrations of prisons and people who live and work within them. Subsequently, it will incorporate a case study presented as a reflection from Humphrey's experience of studying a final year undergraduate optional module 'Psychology in Prisons' which contained some emotion-invoking learning materials. Through this reflection, it is argued that accounts from prisoner voice, evidence of prisoner vulnerability and visual sources can be particularly emotive triggers in this area of study, often which require students to engage in a reflective process to successfully redress the sympathy/empathy balance in the pursuit of in-depth, critical, and simultaneously balanced understanding. In doing so, the chapter will highlight the potentially positive implications for student engagement through processes of feeling, reflection and sense making to achieve a holistic scholarly experience involving both personal and academic development.

Pedagogies of empathy

To situate this chapter within the broader pedagogical context, it will begin by briefly introducing some points for consideration contained within 'pedagogies of empathy' literature. This will highlight the importance of empathy development in university students and connect to the wider content of the chapter which draws on the teaching of penology to articulate the sympathy/empathy balance.

Batson et al. (2012: 1656) propose that attitudes can be improved through the development of empathy for members of stigmatised groups and that it may be 'a potent and valuable technique' for more positive responses to the stigmatised in society. For English (2016), empathy requires the ability to view experiences from another's perspective. Through the consideration of the existence of other viewpoints in the world, a person is then able to learn from the other. As noted by Leake (2016), those calling for pedagogies of empathy advocate for teaching empathy to find better ways to understand one another 'across our substantial differences'.

English (2016) defines empathy as the 'imaginative seeing of situations from the view of another person' (p. 1053). Exploring the work of Dewey, English (2016) points to the connection between imagination and empathy, illustrating that 'empathetic projection' enables us to achieve a view of the world as others see it. Drawing on Dewey's discussions of imagination she explains that imagination enables us to extend our thinking to consider beyond our immediate experiences to 'dwell in these spaces of uncertainty as spaces of learning' (English, 2016: 1054). Dwelling in these spaces, she argues, enables the reader to become aware of their 'blind spot' which, when identified, creates an awareness of things beyond everyday experience (English, 2016). Like Nussbaum (1997), who highlighted the narrative arts as having force in opening the mind through imagination, English notes how autobiographical literature has the capacity to create 'third voice'; a voice not otherwise present in the classroom. The third voice, she states, allows us to imaginatively extend our experiences of the present world into a world that is 'hidden from view'. In English's experience of teaching in the classroom, the inclusion of the third voice through literature enabled students to consider the lived experiences of authors, which then extended to the development of empathetic interest in the social and cultural differences between student peers. Unlike English (2016) who identified her students coming to discuss the ways in which they were culturally similar and different from one another (as well as the differences between them and the authors whose work they were reading), the students in the case study presented in this chapter were broadly socially and culturally homogenous and thus were primarily focused on collectively delving into the hidden world of 'the other'. This was achieved through engagement in seminar activities designed to develop empathy by presenting students with scenarios familiar to them personally, but that drew on core experiential themes to connect them to the people they were endeavouring to understand; people in prison. In this case, students' 'blind spots' were identified through engagement with materials that revealed prisoner voice, such as prisoner authored poetry presented at the end of each lecture and pieces written and published by serving prisoners which were read by students during their independent study time.

Although the development of empathy for 'the other' is an inherently positive undertaking, Shuman (2005) proposes that empathy rarely changes the circumstances of those who suffer and is more often for those in the privileged position of empathizer rather than empathized. This criticism is supported by Leake (2016) who proposes that this form of empathy resembles pity and can serve the interests of the empathizer by confirming his or her desire to be considered a compassionate individual without changing the circumstances of the person empathized with. Furthermore, Batson et al (2012) suggest in their proposition of an empathy-attitude-action model that increased positive attitudes towards 'the other' should provide the basis for increased motivation to help.

While the empathy developed in this chapter's case study does not present an immediate opportunity for students to help those experiencing the challenges and difficulties of imprisonment, for some students the development of empathy during study has a direct, evidencable impact on their desire to participate in action to support 'the other' through their graduate employability pursuits. Some former students who have established careers working directly with people in prison have since returned to talk to current students about how they have been able to apply their critical understanding of key topic areas in their working lives, with reference being made directly to the importance of developing an empathetic viewpoint as a transferable skill.

As will be discussed in the next section of this chapter, over-exposure to the challenging realities of prison life through fictional and non-fictional media representations can serve to desensitise students through the normalisation of such ordinarily distressing images. This desensitisation can result in emotional distancing akin to the compassion fatigue for the suffering of the marginalised described by Seu (2003). In the criminological discipline, which strives to capture the foundational causes of criminality through an appreciation of the impact of social inequality and social injustice, understanding those in the prison setting requires engagement with the challenges of understanding the marginalised and criminalised 'other'. As such, part of the aim of engaging students in developing an understanding of those who are subject to sentences imposed by the criminal justice system, is to create 'resensitisation' through the development of a balanced empathetic viewpoint.

The challenge of achieving empathy when teaching penology

To focus the content of this chapter towards a specific example in practice, the challenges of balancing sympathy and empathy will be considered in the context of teaching penology, the study of punishment and prisons in theory and practice. Prisons are amongst the most secure institutions in society with the primary insights that students gain into their inner workings, prior to study, often being based on carefully edited media representations driven by newsworthy-driven agendas. The public often commute between factual news and entertainment programming (Mason, 2003), creating piecemeal stereotypical perceptions of the reality of criminal justice institutions and those who live and work within them. Jewkes (2015) argues that of the twelve news structures and values that shape crime news media, five apply to the prison in terms of what makes it such a newsworthy topic, one that is especially appealing to audiences. Presentations such as risk, conservative ideology, graphic imagery, violence, and high-status persons (ibid.) make fictional and non-fictional observations of prisons very attractive to audiences. With the emergence of the Netflix phenomenon, viewers are now spoilt for choice in the variety of films, documentaries, and series that they can watch about prisons. This has meant that the development of such perceptions can be problematic, especially given that the reality of prison life can be heavily dominated by overbearing routine and boredom. While documentaries may resonate with some of the ethnographic work of researchers, they still often take a particular angle (Jewkes, 2015). As audience members prior to studying prisons, students' preconceptions of what we might study concerning these institutions may be located in the extremes of the easy-going holiday camp or the dangerous and violent environment (Coyle, 2005).

In contrast to the 'lawless jungle' (Crewe, 2007) often portrayed in prison films, academic literature offers a range of lenses through which to view and understand prison life. This can be seen in recent publications that divert away from a fixation on dominant forms of masculinity which offers a limited picture of the identities presented in the prison setting (see Laws and Lieber, 2020; Maguire, 2019). Exploring their understanding of expressions of care among male prisoners, Laws and Lieber (2020) highlight that prisoners do not live in a continuous state of fear and that there is a need to acknowledge the many understated prisoner characteristics including empathy, positive interactions, kindness, and friendship. It is important to introduce students to such characteristics, to broaden their knowledge on the relevance of them in their role as learners. This, in part, challenges the predominantly aggressive masculine 'argot roles' that Sykes (1958) depicted in his classic work, *The Society of Captives*; work which has endured in the study of prisons. In doing this, students can explore the 'classic' prison sociology literature alongside the contemporary and engage with opportunities to develop their criticality. As per the previously cited academic literature, acts of kindness in prison have demonstrated that prisoners are able to have supportive relationships with one another, as shown in practice through peer support schemes. The Listener Scheme is a peer support service, delivered by

the Samaritans, which aims to reduce suicide and self-harm in prisons (Samaritans, 2020). Operating in almost all prisons in England, Scotland and Wales, volunteers for the Samaritans select, train and support prisoners to become Listeners who provide confidential emotional support to their peers who are struggling to cope (ibid.). The Samaritans website offers content, which can be useful to educators, including information, videos, and testimonials. This can be used to provide students with materials that enable them to link findings from academic literature to real life initiatives. Further information signposting to evidence of the effectiveness of peer support for prisoners has been provided online by Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (see GOV.UK, 2020). As well as providing access to summaries concerning evidence of effectiveness and evidence-informed effective practice, this website presents sources for further reading including *Life in Prison: Peer Support* (HM Inspectorate of Prisons, 2016) and *A systematic review of the effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of peer education and peer support in prisons* (Bagnall et al., 2015).

To broaden understanding of life behind prison walls, several academics have reflected on their own experiences of conducting research in prisons in their published work (see Crewe, 2014; Jewkes, 2012; Liebling, 1999; Sloan and Wright, 2015). Within such publications, writers have offered reflections on distinct themes concerning research processes and experiences. Liebling (1999) considered the 'dangers and rewards' of doing prison research and the reality of the subjective feelings that researchers experience in the prison space. Further acknowledging the emotional trials that can be involved in research in this environment, Jewkes (2011) presented the 'autoethnographic dimensions' of qualitative enquiry shedding light on the emotional investment involved in studying stigmatised "others" pulling together the work of other ethnographers while also recounting a personal research encounter of her own. More recently, Sloan and Wright's (2015) reflected upon the experiences of 'going in green' as a new researcher and the challenges that are negotiated by those who are new to the prison in a research capacity. By engaging with such varied reflective accounts, students have an opportunity to consider that emotion has a role to play, not just in prison research experiences, but also in studying prisons more broadly. This raises key points for debate for teaching and learning about striking an important balance between sympathy and empathy in order to reveal a much deeper level of understanding about prisons and those who live and work inside them.

Deconstructing empathy and sympathy

Critical thinking in learning involves encouraging students to identify and question their own assumptions and engage in developing their worldviews (Howes, 2017). When supporting students with developing their critical thinking, it is important to create a balance to avoid understanding spilling into sympathies as this may cloud interpretations of wider contexts. Such observations have been significant for students studying prisons and penology, in order to facilitate their critical thinking and creativity when developing balanced arguments in assessed work. It is also integral in the process of redressing the balance with students' explorations of victimised actor models that provide alternative views to rational actor theories of crime and deviance (see Burke, 2019). With this in mind, it is crucial for students to be able to recognise the distinctions between sympathy and empathy and apply them when working to develop an understanding of some of the emotive issues raised within this topic area.

With reference to media representations that may shape assumptions that some students have when joining university (see Bennett, 2006), it is important to understand the role of tabloid media. The framing presents the topic of prisons and prisoners often with a distinctly unsympathetic viewpoint. Therefore, presenting students with academic research can starkly challenge such representations, and deconstruct images providing students with what may be interpreted as an overly liberal 'reality

check'. While it is imperative that students are informed, through academic research, of the realities of prison life and the differences among popular media representations, we must not lose sight of the quest for in-depth understanding of the topic which requires some balancing of the books (see Mackey and Courtright, 2000).

Introducing students to academic literature concerning prisons arguably raises a number of key issues. Students have often expressed that they are particularly interested in understanding the challenging nature of prison life, and the impact that prison experiences can have on the mental wellbeing of prisoners. However, in creating the necessary balance, careful thought needs to be given in teaching and learning to how we interpret this knowledge, whilst also understanding the role prisons have in keeping the public safe from people who have a proven capacity to cause harm to others. Through such considerations in teaching, we can begin to unpack our own engagement with the subject matter and contemplate where we can draw the emotional line. For this reason, it is worthwhile to make a distinction between *empathy* and *sympathy*, and this is something that is a useful exercise when having discussions with students (as will be noted at the end of this chapter).

While they may have similar connotations, and in some cases be used interchangeably (albeit incorrectly), the distinct nuances in the meanings of *empathy* and *sympathy* need to be recognised and this is something that should be noted when teaching about prisons and people inside them. When teaching students about imprisonment, and engaging them with academic literature, which can very often place a distinct focus on the negative elements of the prison environment and experience, the aim is to develop detailed critical understanding. At the same time, this also requires a consciousness that comes from engagement in the debates, that being given a prison sentence is a signifier of a serious offence which has caused victimisation in some form.

At its core, sympathy involves a process of sharing the feelings or emotions of another individual. For example, we may experience pain ourselves when learning about the emotional pain of others. If a friend or family member experiences grief through the loss of a loved one, we too may feel a sense of grief through the knowledge that a person we care about is in distress. Empathy however is about understanding and requires us to imagine how another person may be feeling by figuratively putting ourselves in their shoes, while maintaining emotional distance. The distinction between sympathy and empathy was captured by Aring (1958) who proposed:

The act or capacity of entering into or sharing the feelings of another is known as sympathy. Empathy, on the other hand, not only is an identification of sorts but also connotes an awareness of one's separateness from the observed. One of the most difficult tasks put upon a man is reflective commitment to another's problem while maintaining his own identity.

Furthermore, Davis (1983) measured empathy as sensitivity to others, social functioning, emotionality and self-esteem, and intelligence.

When exploring prisoner narratives, we often encounter experiences of victimisation, exclusion and stigmatisation grounding such stories in personal trauma. At the same time, we also see accounts of imprisoned people who have had supportive upbringings and positive experiences in earlier life. The varied nature of prisoners' backgrounds presents a realistic and well-rounded understanding of the population, which importantly highlights that they are not a homogenous group. However, as previously discussed, the negative often outweighs the positive when it comes to learning more about the lives that people have led before imprisonment. Such realisations can invoke sympathetic responses, which are natural when taking into account some prisoners' particularly traumatic

narratives. While it is important for students to maintain an objective viewpoint, where possible, it is also natural and appropriate for emotional responses to be realised when confronted with traumatic human experience.

At this point we are presented with an opportunity to engage students with the 'whose side' debate (see Becker, 1967; Gouldner, 1962; Liebling, 2001,) in which the existence of a value free approach to the social sciences has been contested. Through discussions concerning this debate (see Nichols, 2021), conclusions can be drawn which align with Liebling's work, that we can engage emotionally with such subject matter as a natural human response, and then step back to consider how we translate this into a balanced academic account. In the same way that prison researchers can reflectively neutralise their side being swayed during the research process, students can take a similar reflective approach by ensuring that their reading of the academic literature is sufficiently broad so as not to overly rely on single or small numbers of accounts, thus enabling them to see, and academically discuss, the wider context.

It is important for students to develop the ability to examine prisoner narratives in academic literature from a place of empathy. Putting themselves in the position of another person, whose personal circumstances are markedly different from their own, enhances their opportunity to develop intellectual ability which is 'logically related to emotional intelligence' (Busu et al., 2020: 889). This situates students in a position to further enhance their ability to 'become reflective on their actions or thinking towards others' (Busu et al., 2020: 891) and form balanced arguments that do not slip unnecessarily into sympathetic tone. Such sympathetic views could result in students producing assessed work which can be criticised for being opinionated. As noted however, sympathy itself is not problematic in academic study or research, especially when learning about people who have victimised others and in many cases been victims themselves. Instead, recognising sympathetic responses should be viewed by students as a trigger for them to question their response to make sense of it through the wider exploration of and reflection on the academic materials available to them. The next section of this chapter will consider a module case study, identifying a sample of learning resources that triggered such responses, and how a student (Humphrey) was able to draw on their skills to reflect and make sense of them as a learner.

Achieving empathy

To provide an example of how students engage with learning materials that have the potential to invoke emotive responses, this part of the chapter refers to learning resources embedded in a third year optional Criminology module delivered at the University of Lincoln; *Psychology in Prisons*. This module examines the psychological and physiological effects of imprisonment on people in prisons. By examining the pains of imprisonment (Sykes, 1958) through both classic literature and more contemporary adaptations and interpretations (Crewe, 2011; Crewe, Hulley and Wright, 2017), students explore the intricacies and complexities of prison life. The module provides an opportunity for students to develop their understanding about different populations in prisons including men, women, young people, older people, people from black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds, and prison staff. Each academic year, the module content relating to populations in prison is informed by students from the previous cohort.

The case study presented in this part of the chapter draws on a reflective approach examining module materials including written and visual sources. Utilising the Gibbs' (1988) model of reflection, Humphrey will examine a letter written by an inmate discussing the impact of positivity upon prisoners' mental health, an excerpt of a BBC Panorama documentary exploring daily life within a

British prison and finally a report from the Prison Reform Trust exploring issues concerning older people within the prison environment. Aspects of this student-led reflection will be described using the first person to effectively evaluate the balance between sympathy and empathy when discussing module materials from a student's perspective.

Throughout this module, letters written to Inside Time (the national newspaper for prisoners and detainees) were explored. When studying the pains of imprisonment, as discussed by Sykes (1958), the letter 'Small things – Star letter of the month' (A, 2020) was used as a topic of discussion within the seminar for that week. This letter, written from an inmate's perspective, explores sensitive topics surrounding the impact of prison life and staff interaction upon prisoner mental health. Throughout this emotive letter it describes the impact that an officer had on the inmate through positive interactions. Through such interaction, the inmate described that they felt like a human being and like they mattered. This description of prison life allowed an insight into the daily routine and showed that when officers in a position of authority treat inmates with respect, this can positively impact behaviour. Through the way that the surroundings of the prison itself was described in this letter, and seeing this through an inmate's perspective, as opposed to that of an academic, this changed the emotive response to such a piece. Discussions within the inmate's letter, around feeling like they were being treated like an animal and the impact of an officer with a positive attitude, created a sympathetic response to the situation they described.

This perspective made me question the overly punitive perspective of punishment, as often seen within the media and public perception, as previously explored in this chapter. This is due to the influence of media perceptions of inmates which are built on news values such as violence, where prisoner mental health is often overlooked (Jewkes, 2015). However, I found seminar discussions allowed me to question the sympathy I felt through conversation and the application of theory, such as the rational actor model and concepts surrounding social control. This experience was positive overall as it opened seminar discussions which expanded my knowledge in critical thinking whilst exploring sources, and how to use this when experiencing feelings of sympathy as opposed to empathy towards such scenarios.

Material surrounding older prisoners, aged 50 or over, was also found to be similarly emotive within my experience. Seminar materials surrounding the growing number of older inmates included a report published by the Prison Reform Trust titled 'Good practice with older people in prison – the views of prison staff' (Cooney and Braggins, 2010). This report was written using surveys of prison staff and raised questions about whether older inmates' care is adequate within prison institutions. The report aimed to evaluate and improve care provision. Despite this report now being relatively dated, it raised discussions around the ethical implications of prisoners ending their life in prison, and the 'double burden' that the care of older prisoners causes which can be seen within modern day institutions (Turner et al., 2018). I found that critically exploring the 'double burden' of older prisoners specifically caused emotional responses, which I will be focussing on. Within the report it noted that older prisoners are less likely to receive visits from friends and family, which can leave them isolated. Societal projections of older people being more likely to be vulnerable created feelings of concern for such inmates, moving towards initial feelings of sympathy. I found feelings linked to this demographic often caused me to think of older people within my life, and how I would personally feel if they were to end their life in such a setting. However, I found myself often forgetting the crimes that inmates may have committed. Considering that from previous learning I was aware that high amounts of older inmates are in prison due to sexual related offenses, such emotions it brought up originally came as a shock.

I found throughout this module, discussions surrounding older prisoners to be the most dividing when discussing with my peers, and the most challenging when keeping emotional distance. Often

arguments holding sympathetic undertones of the 'double burden' were met with statistics that showed a significant number of older inmates are in prison due to sexual offences (Turner et al., 2018). This contrast pushes individuals to critically evaluate arguments both for and against older inmates being in prison, and previous knowledge of theory allowed me to evaluate the emotions that these discussions created. This was further explored through reading the journal 'Ageing and dying in the contemporary neoliberal prison: Exploring the double burden for older prisoners', written by Turner et al (2015). Through seminar discussions specifically, and the application of such theory, it meant that I was able to critically evaluate such questions, which was helpful when keeping empathy separate from feelings of sympathy. Evaluating and reflecting on the feelings that such sources created, I am now able to effectively balance understanding and emotional distance towards discussions concerning older people in prison.

When discussing researching prisons within the first weeks of the module, a source which I found to be particularly emotive was an excerpt of a Panorama documentary by the BBC titled 'Behind Bars: Prison Undercover' (Behind Bars: Prison Undercover, 2017). This showed an undercover reporter working as a prison officer within a prison in England, showing body camera footage of what was experienced whilst they were there. This documentary highlighted many poignant themes, including how prison officers felt overwhelmed within their role, understaffing and the effects of this on education and work, as well as the impact of privatisation of prison services. However, throughout the video, the overwhelming themes of mental health and intoxication of inmates, through both alcohol and drug use, made this source stand out. It showed inmates experiencing mental health crises, with one inmate extremely distressed under the influence of the psychoactive drug, spice, banging at the door to be let out. These images created the most significant emotional response whilst I was viewing this. Unlike some of the literature, it showed the true extent of the issues with illicit substances and mental health within the prison environment, which caused a natural sympathetic response. Furthermore, seeing the effects of this on the prison officers, specifically where a prison officer became unwell after inhaling a large amount of spice, showed the extent of the issue within modern day prisons.

Through evaluating such feelings towards this source, I noted themes surrounding mental health within the prison environment cause emotive and often sympathetic emotional responses towards these inmates. I found whilst watching this video that being unaware of the crimes that were committed further caused a disconnect with the audience from the reasoning why they were incarcerated. Whilst watching them in distress, it altered the balance between sympathy and empathy whilst discussing this topic. Also, watching and hearing what the prisoners were doing and how they were feeling, unlike when reading letters or academic material, brought to the foreground the 'realness' of the situation by putting previous reading into perspective. Seminar discussions following viewing this source showed that I was not alone in these emotions, as many other students also found that visual stimulus was particularly difficult to watch when keeping an empathetic stance, especially when in relation to mental health. Such emotions felt by the group were evaluated through discussions of available support and schemes currently running within the prison system, which within the source, were not highlighted when faced with the intense emotion shown by inmates. Examples of such support, as explored previously, removed initial fears of inmates feeling entirely isolated and alone, which shifted feelings of sympathy to that of empathy. Reflecting on this source specifically, I found this topic to cause both the largest and the most conflicting emotional response. I believe this to be due to popular media perceptions of inmates that often filters into our way of thinking as perpetuated by selected news values, as discussed by Jewkes (2015).

These experiences, as noted above, all aided my critical thinking when evaluating and reflecting upon situations where balancing sympathy and empathy was particularly difficult. Prior to studying such modules, my emotional response to such topics within the prison system were heavily linked to that

which was portrayed within the media. However, through examining such sources and exploring emotions of both sympathy and empathy have been useful in building a critical standpoint and emotional resilience, which I feel has positively impacted me academically. Through exploring these sources and reflecting on the feelings associated with exploring them, I have found that those who are seen to be vulnerable within society, such as older inmates or those experiencing a mental health crisis, created the most significant emotional response when completing this module. This is further exacerbated when seen visually, audibly and through prisoner voice. Through discussions with others in seminar spaces, I noted that topics which were easily related to, such as mental health and older people, created a larger divide in opinion within discussions, which I now recognise had undertones of sympathetic and empathetic emotions. Through this reflection, when experiencing such emotional triggers towards materials, I feel I am now more aware of being critical of sympathetic feelings and would be confident in critically evaluating this in future.

Conclusion

It was noted at the beginning of this chapter that student attitudes towards people convicted of criminal offences can be polarised, with both punitive and sympathetic attitudes occupying the two extremes of the spectrum. In making a case for the value of establishing an empathetic stance, thus moving away from the potential skew of sympathy, this chapter has drawn upon the student voice to present a case study, from Humphrey's perspective, giving insight into students' approaches to the mechanics of achieving a more balanced view. While this kind of reflective thinking was not captured in students' assessed work, the lack of attaching such activity to credit-bearing work can be beneficial in focusing it in seminar activities which give students the freedom of engaging in reflective processes as a formative basis for the development of critical thinking. Students were given further opportunity to engage in reflective thinking through weekly directed activities which combined 'read, listen, and watch' approaches to learning materials. This gave students choice in the types of materials they wanted to engage with on a weekly basis diversifying their independent learning experiences within the module. By understanding the processes involved in developing an empathetic rather than sympathetic viewpoint, conclusions can be drawn about the broader value of reflective practice in criminological learning. There may, for example, be positive implications here for student engagement whereby students' psychological investment in their learning (see Lawson and Lawson, 2013) broadens engagement to also involve feelings and sense making, as well as participation in educational activities (Harper and Quaye, 2009). The development of such skills can contribute to students' development both academically and personally, enabling them to consider their own position in their interaction with the world around them and the people they may encounter in their personal and professional lives in the future.

Encouraging the sympathy/empathy debate in criminological teaching and learning practice can enhance students' ability to think critically and creatively, enabling them to unlock their intellectual potential in ways they may not have done previously. As noted earlier in the chapter, researchers are doing this in the field by openly discussing their emotions when reflecting on research processes. This should encourage the same practice to be continued in the classroom setting. Beyond the case study included in this chapter, student outcomes on the module in question have frequently seen the achievement of higher grades in comparison to their previous results and this, in part, could be attributed to the way they are encouraged to scrutinise their own thinking as well as the arguments presented to them in academic literature, which results in criticality and creativity in their assessed work.

To conclude, in studying the emotive criminological discipline, students will encounter numerous instances whereby they are faced with the sympathy/empathy challenge. In identifying this, educators should harness this opportunity to openly discuss this with students in a transparent and supportive way to facilitate the enhancement of their creative thought.

Tips for teaching about prisons

1. Be open with students by discussing your own personal challenges when balancing empathy and sympathy.
2. Openly discuss and deconstruct with students the sympathy/empathy balance as a core part of the wider teaching delivery process.
3. Encourage students to utilise models of reflection. This will enable them to consider how they are processing and critically analysing learning materials.
4. Identify opportunities to bring lived-experience voice into teaching and learning through materials such as letters, blogs and podcasts.
5. Encourage students to confidently acknowledge discomfort when their emotions are challenged during learning.

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