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DOI:

[10.1080/0966369X.2012.759906](https://doi.org/10.1080/0966369X.2012.759906)

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*Document Version*

Early version, also known as pre-print

*Citation for published version (Harvard):*

Moran, D 2014, 'Leaving behind the 'total institution'? Teeth, transcarceral spaces and (re)inscription of the formerly incarcerated body', *Gender Place and Culture A Journal of Feminist Geography*, vol. 21, no. 1, pp. 35-51. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0966369X.2012.759906>

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Checked July 2015

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## **Leaving behind the ‘Total Institution’? Teeth, TransCarceral Spaces and (Re)Inscription of the Formerly Incarcerated Body**

**Dominique Moran**

This paper contests Goffmann’s (1961) interpretation of the prison as a ‘total institution’, echoing critiques which draw attention to its spatial porosity and permeability, and drawing attention to the experience of incarceration and reintegration as inherently embodied. It suggests that ‘transcarceral’ spaces, in which released prisoners experience processes of re-confinement, extend the reach of the prison beyond its apparent physical boundaries. Drawing on scholarship within feminist geography which demonstrates the ways in which embodied subjectivities and identities are bound up with assumptions about gender and class, and are place-contingent, it conceptualises the lived experience of incarceration as inherently embodied, and argues that these transcarceral spaces exist not just as physical locales, but also through the ‘inscription’ of incarceration upon the body. Inscriptions of incarceration thus become corporeal markers of imprisonment, blurring the boundary between ‘outside’ and ‘inside’ the prison and extending carceral control through the stigmatisation of previously imprisoned individuals. In this context, it presents empirical data generated through qualitative research with formerly incarcerated women in the Russian Federation, describing how incarceration is inscribed on their bodies through changes to dentition, in a way which encourages stigmatisation, and which intersects with multiple facets of discrimination to create damaging and limiting power relations, extending the experience of incarceration into ‘free’ life’ by restricting mainstream social interaction and the likelihood of successful reintegration post-release.

**Keywords:** Embodied; corporeal; carceral geography; stigma; prisoner; reintegration; Russia

Prisoners do not, and perhaps should not, leave prison exactly as they went in.

Depending on the prevailing carceral culture, they will have been punished and rehabilitated to varying degrees and perhaps in unequal measure. In posing a question about ‘leaving behind the total institution’, the title of this paper juxtaposes a critique of the ‘total institution’ as espoused by Goffman (1961), as a useful means of understanding imprisonment, with a query about whether those previously imprisoned can ever really leave behind their own experience of incarceration. The paper itself weaves together critiques of the ‘total institution’ with ideas about carceral spaces which are argued to exist beyond the prison walls, and the conceptualisation of the experience of incarceration as inherently corporeal, in the context of

a particular grounded experience of the stigmatisation of formerly incarcerated women during their reintegration post-release.

The paper contributes significantly to scholarship within feminist geography by bringing to light 'the embodied, everyday, informal practices that make manifest the 'place' of traditionally disempowered people' (Dixon and Marston 2011, 445) in this case women prisoners. It does so by bringing feminist theorisations of embodiment into dialogue with the new and vibrant sub-discipline of 'carceral geography' (Moran et al 2012); a rich vein of work emerging around the nature of carceral spaces and experiences inside of them, which stresses the importance of prisoner agency (Dirsuweit 1999, van Hoven & Sibley 2008, Sibley & van Hoven 2008, 205). It extends this discourse of prisoner agency by shifting the focus away from incarceration itself, and by considering instead the gendered experience of incarceration outside the prison; in so doing calling into question the binary distinction between inside and outside.

The paper opens by considering Erving Goffman's (1961) theorisation of the 'total institution', summarising the critiques of this conceptualisation of the prison, in particular the work of Farrington (1992) which covers both the practical and the ideological mismatches between this theory and actually-existing prisons, and of Baer and Ravneberg (2008) who draw attention to the spatial indistinction between the 'inside' and 'outside' of prisons as commonly understood. The paper extends this critique, drawing on the work of Allspach (2010) to consider the broader reach of the prison beyond its assumed boundaries. Next, informed by a feminist conceptualisation of the experience of imprisonment as inherently embodied, in that the body, always in the process of becoming through the experiences of embodiment, is corporeally inscribed by imprisonment, the paper argues that post-release 're-confinement' is similarly embodied, in this case through changes to dentition. The corporeal inscriptions acquired during incarceration act to construct bodily subjectivities which intersect with other embodied characteristics, in particular social class, to stigmatise and disadvantage released prisoners. Having discussed research context and

methodology, the empirical evidence on which the paper is based is presented, structured around the stigmatisation of former prisoners as described by women recently released from prison in Russia, most notably a discussion of poor dental health as a 'marker' of incarceration which reduces the likelihood of successful reintegration.

### **Critiques of the 'total institution'**

Goffman (1961) defined the 'total institution' as

...a place of residence and work where a large number of like-situated individuals, cut off from the wider society for an appreciable length of time, together lead an enclosed, formally administered round of life (Goffman 1961, 11).

Applied to an extraordinarily diverse range of circumstances and contexts, such as homes for the elderly (Mali 2008), psychiatric units (Skorpen et al 2008), the home (Noga 1991), the mass media (Altheide 1991), the military and the police (Rosenbloom 2011), and sport (Cavalier 2011), its appropriateness as a means of understanding the 'prison' has been widely critiqued; there are disjunctures between the theory and the actuality of imprisonment. Farrington (1992, 6), argues that the 'total institution' thesis is 'in fact, fairly inaccurate as a portrayal of the structure and functioning of the... correctional institution' in that the modern prison 'is not as completely or effectively "cut off from wider society" as Goffman's description might lead us to believe'.

The core of Farrington's (1992) argument is that prison institutions have a relatively stable and ongoing network of transactions, exchanges and relationships which connect and bind them to their immediate host community and to society more generally (ibid 7). Although at the time of writing relatively little research had explored these connections, such as the relationships between prisons and their host communities, the process of prison siting, and the relationships between criminal offenders and the society from which they have come, in the intervening years these topics have come more clearly into view, particularly in the recent development of 'carceral geography' (Moran et al 2012; see also Che 2005, Glasmeier and Farrigan 2007, Engel 2007, Bonds 2006 & 2009, Moran et al 2011). In response to what Wacquant (2011, 3) has described as 'a brutal swing from

the social to the penal management of poverty' particularly in the United States, with a 'punitive revamping' of public policy tackling urban marginality through punitive containment, and establishing a 'single carceral continuum' between the ghetto and the prison (Wacquant 2000, 384), the relationship between prisoners and wider society has been a particular focus of study (e.g. Peck 2003, Peck & Theodore 2009).

Farrington (1992, 7) essentially argues that Goffman's notion of the prison as a 'total institution' might be rejected in favour of a theoretical conception of 'a "not-so-total" institution, enclosed within an identifiable-yet-permeable membrane of structures, mechanisms and policies, all of which maintain, at most, a selective and imperfect degree of separation between what exists inside of and what lies beyond prison walls.' Subsequent studies support this interpretation, with, for example, Baumer et al (2009) describing prisons becoming 'porous' through the practice of prisoner home visits, and Hartman (2000) discussing the restriction of prisoner access to the internet in the language of 'walls and firewalls'. Although Farrington (1992) identifies 'points of interpenetration' through which the prison and wider society intrude into and intersect with one another, his critique stops short of that of Baer & Ravneberg (2008) who problematise the conceptualisation of a binary distinction between 'inside' and 'outside'. Instead they view prisons as 'heterotopic spaces outside of and different from other spaces, but still inside the general social order' (Baer & Ravneberg 2008, 214). They stress that further understandings of the nature of the prison should incorporate the experience of prisoners, whose perceptions of the 'inside/outside distinctions and indistinctions [may] take on different complexities and subtleties'. An example of this kind of work is Allspach's study (2010), in which by exploring the experiences of women released from federal prisons in Canada, she demonstrates that liberal 'welfarist' ideals embedded in neo-liberal reforms facilitate a network of social control of these women, forming carceral spaces beyond prison walls which perpetuate and exacerbate their marginality after release from prison. These 'socio-economic spatial re-confinements' (Allspach 2010, 720), saw women negotiating halfway-houses in deprived neighbourhoods, surveilled by closed-circuit television, and micro-managed by parole officers and

halfway-house staff; experiences reminiscent of the surveilled institution of the prison, which both reduced their agency and independence, and restricted their social contacts.

Seeing this work through the lens of critiques of the 'total institution', the prison wall is permeable not only in that it permits the interpenetration of material things (people, supplies) and intangible things (ideas, the internet, emotional attachments), but that the 'carceral' itself is not restricted to the space contained by the permeable wall of the prison; it is transported outside of the prison through the continued control of released prisoners across space, to take form elsewhere, for example in the 'transcarceral' spaces described by Allspach (2010).

In response to this dialogue, I argue here that transcarceral spaces exist alongside and perhaps also in combination with, an embodied sense of the 'carceral' which is similarly mobile beyond the prison wall through the corporeality of released prisoners. Drawing on feminist scholarship to conceptualise the lived experience of incarceration as inherently embodied, I argue that inscriptions of incarceration thus become corporeal markers of imprisonment, blurring the boundary between 'outside' and 'inside' the prison and extending carceral control through stigmatisation. The insights derived from an embodied perspective on experiences 'inside' prison offer much for understandings of gendered experiences 'outside', and indeed for the question of whether the experience of individuals released from incarceration can be characterised in terms of this binary distinction. Specifically, considering the continued 'control' of women released from prison, a feminist perspective of embodiment opens a space for discussion of how that control is felt personally, its manifestations, and the ways in which those affected internalise or contest the extended reach of the carceral into their lives on the 'outside'.

### **The embodied experience of imprisonment**

Feminist geography recognises both the mutually constitutive relationship between bodies and spaces, and a variety of bodily subjectivities (Longhurst 2005). Bodies are understood as sites of

'textual inscription' (Johnson 2008, 563) which shapes identities and social relations as well as the conceptual and actual spaces in which bodies move. In this paper I draw upon three interlinked areas of feminist scholarship; first, I consider the ways in which bodies, discourses, forces and spaces jointly shape subjectivity and action, and how these are resisted, in relation to incarceration. While bodies and spaces are understood to shape each other, McDowell (1999, 61) notes that bodies may not necessarily 'fit' the idealised representations for certain 'spaces'; considered ill, ugly, wrong or deviant in a variety of ways. A second concern is therefore the inscription of incarceration in terms of the stereotypical construction of bodies which do not 'fit'. And finally, an engagement with intersectionality; thinking critically about the embodied experience of incarceration in relation to other (embodied) social relations, such as class, which work to marginalise and exclude (Rose 2007).

Focussing on the ageing female body in prison, Wahidin (2002, 178) showed how discourses act upon and inscribe the body, held in a carceral prism in which power relations surveil those under the prison 'gaze'. She demonstrated how time marks the body, and how the corporeality of time in prison 'transcends the dualisms between subject/object and mind/body' (ibid). Informed by a conceptualisation of the project of the self as always unfinished, Wahidin (2002) sees the body as an intersectional project central to a sense of self-identity, 'inscribed by variables such as gender, age, sexual orientation and ethnicity, and by a series of inscriptions which are dependent on types of spaces and places' (ibid 180). Prison time is inscribed upon the body not as a passive materiality that simply awaits inscription, but rather through its negotiation of the 'capillaries of power, enabling the body to be always in the process of becoming through the experiences of embodiment' (Wahidin 2002, 181).

In this way, the material body can be understood as a medium through which power operates and functions; interwoven with and constitutive of systems of meaning, signification and representation (Wahidin 2002, 192). Discussing the embodied experience of prison, Wahidin and

Tate (2005) present compelling evidence that incarceration is felt corporeally by elder women prisoners. For example:

Inside I don't feel old. But my body feels old. Health-wise – I have no energy and my bones ache all the time. When I was at home on a morning I'd be as bright as a button. Looking forward to the day. But here, it's such an effort. You seem to be dragging your body around all the time. You are conscious of your body. You know, it feels heavy all the time. Your heart is heavy all the time. Your feelings are all heavy – there is no lightheartedness (in Wahidin and Tate, 2005, 70).

Although this paper draws on the theoretical conceptualisations put forward by Wahidin (2002), and the critiques of Goffman's (1961) 'total institution', it pertains to a different geographical context to these bodies of scholarship, which emerge predominantly from the US and the UK. This different geographical context – the contemporary Russian Federation, merits a brief discussion. The following section of the paper therefore provides a brief overview of women's imprisonment in Russia, and of the research undertaken for this paper.

### **Research context and methodology**

As discussed elsewhere, 'Prisons are not simply institutions which (cor)respond to crime; rather, they are reflective of and mediate social, political, and cultural values, both at the level of the carceral state, and the individual prison' (Moran et al 2009, 701). Penal systems develop in context, and there are striking differences in penal interventions between countries with different historical and cultural traditions (Tonry 2001); Melossi (2001, 407) notes that '(p)unishment is deeply embedded in the national/cultural specificity of the environment which produces it'. With this in mind, and before presentation of empirical material, some discussion of the Russian penal context of this research is required.

In Russia, the legacy of the Stalinist Gulag and later Soviet imprisonment practices has generated a particular penal geography (Moran 2004; Pallot et al 2010; Moran et al 2009 & 2011; Pallot & Piacentini with Moran, forthcoming). Although the contemporary penal system is fundamentally different from its Soviet predecessor, amongst the continuities with the Soviet period



are high imprisonment rates, and the fact that prisoners, and particularly women, are still sent to geographically peripheral locations to serve their sentences. The barbaric conditions reported in the 1990s have triggered comprehensive reform, much of which is still incomplete, although reflected in the Russian Penal Code. However, Russian prisons are vastly under-researched, and the Russian penal authorities remain intensely secretive.

The data presented here pertain to female former prisoners in the contemporary Russian Federation. Women are a small minority of Russia's prison population. On 1 March 2011, women made up 8% (66,000) of the 814,200 people incarcerated in the Russian Federation. These women were accommodated in correctional facilities specifically for female prisoners, located in the main at distance from major population centres, meaning that most women in prison are held outside of the administrative region in which they previously lived. As I have noted elsewhere (Moran et al 2011) the spatial distribution of women prisoners in Russia bears no resemblance to the distribution of women's crime.

Data for this paper were gathered through extensive fieldwork as part of a wider project which comprised interviews with prison personnel and incarcerated women and girls, and interviews with recently released women. The project<sup>1</sup> was carried out between 2006 and 2010, when a team of UK and Russian colleagues were permitted access to women's prisons. The methodological and ethical challenges of conducting research inside of prisons are well known and have been discussed elsewhere as they pertained to this project (Moran et al 2009). However, a constant concern in the undertaking of this research was to pay close attention to women's personal experiences and to their 'everyday', encouraging them, in the interview context, to describe aspects of their experiences which might otherwise be overlooked as 'mundane'. As part of the wider project, questions related to experiences after release were explored with a group of women who had recently been released from prison, interviewed outwith the penal system, in their own homes or in public places of their

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<sup>1</sup> ESRC award RES-062-23-0026, with Judith Pallot and Laura Piacentini.

own choosing. In all, 22 formerly incarcerated women were interviewed, in January and February 2009. In terms of other aspects of identity which might contribute to the intersectionality of the experience of those previously incarcerated, the women ranged in age between 20 and 55, with the majority in their twenties and thirties. There was very little ethnic diversity amongst the respondents; of the seventeen who identified their ethnicity, 15 were ethnic Russian, one Kazakh, and one described herself as Russian-Jewish. At the time of interview, the majority had been out of prison for less than two years.

### **Prisoner Reintegration**

As released prisoners, these women were facing the challenges of 'reintegration', into society after release, trying to reconstruct their family lives, to reacquaint themselves with parents, partners and children, and critically, trying to find employment. They spoke of the challenges they faced in coping with life after release, getting used to 'normal' life and adapting to the changes which had taken place in their absence. Reintegration has been intensively studied, particularly by criminologists and prison sociologists, and while a detailed consideration of this research is beyond the scope of this paper, a brief survey of studies as they pertain to embodied experience is presented here. Researchers have in general sought to identify the critical factors contributing to successful reintegration (broadly defined as former prisoners functioning as members of mainstream society rather than reoffending and being reincarcerated). A survey of this scholarship shows that the key, interconnected, factors include; finding employment on release (and thereby overcoming the stigma attached to ex-offenders entering the labour market); maintaining good health (to contribute to a good quality of life and to enable employment); maintaining connections to family and community (for both emotional and financial support and also accommodation); obtaining secure and affordable housing (again related to employment or income); obtaining and retaining appropriate documentation, and avoiding substance abuse (Travis 2005). Broader contextual issues

include the maintenance of community supervision, partnership working between local stakeholders, and public safety (Petersilia 2001, Travis et al 2001, Travis 2005).

Despite the attention paid to prisoner reintegration, as a critical time during which, it is perceived, the right kind of assistance can prevent recidivism and improve outcomes for the previously imprisoned, very little attention has been paid to the physical manifestations of imprisonment, in terms of the embodied experiences of prison and the way in which these impact on life after release; in particular, the specific ways in which they might impact gendered bodies leaving carceral space. Studies of barriers to participation in the labour market, for example, while they highlight the problem of stigmatisation for former prisoners, (the 'prison effect'), tend to focus on the formal disclosure of a criminal past (Weiman 2007), rather than on the subjective, personal judgement of individuals based on their appearance. Former prisoners' corporeal bodies have thus far come under scrutiny only as vessels of illness or disease, when authors consider the considerable challenges faced by prisoners released in poor health and requiring expensive healthcare services for which they cannot afford to pay, or where illness renders them unable to work (Hammett et al 2001, Mallik-Kane 2005, Davis & Pacchiana 2004), rather than in a way which enables bodily subjectivities to be recognised and considered.

In her work on the reintegration of women prisoners, Zaitzow (2011, 209) points out that 'what happens inside jails and prisons does not stay inside jails and prisons'. However, while providing a grounded and nuanced overview of the particular challenges facing women on release from prison, including the stigma attached to incarceration, which, as she says, translates into an embodied notion, with women saying that 'they believe they have a tattoo on their forehead that proclaims them as "ex-con"' (ibid, 242), her work leaves unanswered questions about exactly *how* this embodied experience of imprisonment works to stigmatise women released from prison. Although there are no such tattoos, women still feel 'marked out'. Using empirical evidence

gathered during research with women released from prison in Russia, this paper goes some way towards providing an answer to these questions.

### **Transcarceral Spaces and the Inscription of Stigmatised Bodies**

Stigma is a concept whose current widespread consideration also owes a debt to the work of Goffman (1963). Varying widely in precise definition, the concept of stigma is generally understood to convey a sense of disgrace, based on an attribute which is viewed as discrediting, and which reduces the bearer from 'a whole and usual person to a tainted, discounted one' (Goffman 1963, 3). In their instructive conceptualisation of stigma, Link & Phelan (2001, 367) understand it as existing when a series of interrelated components converge. Paraphrasing their construction; first, people distinguish and label human differences (such as skin colour), and second, dominant cultural beliefs link these labelled differences to undesirable characteristics, or negative stereotypes. Third, labelled persons are, on the basis of these stereotypes, placed into categories of 'them', separate from 'us'; and fourth, 'they' experience status loss and discrimination that leads to unequal outcomes. Stigmatisation happens when 'elements of labelling, stereotyping, separation, status loss and discrimination co-occur in a power situation that allows the components of stigma to unfold' (ibid 2001, 367). This conceptualisation of stigma resonates with the bodily subjectivities discussed within feminist geography, for example by Longhurst (2005) in relation to the shame, disgust, revulsion and contempt associated with 'fat' bodies, and the attendant assumptions that 'fat' people are undisciplined, untrustworthy, and non-conforming. As she notes, a variety of bodily characteristics have often been used to indicate social and moral positions, with judgements about bodily appearance being contextual, place-based and temporally contingent on societal values.

In Russia, as elsewhere, a personal history which includes incarceration is a source of stigma, with former prisoners facing significant obstacles to assuming mainstream social roles. Incarceration is generally perceived to carry a stigma that marks the previously incarcerated as dishonest or

unreliable, often seen in labour market studies where employers express a strong preference against hiring former prisoners (Lopoo & Western 2005). Although the stigma attached to incarceration is well understood in terms of its operation and its effect, i.e. the stereotypical views which are held about former prisoners, and the separation, status loss and discrimination which they suffer as a result, much less is known about how labelling takes place; how bodily subjectivities (Longhurst 2005) take shape, and how those affixing stigma to previously imprisoned individuals *know to do so* in order for the interrelated components to converge and for stigma to unfold. This status is not tattooed on foreheads, but according to the experiences of former prisoners interviewed in Russia, something about their bodily subjectivity is apparent as a human difference which can be recognised and linked to stereotypical beliefs.

Formerly incarcerated women frequently spoke about their sense that their experience of incarceration was plainly apparent to others – that people would be able to ‘tell’, to discern from their appearance that they had been to prison. As one woman explained:

I was out [of prison] for two months before I would come out of the house. I was afraid that ‘zek’ [a Soviet era word for prisoner] was written all over my face. I was afraid of people.

Another former prisoner initially kept her history a secret from work colleagues, for fear of their reaction, disclosing it to them on the anniversary of her release. Her recollections of this event revealed their preconceptions.

When I came to work here we [the former prisoner and her work colleagues] drank tea together and got to know each other... When I got my first paycheque, I didn’t say anything to anyone, just made tea and said – ‘Girls, let’s have a cup of tea’. When everyone was sitting down and drinking tea, I said ‘You can congratulate me’, because it was October 5<sup>th</sup>. I said ‘Girls, I want to share my joy; it’s a year since I was released [from prison]’. It was such a shock for them, all sitting there!... They were all like ‘oh-oh-oh’, laughing. And they were like, ‘Tatiana, you’re lying!’ - ‘You don’t smoke, you have no tattoos and you don’t swear!’

As this extract shows, although her work colleagues were supportive when she disclosed her history to them, their reactions revealed both their negative preconceptions about former prisoners,

and the fact that they perceived prison to 'mark' women in a certain way – through their physical appearance and personal habits. In their minds, smoking, tattoos and swearing were human differences which could be clearly observed, and which indicated that a person could previously have been incarcerated. Another formerly incarcerated woman expressed this much more starkly.

They drink and smoke, they have tattoos, and they use slang. And their teeth are rotten. That's how people think women who've been in prison look.

Former prisoners perceived their dental health to be the single most noticeable physical manifestation of imprisonment – the most outwardly visible and problematic marker of their status. In the interview setting they were self-conscious about their teeth, and they continually returned to this as a theme of conversation, discussing the poor dental care they had received in prison.

#### *Dental health in prison*

At this point, and before discussing in depth the views of former prisoners, it is timely to make some brief contextual observations about dental health in prison. Recent research conducted across a variety of geographical contexts, for example in China (McGrath 2002), Australia (Osborn et al 2003), the US (Cunningham et al 1985, Salive et al 1989, Mixson et al 1990, Boyer & Nielson-Thompson 2002), Nigeria (Dhlakama et al 2006), and South Africa (Naidoo 2004) finds that prisoners' oral health is worse than that of relevant background populations. Attributing this to poor oral hygiene before imprisonment, and to poor provision or uptake of prison dental services, studies also commonly identify the unnecessary loss of teeth, reflecting a tendency for prison dental services to extract teeth rather than fill cavities. Accordingly, poor dental health amongst prisoners, often worsening as sentences progress, is recognised as contributing to poor general health and poor nutrition. If prison dental services suffer in comparison with those provided to the general population, then in Russia we might expect them to be particularly poor; as Jargin (2009, 519) has noted, some Russian dental practitioners perpetuate a Soviet-era tendency towards invasive treatments, some manipulate patients 'towards extractions and prosthetics [dentures]', and minimally invasive techniques which seek to conserve dental tissue have only recently been

introduced. Very little is known in general, however, about the oral health of prisoners exiting prison in the Russian Federation; the only indication comes from a 1991 study carried out in Magadan, in the Russian Far East, in which Hardwick et al (1993) noted the negative effect of a significant number of recently-released prisoners in their sample of the local population. Elsewhere, Williams (2007, 84) points out that in the US, missing teeth 'is becoming a telltale sign of having been incarcerated'.

### **A 'telltale sign': intersectionality and the corporeal inscription of incarceration**

Women's recollections show that Russia is no exception to the rule about poor and invasive dental treatment in prison, in that the mutually constitutive relationship (Longhurst 2005) between incarcerated bodies and carceral spaces manifests itself through a detrimental effect on dentition. Although one fortunate former prisoner reported that her prison dentist had treated both prisoners and staff alike, and had filled cavities, most women's experience was that although a dentist visited the prison once or twice a month, dental treatment was limited to extraction of teeth.

Q. Why do you lose your teeth [in prison]?

A. Why do you lose them? If you get caries [tooth decay] they pull them out, just pull them out, but they will not drill them.

Q. So there isn't any treatment?

A. No.

There were dentists, but dentists only extracted teeth.

Q. What do you mean?

A. Just that. We did not get fillings...

Q. So, if for example. ..

A. If there was toothache, then you'd go to the doctor. She would take a look and say - if you want to put up with an extraction, I'll pull it out. So she pulled it out.

The dentist just pulls teeth out. Actually they are never filled them, just pulled them out. That's all [the dental treatment] that we had.

However, in other prisons, it was possible to have cavities filled rather than teeth extracted, but only if prisoners could pay for this service, out of the meagre wages they received for prison work, or with financial support from friends and family. This differentiation of provision of care to prisoners on the basis of their ability to pay suggests an intersectionality in the corporeal inscription of incarceration. In other words, taking a perspective informed by the work of Rose (2007), it is apparent that characteristics such as social class, taking form here in terms of the availability of

financial resource to pay for non-invasive dental treatment, intersect with this inscription to render it gender-class-specific, and perhaps also gender-class-producing.

For your teeth, if you have money you can go to the 'hospital' [the prison clinic] for treatment. Otherwise they just pull out the aching tooth. They drill, they drill there. You can get the drill in the 'hospital', for money.

As a result, women unable to pay for fillings rather than suffer extractions, when released from prison found themselves re-entering society with missing teeth and poor oral health. As one woman put it,

Teeth, teeth, teeth, teeth... There was virtually no one who didn't complain about the state of their teeth. Yes, they'd fall out, yes, they crumbled away. I lost two teeth while I was inside. It was the bad environment, the lack of vitamins, well everything, generally.

For these women, prison time is clearly inscribed on their bodies through loss of teeth. They feel conspicuous and different as a result, and perceive themselves to be easily recognisable as former prisoners. Missing teeth are, to their minds, the human differences which are noticed by others, allowing them to link dominant cultural beliefs about the previously incarcerated to these labelled differences through negative stereotyping.

It is, of course, possible that a different process is in train here, that persons affixing stigma to formerly incarcerated individuals on the basis of their missing teeth do so on the basis not of dominant cultural beliefs about the formerly incarcerated *per se*, but instead in relation to stereotypes about people with poor dental health (Fisher et al 2005). It is also quite possible that the loss of teeth affects these individuals' self esteem to the extent that they affix stigma to themselves. Oral health is a good predictor of self esteem and general wellbeing, and vice versa, i.e. the better a person feels about their life in general, the more likely they are to take care of their teeth (Macgregor & Balding 1991, Benyamin et al 2004, Locker 2009). Although these women describe their loss of teeth in prison as a result of the dental care provided to them, rather than as an outcome of their own neglect of oral hygiene (which might have been related to low self-esteem), it is likely that their loss of teeth accentuates, or causes them to feel more keenly, the disadvantages



that they feel accrue to them because of their physical appearance. Whatever the precise mechanism through which this stigma operates, what is clear is that women experience shame and embarrassment about their teeth. They feel that their bodies do not 'fit' the spaces in which they find themselves (McDowell, 1999), both in a general context in which Russian women are increasingly subject to aspirational physical ideals; a 'Barbie doll image of beauty' (Kay 2000, 90), and specifically in a job market in Russia which privileges physical appearance (Moran et al 2009), particularly in the retail jobs to which many of these women aspire; a context which induces shame and guilt about the less-than-ideal body. Their comments, discussed below, describe compellingly the simultaneously very personal and overtly public nature of missing teeth as prison time inscribed on the body in a way that was very embarrassing, and very difficult to conceal. As Yakubovich (2006) has noted, in the circumstances of post-socialist transformation, Russian employers have formally and routinely indicated ascriptive characteristics such as age, gender, health and physical appearance requirements in job advertisements, in addition to the informal discrimination which pervades most labour markets (Hamermesh & Biddle 1993).

This particular corporeal inscription of incarceration, in terms of the loss of teeth, is unlikely to be either intentional on the part of the Russian prison system, which attempts to provide adequate medical and dental care to all inmates, or directed uniquely towards women. A comparison of the experiences of male and female ex-prisoners is beyond the scope of this paper, but it is likely that the apparent institutional neglect of dental care is replicated in men's prisons. While the loss of teeth is therefore unlikely to be inherently gendered, the women's testimony suggests that women's embodied experience of this inscription is distinctive, in terms of the ways in which the 'lack of fit', as theorised within feminist geography (McDowell 1999, 61), between their formerly incarcerated bodies and the circumstances in which they find themselves after release are played out; in particular the adverse effects of this inscription for their entrance into and participation in the labour market. In line with the observations made by Williams (2007) for the US, these Russian women found that deterioration in their dentition caused problems on release from prison, particularly when trying to

find work, and they articulated these concerns by contrasting their own appearance with that of younger and more physically attractive or 'appropriate' competitors in the job market.

Q. And did they not do your teeth in prison?

A. No, that's the worst thing. There, all the girls, all of them, they come out toothless – Not one will give you a job [on the outside]. Not when you open your mouth.

I had to get my teeth done. I got my front teeth done before anything else. I couldn't even open my mouth or, well, who would give me a job? It's easier for them to take a young girl who looks good in the same shop, than me with no teeth.

Here, women released from prison suggest that their having lost their teeth allows persons in a position of relative power, such as employers, to label them, to place them in a separate category from those whose bodies more closely 'fit' the demands of gatekeepers to employment, and thereby to enforce the status loss and discrimination that lead to unequal outcomes. For women leaving the prison system in Russia, such stigma is particularly significant for their prospects of finding work, and entering a job market arguably prejudiced against hiring women since the economic collapse of the early 1990s privileged men's labour, and where women's physical attractiveness is a significant factor in their likelihood of being hired (Moran et al 2009). Women feel this stigma as the visible effect of prison time, marking them out as former prisoners and reducing their prospects for successful adjustment after release.

### **Overcoming stigma: Reinscribing the formerly incarcerated body**

As earlier testimony showed, missing teeth are just one of a combination of physical characteristics and habits which women released from prison perceive to mark them out;

They drink and smoke, they have tattoos, and they use slang. And their teeth are rotten. That's how people think women who've been in prison look.

However, they seem to be the most problematic, in terms of the problems women face in concealing them as bodily inscriptions of incarceration, and in thereby avoiding the labelling which can lead to stigma. Smoking, drinking and swearing or using slang are habits which can be difficult to break, but women can at least try to resist performing them in public if they feel that this will help conceal a problematic personal history. Tattoos indelibly mark the skin, but are not always publicly

visible<sup>2</sup>, and women's choice over whether or not to acquire tattoos can be informed by an understanding of how they are perceived. However, any social interaction which involves speaking reveals missing teeth, and, in their minds, their prison history. For this reason, the women interviewed were willing to go to considerable trouble and expense to repair or replace their teeth, and they devoted scarce resources to getting their teeth fixed as a high priority on release. Here, the intersectionality of inscription again becomes clear – women with the means to pay for better dental treatment in prison (where this is available) emerge from prison with better dental health and accordingly fewer problems of this kind. Although all women losing teeth in prison may wish to remedy this situation, the cost of dental treatment probably means that only a small proportion are able to pay for the treatment they would like. The testimony of women prisoners suggests that many rely upon help from family members with available funds to pay for their dentistry. The embodied inscription of incarceration seems, therefore, to become more pronounced, and more significant, for those formerly incarcerated women lacking a supportive family and/or the financial means to address their problems.

Here [outside of prison], you *have* to get your teeth done, above all. Now you can have them put in [implanted], my mother gave me 56 thousand rubles [approximately 2000 US dollars] to have teeth put in.

Q. That's expensive.

A: Yes. [But] I had no teeth, I was ashamed to open my mouth.

Russian prisoners face a variety of obstacles to successful reintegration, including the renewal of essential personal documents like the internal passport, residence permits, and so on, with implications for their legal status and entitlement to various aspects of citizenship. What was clear, though, was that the stigma attached to their teeth made them deal with this issue more urgently than almost anything else, in an attempt to rectify the 'lack of fit' (McDowell 1999, 61) between their own bodies and the idealised representations expected in the post-carceral spaces of employment.

I'm not in a hurry to get my documents, and I haven't visited the doctor's. The only thing is - dentistry – that's the first thing I'll do when I'm more or less back on my feet. I've looked at it. I already think that I'd have a plastic prosthesis [dentures], for the whole mouth at once. It'll cost seven thousand. Ten thousand, I think, because that's not

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<sup>2</sup> Women do receive tattoos in prison in Russia, but the practice is not as widespread as in men's prisons.

counting how much it costs to have [the remaining teeth] pulled out [approximately 250-350 US dollars].

Q. Would that be an implant?

A: No, that would be full dentures. The ones that stick [to the gums]. Because right now they make something out of silicone. I have to adapt, because they can't be fixed, they have to be pulled out.

Having identified the problems they face in the labour market with poor dentition, it follows that the inability of certain women to pay for remedial dental treatment reinforces the gender-class-producing function of carceral inscription through hindering their pursuit of employment, and thereby reducing their likelihood of reintegration. Restricted in their employment opportunities, women with poor dentition are perhaps more likely to find themselves in lower-skilled, non-public-facing employment such as cleaning or factory work, where their prospects for career progression are minimal. The 22 women interviewed spoke from personal experience of disadvantage. Although all had completed basic education, some having also undertaken specialist vocational training, and 19 lived with husbands, parents or other family members who provided some support to them after release, at the time of interview only twelve were employed, and of those twelve, nine were working in factories. Only two held public-facing jobs, one in door-to-door sales, one working at a gas station. One woman reported that she was both unemployed and homeless.

Erasing, or overwriting, this inscription of incarceration from their visible bodies was of paramount importance, but these testimonies suggest that women are differentially able to reinscribe their bodies, according to their social class, and their level of family support. Removing the physical characteristic which they felt enabled others to attach labels, to relate these to negative stereotypes and accordingly to discriminate and withhold opportunities such as employment enabled some, but not all women to avoid the stigma that attached itself to their status as former prisoners, or more precisely, to enable them to retain more control over the disclosure of this fact about their own personal history.

By demonstrating a desire to repair the damage done to their appearance in prison, these women continued the unfinished projects of their bodies. In this way, they show that as Wahidin (2002, 192) argued, the material body is not a passive receptacle for inscription, but rather is interwoven with and constitutive of systems of meaning, signification and representation. They treated their bodies as projects, always in the process of becoming through the experiences of embodiment. The plans they had to replace their missing teeth reflected the body as a project central to their sense of self-identity, marked by a series of inscriptions which are dependent on types of spaces and places and experiences in them. If the loss of teeth was a marker of imprisonment, noticeable and 'telltale' on the outside, then replacing their teeth acted to reinscribe the body, as the women made their own inscriptions in line with their own conceptualisation of themselves and their self-identity, in a context where they felt stigmatised by their outward appearance.

### **Concluding remarks**

This paper opened with a critique of Goffman's (1961) 'total institution' as a useful way of understanding prison institutions, and ended with a discussion of missing teeth and dentures. Linking these two discussions are the concepts of the transcarceral, embodiment and stigma, discussed within a framing discourse of feminist geography, and contributing to the critique of the 'total institution' of the prison as not as 'total' as Goffman's notion would have it. Not only is the prison wall permeable, as Farrington (1992) has demonstrated, but the idea that there is a clear binary distinction between 'inside' and 'outside' has been destabilised, as shown by Baer & Ravneberg (2008). Allspach (2010) further suggests that there are 'transcarceral spaces' of re-confinement beyond the physical walls of the prison, in which women released from prison experience the extension of carceral control. Drawing on scholarship within feminist geography which demonstrates the ways in which embodied subjectivities and identities are bound up with assumptions about gender and class, and are place-contingent, I conceptualise the embodied

experience of imprisonment and argue that the transcarceral takes form not just as a spatial locale, but also through the stigmatising, intersectional and gendered effect of the bodily inscription of incarceration. As the empirical evidence from formerly incarcerated women in Russia shows, prisoners' bodies can be marked by incarceration in ways which, through the operation of stigma, serve to extend the carceral control of the prison into their 'free' lives by intersecting with multiple facets of discrimination to create damaging and limiting power relations, thus reducing their independence and restricting their opportunities.

Listening to the experiences of these women is critical, though. Although in their descriptions of their personal experience and the 'everyday' of embodied incarceration, they describe vividly the corporeal inscription of incarceration upon their bodies, they are not passive recipients of such inscriptions. After release they reassert agency over the projects of their bodies, and prioritise their reinscription, as a means of preventing stigmatisation and thereby minimising the extension of carceral control.

The paper extends critique of the 'total institution', but also has utility for carceral geography. Thus far carceral geography has tended to conceive of incarceration either as the experience of carceral spaces, i.e. the 'insides' of prisons (Dirsuweit 1999, Sibley & Van Hoven 2008, Van Hoven & Sibley 2008), or to take a more abstracted view which positions the prison on a 'carceral continuum' of hyperincarceration (Peck 2003, Peck & Theodore 2008). This paper suggests that there is an additional perspective which considers the 'carceral' as more than a physical space, but which also draws attention to experience of the 'carceral' as both personal and embodied.

**Acknowledgements:** The UK Economic and Social Research Council provided funding to Dominique Moran, Judith Pallot and Laura Piacentini, for the conduct of the research leading to this article. A Visiting Fellowship at the Aleksanteri Institute, University of Helsinki, provided support to Dominique Moran for the preparation of the article.

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