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# Doing a Bid: The Construction of Time as Punishment

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# Doing a Bid: The Construction of Time as Punishment

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## **Abstract**

Juxtaposing the sociology of time with the sociological study of punishment, we interviewed 34 former inmates to explore their memories of how they constructed time while “doing a bid.” Prison sentences convey macro-political and social messages, but time is experienced by individuals. Our qualitative data explore important theoretical connections between the sociology of time as a lived experience and the temporality of prison where time is punishment. The interview data explores the social construction of time, and our findings demonstrate participants’ use of the language of time in three distinct ways: (a) routine time, (b) marked time, and (c) lost time.

## **Keywords**

the sociology of time, the sociology of punishment, memory, “doing a bid”

## **Introduction**

The carceral apparatus of the United States revolves around the punitive discourse of time and punishment in the form of incarceration (Davis, 2003; Dolinko, 1992). Retributive policies imposing mandatory incarceration deliver a distinct message of punishment to the offender, and the sentence of

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time to prison communicates a separate political and social message to society that wrongdoers are punished and incarcerated, simultaneously creating a unique form of language that conveys the illusion of safety to the broader community (Primoratz, 1989; Wringer, 2012; Zerubavel, 1987; see Clear, 2009). The former message of punishment is summarized with a deceptively simple statement about time, "I got 50 with 20," Fred said, then described its significance. "I was sentenced to 50 years and I had to serve a minimum of 20." Fred's short narrative portrays the language of time and communicates his length of incarceration by the state of New Jersey (see Davis, 2003). His long prison sentence emphasizes four principles of punishment: retribution, incapacitation, deterrence, and time (see Cullen & Gendreau, 2000; Durkheim, 1964; Whitman, 2003). Furthermore, it encapsulates statutes that are tough on criminals, such as the "War on Drugs," aggressive surveillance techniques, "truth in sentencing," mandatory minimum prison sentences, and "three strikes you're out" (Mauer & King, 2007). Specifically, a prison sentence incorporates the temporal order of punishment in the confined carceral space (Medlicott, 1999; Moran, 2012a), sending social and political messages that create a language of time about punishment through policy (Primoratz, 1989), and expanding our understanding about the character of repressive social control (Durkheim, 1964; Simon, 2005).

Time experienced while imprisoned is a conceptually different cultural experience than time lived outside prison. Yet, there is little empirical inquiry about female and male adult offenders' memory and the construction of time, popularly known as "doing a bid." Serving time in prison is the dominant form of punishment in the United States, but the sociological nature of time linked to the sociological study of punishment overlooks the concept of "doing time" as a lived experience, despite the central importance of both in a prison sentence (see Van Manen, 1990). Our research seeks to fill this gap in the literature to detail the embodied experience of time; within the sociological notion of time and punishment, we contextualize former prisoners' memories of how they negotiated time in prison and how they communicated that experience explicitly through the language of time. Based on 34 semi-structured interviews with formerly incarcerated men and women, we capture the felt sense of time as a temporal experience through memory. Memory orients us to our present, provides temporal orientation to the world in which we exist, and stabilizes our sense of self (Muth & Walker, 2013). Utilizing qualitative narrative analysis, three time-centered themes emerged from former prisoners' narratives about living in the regulated institution of prison—*routine time*, *marked time*, and *lost time*—connecting the universal human quality of time to the existential meaning and experience of time inside prison.

## The Sociology of Time and Punishment

The sociology of time examines how time structures lived experiences (Bergmann, 1992). This includes social existence, social activities, civic engagement and public participation (Moen, 2001), collective events, social structures, the organization of time (Wingens & Reiter, 2011), and the progressive order and standardization of time across space and individuals' life-course (e.g., child birth to death; Zerubavel, 1982). Time is divided into acceptable blocks of social accessibility during public and private time (Zerubavel, 1979). It is organized around, for, and at work (Perlow, 1999), and is also constructed for vacation or holiday time, which differs from regularly lived time (Stein, 2012; see Bergmann, 1992). Zerubavel (2003) maps the nature of time as a coherent narrative of linear, circular, or spiral patterns that models the ways that time is ordered as temporal location (when), frequency (how often), experience (memory), and how the rhythm of time is circular, which is how people experience social activities. Time is not absolute; it is socially constructed and embedded in social practices bound to distinctive structures and institutions. Furthermore, it is contextualized into temporal strategies that are designed to control or manipulate the tempo of activities (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998).

Although time governs life, social events, experiences, and activities, it is uniquely and dramatically different for individuals who are incarcerated. Their nature of time is experienced differently due to the spatial arrangements and reason for prison, and is qualified in a distinct fashion as *dead time* (Božovič, 1995) or *timeless space* (Dodgshon, 2008). For prisoners, time means enduring endlessly long hours being monitored in the "panopticon" for a period of time determined by the sovereign (Božovič, 1995; Foucault, 1977; Grandy, 1993). Time sentenced to prison is important in framing how the government punishes, but Moran (2012a) argues that despite time's central importance in the carceral space, the theory of punishment overlooks the essential element of locating individuals' lived experience in the structured environment of prison. Excepting scholars scrutinizing Jeremy Bentham's panopticon as an architectural form of surveillance, discipline, discourse, coercion, austerity, docility, and social control (e.g., Božovič, 1995; Cullen & Gendreau, 2000; Foucault, 1977; Grandy, 1993; Murray, 2009; Sykes, 1958), scholars have moved beyond the panoptic metaphor to focus on the array of power displayed through surveillance technologies (Haggerty & Ericson, 2000; Matthieson, 1997; Simon, 2005). That is, the focus is on how inmates learn to adjust to the unrelenting nature of time to exist in the prisons' spaceless confines (Adams, 1992; Hardt, 1997; Leal & Mond, 2001), how inmates survive the violence and trauma of the incarceration event (DeVeaux, 2013),

and how inmates cope with the resulting physical and psychological marks left as a direct result of being incarcerated (Boxer, Middlemass, & Delorenzo, 2009; Medlicott, 1999; Moran, 2012b; Schnitker & Valerio, 2013). Time in prison leaves a visible mark and inscribes its stigma on inmates' bodies (Moran, 2012a, 2012b; Wahidin, 2002, 2004; Wahidin & Tate, 2005), and the prison sentence negatively affects loved ones left behind, as the "family does time," too (Braman, 2007; Comfort, 2008).

Literature and mass media explore the prison experience, but the lived experience of prison as its own language of time remains elusive (see Van Manen, 1990). The paucity of empirical inquiry about individuals' construction of "doing time" within the carceral space means that time as a prison sentence is largely examined as a means for the government to punish (Braman, 2007; Cullen & Gendreau, 2000; Jiang & Winfree, 2006; Wringe, 2012), which has a negative effect on individuals, families, and the community (Clear, 2009; Comfort, 2008; Grinstead, Faigeles, Bancroft, & Zack, 2001; Mauer & King, 2007). The persistent depiction of time in popular media discourse is of prisoners etching lines into the wall, like Andy Dufresne in *The Shawshank Redemption* (see Moran, 2012a). Yet, participants scoffed at the idea of prisoners marking time like Dufresne. Hunter put it plainly, "You would go crazy doing something like that."

The practice of time while incarcerated is rooted in lived experiences within the carceral geography of prison and the conditions of carceral space (DeVeaux, 2013; Medlicott, 1999; Moran, 2012a, 2012b; Moran, Piacentini, & Pallot, 2012) and is constituent with how individual pursuits are framed within the confines of institutions (Foucault, 1977; Wingens & Reiter, 2011). Thus, time experienced in prison is positioned within the sociological theory of time and the sociological study of punishment, but the power of lived experience within the temporal order of prison is absent. Prisoners are forced to manage time by constructing it within the available bounded spaces, and the sociology of punishment is an essential element integral to this lived experience.

## **Time as Macro-Policy and Punishment**

The macro-policy message of punishment is distinct because once convicted of a crime, an expansive and seemingly capricious set of calculations allows the government to impose a penalty of "precisely determined quantity" that fixes an amount of time to be served inside prison (Hardt, 1997, p. 64; see Davis, 2003). The longer the prison sentence, the higher degree of societal disgust, which makes time the "operator of punishment integrated into the economy of the penalty" (Foucault, 1977, p. 108). The principle of time as

punishment is dependent on the context and location of prison (see Wingers & Reiter, 2011). How one serves time inside prison is fundamentally different because it extends beyond the body politic and into the community, severing prisoners' familial and societal relationships while relentlessly regulating every activity while limiting social, political, economic, and legal rights (DeVeaux, 2013; Foucault, 1977; see Braman, 2007; Comfort, 2008; Muth & Walker, 2013). Cut off from everything they know, inmates must arrange their government-imposed time by shaping their lived time behind the prison wall (Adams, 1992; DeVeaux, 2013).

The macro-level trends of punishment and prison sentences do not translate uniformly to the individual lived experiences of those enmeshed in the carceral apparatus (Goodman, 2012). Rather, the macro-policy of punishment via time is imposed upon the individual and signifies time as a micro-level human event that is experienced by thousands (see Clear, 2009). However, it is not uniform because time inside prison reproduces patterns of lived experiences that only have meaning within the temporal order of prison (see Zerubavel, 2003, 1987). Prison time does not have a direct forward function; it is slow, repetitive, and abstract. For instance, prisoners are counted as an integral part of their lived experience. During "the count," prisoners, upon awakening, stand in front of their cells to be counted by guards to ensure there has been no escape—and they are counted throughout the day. The count is institutionalized into the lived pattern of being an inmate, and conducted at such regular intervals, every day and night, that the count becomes a way to keep time. "I always knew what time it was based on the count," William shared, "for 19 years, that's how I told time." This manner of keeping time did not alter from one year to the next, making the sociology of time inside prison distorted because the rhythm of life is not ordinary, and time is further altered when living under the threat of physical assault becomes ordinary and condenses time into a daily will to survive (DeVeaux, 2013).

The theory of punishment as time is individualized, but personal narratives of "doing time" raises questions about the study of punishment, the sociological theory of time, and individuals' construction of living a government-imposed sentence of time. The macro-policy of punishment alters people, and prison changes them (Leal & Mond, 2001). How individuals understand time as a lived narrative based on their memories about the temporal circumstances of the confining space of prison demonstrates their attempt to preserve a sense of control over their situational context (see Emirbayer & Mische, 1998). What emerges is a story of social interactions that make sense of their prison experience (see Fivush, Habermas, Waters, & Zaman, 2011). Thus, the temporal dynamics of "doing time" in prison illuminates the dimension of individuals' memory of time in prison, and accounts

for the sociological conception of time as integrated into the formal notion of punishment. Memory narratives are a cognitive instrument with sociocultural elements essential to a sense of self and reality (Bruner, 2004). Emphasizing the memory of time exposes how former prisoners construct their truth of “doing a bid” as a lived experience. Furthermore, it improves our understanding of the nature of time in a confined space, describes how time is endured, and explores how time is separate and different from its organization in society (see Bergmann, 1992; Moen, 2001; Perlow, 1999; Stein, 2012; Wingens & Reiter, 2011; Zerubavel, 1979, 1982).

## **Method and Scope of the Study**

The data for this study are derived from two larger and original institutional review board (IRB)-approved ethnographic studies conducted over an 18-month period, from February 2011 to August 2012, involving approximately 10 hours of participant observations each week. Fieldwork, interviews, and observations took place at a non-profit organization located in downtown Newark, New Jersey, where both authors observed and engaged with staff, volunteers, and participants. We were provided virtually unlimited access to the non-profit organization during our respective visits where we identified key participants (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006; Sutton, 2011). From these interactions, we interviewed 34 formerly incarcerated adults—30 men and four women. The interviews were semi-structured, open-ended, and revolved around three distinct stages of life: (a) personal life before incarceration, (b) life while incarcerated, and (c) reentry. Participants were given the freedom to place specific importance on any topic of their choosing within the broad topics of interest. Interviews lasted between 60 and 75 minutes, and no incentives were provided. Participants were made aware of their rights; written consent was acquired, and when consent was given, interviews were recorded. Of the 34 interviewees, 29 self-identified as Black or African American, and five self-identified as White. Participants ranged in age from 22 to 68 years at the time of their interview, with an average age of 45. Respondents were convicted of at least one felony, and their prison sentences ranged from a minimum of 1 year to a maximum of 50 years. They had served time in different jails, and state and federal prisons, although the majority served time in New Jersey state prisons.

Using narrative analysis to evaluate the interview data, we focused on the second component of the protocol to access participants’ memories about their conception of time while incarcerated. Studying the language of lived narratives reflects how stories that appear idiosyncratic are similar in linguistic form when analyzed (Labov, 1997; see Geertz, 1973; Goffman, 1981).

Through the qualitative method of narrative analysis, we examine memory and its context to place (Hoelscher & Alderman, 2004), the social construction of time that represents social life, culture and emotions (Jovchelovitch, 2012), and how memory narratives lend credibility to prison time as a lived experience (Labov, 1997). As personal narratives provide a foundation with which to understand a lived experience, we explore the tangled relationship between the sociology of time, the sociological study of punishment, place, and the context of prison to conceptualize how one “does time.” The narratives should be read as such, and we analyzed each interview narrative “as it was” to build emergent themes to identify collective and distinctive experiences of prison time (see Muth & Walker, 2013). The temporality of prison emerged in separate narratives, and we only include participants’ language about the temporal lived experiences within the cultural conditions of prison to advance our understanding of participants’ memories of constructed time to offer an expanded meaning of “doing a bid.” Our epistemological position is that participants’ memories are rooted in their past and present existence. Therefore, participants could access memories about serving time in the confining space of prison (DeVeaux, 2013; see Van Manen, 1990), and their memories about such a limiting space conjoin with time to produce personal narratives that reflect the larger phenomenon of doing time in prison (Hoelscher & Alderman, 2004; see Zerubavel, 2003). We sought to uncover these specific time–space lived experiences. To protect participants’ identities, pseudonyms are used.

## **Micro-Level Discursive Narratives Conceptualizing “Doing Time”**

The language of temporality of participants’ memories is used to explore the nature of time strategies that develop in the carceral space. Former male and female prisoners conceptualize “doing time” in three ways: routine time, marked time, and lost time. The commonality between each of the recalled narratives is how time is thought of in a distinct manner that requires the suppression of their former “free” self to survive.

### **Government Time**

Prison time is imposed by the government, and participants, the majority of whom were sentenced to serve time in New Jersey, used the language of time to describe the time they were incarcerated and to differentiate the different level of government that sentenced them: Local sentences are measured in

days, and sentences less than 365 days are served in a local jail; states count time based on the hierarchical descending order of time—in years, months, and days—and the federal system calculates prison sentences based on the number of months sentenced.

Several of the younger male respondents served time in a local jail, referred to as a “skid bid” due to its short duration, and they kept close track of the number of days incarcerated. Mukhtar stressed the importance of holidays or seasons,

A lot of times you hear, “I hope I’m out for Christmas” or “I hope I can stay out for Christmas.” So, it’s hoping by holidays and counting your days so that you can stay on the streets. That was my way of thinking [like] damn [I] couldn’t stay out the whole summer. Damn.

Skid bids are downplayed as “small time.” Of his time in county lockup, Bo said, “It ain’t really nothing. I was locked up for like 30 days or something, nothing like the big bruhs did.” When Bo mentioned the “big bruhs,” he was referring to the men who had served “long bids” in state or federal prison. Time served in county jail is insignificant when sitting in a room with someone who had served 30 consecutive years.

Participants’ use of the language of time reflected the punishing government, and was often intermingled with colloquial street language of time. Carl plainly said, “I got a three flat.” Aaron retorted, “I got five no min.” Carl and Aaron, without stating so, communicated that New Jersey imposed a prison sentence of 3 and 5 years, respectively, and each had to serve their entire sentence, as there was no minimum time attached to their respective sentences. Johnson’s statement of time indicated the difference, “I got 2 with 10,” meaning he had to serve a minimum of 2 years before being eligible for parole and had a maximum sentence of 10 years. Sarah shared, “I got a 10 with an 85 stip,” indicating that her sentence was 10 years, and she had to serve at least 85% of that time in a New Jersey prison before she was eligible for parole.

Participants who spoke about time only in terms of months made clear they were convicted of a federal offense and served time in a federal prison. Abdul stated, “This last bid was 121 months. At some point, I stopped counting; all I knew is that each month I’m closer to the door [to being released].” Benny, who had done time at the state and federal levels made the distinction: “I did 5 years and then got 180 months.” He unconsciously designated which government sentenced him based on the language of time. Emmanuel, a former federal inmate who served 63 months remarked, “The feds can get you for *life*, bury you. It’s not like the state; the feds can *get* you.” Emmanuel

discussed a man he served time with who was sentenced to 696 months (i.e., 58 years), the equivalent of a life sentence. The language of time is how participants conceived their government-imposed punishment and how they talked about their time.

## Routine Time

Schedules and routines shape the monotony of the prison environment, as dictated by the prison administration that has total control over the institution. Yet, in the face of the omnipresence of surveillance, prisoners constructed individualized routines to survive their prison time. Individual routines developed despite the schedule imposed by guards, and offered participants a therapeutic or counter-balance to the oppressive environment of prison. Participants who developed a routine moved through the confined space of prison at their own pace, notwithstanding the control and domination of prison rules. Anthony captured the general sentiment behind creating his own routine, “You have to do the time, not let the time do you.” This captures the mental strength required to do time, while reflecting individuals’ disposition to create a routine within the confines of the prison’s schedule. The purpose of a routine was to build physical, mental, spiritual, or emotional strength through deliberate actions.

A routine is composed of activities that allowed participants to create their own autonomy within the restricted environment and to make intentional choices of how they did their own time. Michael conveyed,

I had a drug sentence so I did some programs and groups, all to help when I get out so I could get a job, and I did them [the classes]. They turned out to be good. I learned some stuff, mostly about myself, which is probably what I needed.

Self-improvement was a concrete way participants talked about maintaining a sense of self. Turq, after completing a 25-year prison sentence, echoed Anthony’s comment: “Don’t serve time, let time serve you, taking classes gave me a place to go, and I tried to stay strong by praying every day.”

Blake communicated his intentional choice to create a routine:

I did my prayers in the morning, a little workout after chow [breakfast], then I had a little prison job, and from there I went to chow [dinner], back to my cell, and more prayer. I didn’t have time to think about being locked up.

Blake recalled his routine by describing it this way: “This is what normal people do on the outside, so it makes me feel kinda normal, you know.” For

participants such as Turq and Blake, routines focused on religion, classes, and exercise, each playing an integral role in “doing time” while providing a sense of normalcy and an opportunity for personal growth.

Routine prayer kept religious participants connected to their religious community on the outside, as they worshipped in a similar manner and celebrated the same holy days. This is true, especially for Muslim participants, where “doing time” is structured around prayer. As one Muslim participant, Kaysan, stated, “I have to be up before sunrise for my morning prayers.” The Morning Prayer, known as *fajr*, is the first of five sequential prayers said at a designated time throughout the day. Praying brought participants closer to their higher power, and offered them the opportunity to create a routine that they could follow continuously across a “long bid.”

Exercise, another common activity inside prison, is connected to spending time “on the yard.” For male participants, in particular, exercise formed the basis of their routine because it kept one physically fit and mentally strong, as well as ordinary. Thomas said, “I love working out. The girls love it—not that they were around—but still [exercising] makes me feel good and was a way to pass time.” By setting clear goals, exercise provides a way to measure progress as one builds his or her physical strength and physically transforms his or her body, which offers a sense of accomplishment. As each goal is met, Thomas talked about how it helped him concentrate and apply himself to construct “bigger goals;” each time he accomplished a goal, a deeper sense of motivation set in and provided the impetus to continue to “do time.”

Others set a routine based on family connections, talking fondly of their loved ones, including their mothers and spouses. Some spoke in reserved tones about trying to re-build or maintain relationships with children or a significant other. Clifford was one participant who relied heavily on his girlfriend: “I love my girl, she met me while I was locked up and we been together like sixteen years. That’s a lot of trust.” Clifford and his girlfriend wrote weekly letters, and she came to visit him on a regular basis. Their connection was important because the routine of letter writing kept him grounded. Hussein, however, had an unusual interaction with the outside world: “I met my wife while incarcerated. She was a corrections officer. She resigned, and a year later we were married and been together now 25 years.” Hussein’s experience was rare, but his marriage and family relationships were common; his wife kept him balanced and gave him the strength to withstand the 30 years he was incarcerated. For many, having a loved one waiting for them on the outside made “doing time” marginally easier. Jo-Jo spoke about her children, “My mom would bring my kids to come see me and my son and I would speak on the phone. I’d read to him or sometimes he reads to me. It’s really nice.” The relationship Jo-Jo had with her son was of vital importance as it

kept her balanced, so visits became an essential part of her routine. By organizing their time around family relationships, seemingly simple routines such as letter writing became an important interaction that sustained a relationship within a critical support network. Having a connection to the outside world was more than writing letters, as it also helped the men and women to learn how to give and receive love. Feeling love kept them focused and committed to their routine.

In addition, many talked about structuring a routine around health-related issues, such as ailments like diabetes. Clay explained, "I'm a diabetic and I need to keep my sugar low so I have to watch what I eat and make sure to take my medicine faithfully every day." Monitoring his blood sugar levels created a set of associated activities, such as diet and exercise that guided his routine. Some shared that routine time was a way to "do time" that tried to import a sense of normalcy similar to activities on the outside that personalized the impersonal within the cold and detached temporality of prison.

## Marked Time

Going to prison to serve time while separated from loved ones and the community can be damaging to a person's psychological and physical sense of self (Boxer et al., 2009). So, to fight the damaging effects of prison, some narrated their time by marking its passage in a way that only made sense to them. Participants knew that time inside prison was dissimilar to the outside world, and although they did not describe the sociology of time, they recognized their ability to mark time to survive prison. Marking events affected their sense of being, raised their level of consciousness, or connected them to the outside world in significant ways.

Others spoke about marking time via certain holidays because they were unlike the other days. Eliza stated, "They did something nice for each holiday. They gave us some turkey, stuffing, and other good stuff [for Thanksgiving]. It was nice, different from the regular crap." Knowing that a special meal would be served on each "high holiday" offered a way to mark the passage of time, while nourishing a sense of community with others in and outside prison, especially family. "And at Easter, well, everybody loves the Easter Bunny, right?" Eliza asked the question, smiling her answer while describing the cards she sent and received from family.

The unique nature of family is captured in the routine of letter writing, but family also shapes how participants marked time. Not all of the participants had positive family connections, which is not unusual in the returning population. Family splinters when someone does time, and it is not unusual for that distance to grow when a loved one is incarcerated (Grinstead et al.,

2001). However, when one had a good family connection, spending time with them was valued. There was a clear distinction between two types of visits: scheduled and spontaneous. An interesting finding is how scheduled visits were described. A visit became a block of time set aside from the normal time, placing a prisoner in a stressful and precarious situation. In the weeks and days prior to a scheduled visit, a prisoner had to be on his or her best behavior to ensure that he or she did not earn an infraction that would cancel the visit. Idris shared how missed visits were traumatizing, and resulted in hurt feelings and increased inmate and family anger toward prison administrators. "Look, visits are rare, you don't get to see your people whenever" and when loved ones schedule a visit, they often have to sacrifice to make it possible. The cost includes saving money to take time off from work, traveling to the prison facility, and staying overnight due to prison security protocols that require visitors to arrive several hours prior to the visit (e.g., 6 o'clock in the morning) to undergo visitors' security measures (Braman, 2007; Grinstead et al., 2001). When such preparation is necessary for a 2-hr visit, only to have the visit canceled, it is like "getting punched in the gut, takes your wind," shared Fred.

The group knew firsthand about visitors' strip searches and violations of privacy, as they lived that way. Knowing these security measures, including bag and physical body searches, were distressing for family, young children, and the prisoner, Isaac exclaimed,

I hated having to put my wife and little girl through those strip searches to come see me. To think of another person making my wife take off her clothing or patting down my little girl and how embarrassing and stressful that is for them, it really stressed me out. Better they stay home.

Ray Charles' solution to counter the negative ramifications of scheduled visits were spontaneous visits:

Then there is no pressure; if they show up then great, if not, cool. Because a lot of times things come up, family may not have the money, they come late and can't get in, and no one [guards] tells you stuff, so that used to get me mad.

Clifford echoed these feelings about missed visits, "Not just mad, but worried, too, like I hope they didn't have an accident or something bad happen to them."

As a result of the stress and unease around scheduled family visits, all reported that they preferred phone calls. Hussein explained the difference, "Visits are always good, no doubt, but the problem is after the visit, you

want to leave with your family and you can't and that brings you back to the harsh reality of where you are and that's prison." Although previous scholars have voiced that family visits offer positive effects during incarceration (Braman, 2007; Comfort, 2008), participants expressed that that was not a universally supported perspective of those serving time. Rather, visits can be problematic and dangerous for the livelihood of the prisoner. Carl explained how he felt down after visits from loved ones and how it disrupted his frame of mind, "You have to be mentally and emotionally stable in prison, otherwise you ain't gonna make it. Family visits can disrupt everything you trying to do." Other participants shared how family visits were destabilizing and draining as visits disrupted carefully sequenced habits and time strategies. Kenneth described having to "start all over again" after a family visit because it was a painful "interruption;" each visit marked time and what was missed on the outside. Ray Charles explained how visits highlighted the reality of what he was missing, and how much time he had left on his sentence. "It's always depressing to think about, family asks, 'when you get out,' and you don't want to [think about your sentence and] think about how much time's left." Several shared how they struggled with family visits, the guilty feelings that emerged as a result, and also the shame of placing the entire financial burden of the trip on the family. However, they preferred family visits to no visits at all.

The participants who did not have visitors had very clear reasons. Jackson is one who marked time based on his mother's murder:

I was sitting in the mess hall when I got a call down to the office. When I got there, the lieutenant told me straight out that my mother had been murdered. I will never forget that moment. I even remember what the guy who did it looks like and I started doing my research to find out what prison he was being sent to so I could get a transfer because I had it made up in my mind to kill him. Luckily, that never happened and I'm able to sit here today.

After his mother's death, Jackson marked time to "get the guy," and although he was unable to kill him, his emotions kept him "doing his time." Emotion and fear allowed participants to "do time," and September 11, 2001, is one such instance that left its mark on several. Idris said,

I was locked up in Northern State and we just finished breakfast and after that we was supposed to get some rec [recreation] time but they locked us down. Some guard turned on the television and we hear what was happening. Then we all got scared like, "if these muthafuckas bombing, where we suppose to hide?" We stuck in here.

Marking time through family visits, a jarring personal occurrence or shared event, broke up the monotony of prison time that could be marked on a calendar. Unfortunately, marking time as described left the individual participant to the randomness of life. Although they did not mark time by their own choosing, respondents acknowledged that marking time around stressful or emotional events focused their energies away from the mundane nature of prison.

For instance, major health-related issues requiring professional medical intervention differ from the routine management of daily health concerns. Experiencing a major injury, a health crisis, a broken bone, or the need for oral care during incarceration is memorable for all the wrong reasons, and ends up marking time. Sarah marked time based on breaking her arm. When it happened, she explained, it changed doing her time.

I slipped on some water in the kitchen area and I shattered my right arm. It stayed broke for like 3 years because [the Department of Corrections] never gave me proper medical care. Even today, I have this brace [referring to the medical brace that she was wearing that restricted her forearms' movement], and I know there is nerve damage because I cannot feel some of my fingers.

Jimmy talked about needing dental work, and how a supposedly simple procedure carried on much longer than if he was on the outside simply because he was inside prison: "I put in a slip [request] five times to see the dentist because my mouth was killing me and I still haven't seen him [a dentist]. This is going on eight months now." Major ailments that literally leave a mark on one's body marked time for some participants while incarcerated. The injury becomes an interruption from what they were previously doing. The injury itself functions as a starting point, attempting to access health care is the middle point, and then getting the required care is the end point. For inmates, there was no end point to mark, as their health concern lingers and is never properly addressed. In some instances, they are left to suffer in pain. In Sarah's case, her pain is now longer than her prison sentence, and she will likely continue to suffer pain for the rest of her life because she received sub-medical care while incarcerated. Seeking professional medical health care workers to address a serious health concern while incarcerated becomes a way to mark time based on the response (or lack thereof) concerning disregarded or ignored medical needs.

## **Lost Time**

The third manner in which participants' negotiated the temporal order of prison is "losing time." They did not wear a watch inside: Carol said, "A watch, where you got to be?" Carol elaborated, explaining how keeping time and days on a calendar has little meaning until "your time is short and you

start counting down to getting out.” Time inside prison does not carry any pressing needs. One day is indistinguishable from any other day, and losing time was a way to forget about “doing time.” Fred noted the pain of his punitive long prison sentence, and that “losing time” was what got him through:

I had a 50-year sentence and knew I wasn't up for parole for 20. I had just turned 22 [years old and] told myself, “I can go nuts, no point in being good, I'm doing what I want if I got to stay [inside] forever.” Then, I realized I had to be on good behavior so I could get out.

What Fred meant by “then” was the second decade he was incarcerated, and although he did not specify what he meant by “go nuts,” he described his first decade incarcerated like this: “Look, I did it all. I was bad. I had a reputation.” We surmised that he spent the first decade fighting through his time as a way to proactively lose track of that time.

During one interview, Socrates introduced himself by name and time served: “I had 17 years, but did more, thought they forgot about me, did my time in Rahway and Southern.” Socrates kept semi-track of his time, as he only differentiated his time based on his prison transfers, reciting how long he served in two New Jersey prisons: “Long time in Rahway, like 8 years, 5 months, 16 days, then 3 years, 6 months, 28 days in Southern. Back to Rahway for the last bit, 5 years, 2 months, 6 days.” Through time, Socrates shared his story of prison transfers, and although he did 2 months and 19 days over his 17-year sentence, “Can't get any of that time back, but what's 80 days when you done years?”

For numerous others, unlike Socrates, remembering concretely how many years one spent incarcerated was incomprehensible. Nicholas shared, “I spent about 35 years incarcerated, actually maybe 30. I'm 46 years old, so um, let's just say I spent something like 30-35 years in prison, does that work?” Nicholas could not remember how much time he had served; official records indicated that it was 22 years. Johnson had similarly lost time, sharing, “I'm 32. I think I did something like 23 years.” As a look of bewilderment set in, he quickly corrected himself, “Well, I think more like 8-10 years, I went in when I was like 23 or something like that.” This was common, for those who served a “long bid” or several “short bids” and could not remember how long they had been incarcerated. Large blocks of time were lost, along with legal rights. For instance, Miles spoke about losing time on the outside, as well as his political rights while he was incarcerated:

I lost my entire twenties because I was arrested when I was 18, convicted at 19, and spent more than a decade locked up. I missed both of [George W.] Bush's terms and have never been able to vote for president.

For Ricardo and Thomas, their lost time was conceptualized as an opportunity to make changes and take stock of the consequences of their criminal actions. Ricardo told his family to stay away and not to visit him, summarizing his decision this way: "Look, I told my family not to come. I have eleven children and I told all of them not to visit me. It's just too much." Ricardo served federal time in a prison several states away from his family, and knew that it would be financially taxing for any of his family to come visit him. As Thomas puts it, he told his family to stay away because of the related costs needed to travel a great distance. This was common; the Department of Corrections' major role at both the state and federal levels is to manage bodies, and that means prisoners are incarcerated where they are assigned. These participants expressed a love-hate ambivalence toward family visits due to the increased stress generated around the visit, so they told their family to stay away: "Who wants to have to worry about their well-being when you in there trying to survive," Thomas shared. He created a routine around "lifting weights and getting pumped" while purposely losing track of time because he had no control over his disintegrating relationship with his son:

I always tried to be there for him, but when I got locked up, it became hard to communicate and keep an eye on him. His mother wasn't bringing him down to visit and he was getting older. He's 19 now and getting in to his own trouble. He told me the other day he's a Crip. Can you believe that? This white boy is going around saying he a Crip. I try to be there, but he an adult now. I lost that time, and I've lost him.

## Discussion

An overlooked aspect of the prison experience is how the incarcerated population feels about their own incarceration. Former prisoners offer important insights about "doing time," and their memories are integrated into the sociological study of time and punishment to offer an original perspective of "doing time." Describing and contextualizing participants' memories of "doing time" in the carceral space draws a composite picture of how time is experienced as lived experience *and* punishment. Participants' representations of time reveal how the space in which social and bodily interactions unfold is integral to how time can be constructed in prison, and how the spatial arrangement becomes lived time (see Bergmann, 1992). At any given moment, participants could recall the spatial limitations of their options and knew that the restrictive prison space would shape their actions. The analytical context and temporal order of prison creates an environment where despite one's criminal past and carceral surroundings, individuals have the

ability “to engage with, respond to, and transform their environment” (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998, p. 1000; see Hoelscher & Alderman, 2004).

This study builds upon the existing literature analyzing the sociological nature of time and how time is a micro-lived experience within the corporeal confines of the carceral space. By focusing on former inmates’ sociological construction of “doing time,” we expand our understanding about the socio-temporal nature of time as a prison sentence. Moreover, we contribute to the literature by addressing the “felt sense” of time in prison and the way it is infused with personal meaning that influences one’s ability to “do a bid.” Participants reported how their lived experiences of time are intimately structured around punishment, and our findings show that they wanted to be “normal,” structuring their time in a similar fashion to people on the outside, reflective of the sociological mapping of time in other circumstances (Zerubavel, 1979, 1982, 1987, 2003).

The theoretical integration of the sociological study of time and the sociological nature of punishment in how participants “do time” offers a variety of insights into the complexity of time, how this intricacy is communicated through language, and how time is a lived notion. Furthermore, it has important implications for understanding the context of temporal experience as it relates to time. Time is a fundamental part of our individual existence and identity, and time served inside prison leads to multiple temporalities. Our contribution, thus, highlights former prisoners’ lived experiences in keeping their own time. Utilizing firsthand accounts of time inside prison contributes to the literature in three distinct ways.

First, we explicitly juxtapose the sociology of time with the sociological study of punishment to determine how former inmates remember serving time in prison. Their memories of constructing time are intimately related to the temporality of punishment, how time is experienced at the micro-level within the temporal order of prison, and how the language of time expressed their understanding of punishment through memory. Second, the study’s use of qualitative interview data exploring individuals’ negotiation of time as a prison sentence demonstrates how time operates in distinct ways as the carceral imagination is free to re-conceptualize the relentlessly ordered institution of prison in opposition to individuality and assertions of personhood (Murray, 2009). The manner in which individuals personalized, operated, and existed within the limited carceral space of prison, and how the social construction of time is contextualized, regardless of the penal maze controlling bodily functions (Wahidin, 2002, 2004), displayed a varied capacity in how participants thought about time while incarcerated. Third, the analysis adds to the theoretical notion of the sociology of time as a function of context within the carceral space that is reflective of how scholars have documented the importance of the context and environment of time (Comfort, 2008; Davis,

2003; Hardt, 1997; Hoelscher & Alderman, 2004; Zerubavel, 1979, 1982, 1987, 2003). Even with the goal to punish, the carceral space does not disrupt time as it is integrated into the rhythm of life. Participants demonstrated individuality in spite of the prison's attempt to dismantle their sense of personal identity. Their sense of time constructed from their memories (Hardt, 1997) provides a sense of how *routine*, *marked*, and *lost time* can be illustrated as a response to the temporal order of prison.

Notwithstanding the carceral space, participants' social construction of time did not diminish their voices, and this should be incorporated into future studies about carceral time. Our integration should be considered within this broader literature, including the nascent field of carceral time (Moran, 2012a, 2012b; Moran et al., 2012), while also contributing to the sociological literature that examines the temporal order of lived experiences (Durkheim, 1964; Foucault, 1977; Medlicott, 1999; Simon, 2005; Wiggins & Reiter, 2011).

As a final note, the contextual elements of "doing time" are the boundaries of the prison, and the existing literature about the carceral space rarely reconstructs time from memories about time. Therefore, to expand our understanding of what it means to "do time," scholars should explore a representative national sample of former prisoners' embodied experience of "doing time." Our sample, for instance, is not representative and is not generalizable to the population of former prisoners who served time in other correctional institutions. In addition, there is a lack of gender diversity to draw reliable conclusions about gender differences in "doing time." Scholars should explore the construction of time in the carceral space of a women's prison or include an over-sample of women to see how former female prisoners "do time." Gender differences and the construction of time through memory are important understudied areas, as the literature shows gendered differences in interpersonal ties between prisoners. Such personal relationships inside prison may influence how female inmates "do time" (see Adams, 1992; Jiang & Winfree, 2006). Despite these limitations, however, our research reveals that former prisoners' memories of lived experiences are important resources to explore the manner in which time functions as punishment in limited spatial arrangements, and how those experiences can be contextualized via the language of time.

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