

‘Who’s the Daddy?’ – Ideas about Fathers from a Young Men’s Prison

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Abstract: Drawing from an ethnographically-informed study of men’s identities and social relations in prison, this article explores the ways in which ideas about fatherhood are institutionally deployed and personally experienced. Based on interviews and observational data in a young offender institution (YOI) for 18- to 21-year-old men, the article considers young men’s orientations toward being a father and their participation in parenting classes and a ‘Fathers Inside’ group. Four vignettes are constructed to present an account of some of the issues surrounding men’s experience of prison, being a man and a father, researching men in prison and gender regimes in which fathers are being rediscovered and reinvented.

Keywords: fathers; prison; masculinities

This article draws from research conducted as part of the ‘Ethnicity, Identity, and Social Relations in Prison’ project.¹ The project adopted a qualitative approach based on ethnographic principles of extended fieldwork among men serving prison sentences in two prisons in south-east England. It was on the first formal visit to one of these prisons, Her Majesty’s Young Offender Institution Rochester (HMYOI Rochester),² in June 2006, that the issue of fathers in prison was presented as significant. We³ attended a meeting of senior prison officers to discuss our interest in ethnicity, identity and social relations and were told that it must surely be significant that approximately 40% of the young men self-disclosed as fathers or fathers-to-be. Prison staff, we were informed, had developed an energetic ‘Fathers Inside’ group and were eager for us to consider its relevance to our interest in men’s identities.

Field diaries reveal that despite our familiarity with prison research, we were both struck by how high this figure was among such a youthful group of men. Part of the reason for this is that there is no formal collection of data on the parental status of men sent to prison, but the figure is consistent with prison service and other estimates (HM Inspectorate of Prisons 1997; Katz 2002). The disclosure also appeared to signal an unexpected institutional engagement with the idea of men’s gender identities. This article will present four vignettes drawn from the fieldwork, that are constructed for

their capacity to condense diverse experiences in the prison and shed light on broader themes of men's social relations in prison and beyond. The vignettes are used heuristically to open up and explore ideas about fatherhood in a penal environment characterised by growth and potential crisis.

Penal Lenses, Paternal Optics

As Wacquant (2002) has observed, the prison may be seen as a 'template or vector of broader social forces, political nexi, and cultural processes that traverse its walls' (p.386). Wacquant expresses concern that as carceral populations have expanded they have been accompanied by an alarming decline in qualitative studies of prisoners' lives, although Phillips and Earle (2010) suggest that while this may be true of North America, it is certainly not the case in the UK, where the last decade has hosted a thriving prison research community. Wacquant (2009a, 2009b) has subsequently extended his thesis on the wider significance of carceral expansion in more recent explorations of neoliberal penalty in which he identifies specific gender characteristics operating in an emergent penal state. In these accounts, explicit references to gender and the power to punish coexist to frame a theoretical analysis that corresponds with the empirical work discussed later in this article. Speaking, for example, about women's experience of penalty, he identifies a penal quartet 'formed by the police, the court, the prison and the probation or parole officer [that] assumes the task of policing their brothers, their boyfriends or husbands and their sons' (Wacquant 2009a, p.15).

According to Wacquant, the penal state represents a newly ambidextrous state arising from the 'dynamic coupling' of 'the maternal and nurturing social arm of the welfare state' with its more conventionally paternal 'virile and controlling arm'. This transition from the "nanny state" of the Fordist-Keynesian era to the strict "daddy state" of neo-liberalism' is characterised by Wacquant (2009a, p.290) as 'the re-masculinization of the state'. In the process, the old velvet gloves are discarded as the state 'mans-up' and gets down to the increasingly urgent business of pacifying the marginal and dispossessed populations of a rampant neoliberal world order – by putting them in prison.

The prison, according to Wacquant, is central to the neoliberal project, an essential element of its statecraft. In this respect, he echoes Sykes's (1958) cautionary remarks that:

The prison is not an autonomous system of power, rather it is an instrument of the state, shaped by its social environment, and we must keep this simple truth in mind if we are to understand the prison. (p.8)

Sykes (1958) also remarked on the paternal dynamics of the social relations he encountered in his study of men in prison, observing that: '[T]he criminal in the custodial institution is in a position somewhat like that of a wayward son who is forced to work by a stern father' (p.16). As will be

discussed later, the reconfiguration of these stern paternal sentiments about suitable forms of labour are now extended to childcare and, implicitly, domestic labour, that merit closer critical scrutiny.

Significantly for the conjectural concerns of this article, Wacquant's (2009a) 'theoretical coda' identifies in the coupling of left (feminine) and right (masculine) arms of the state 'an unprecedented institutional innovation' (p.291), and that the resulting penal cornucopia is of such a scale that it cannot be left to the traditionally narrower concerns of criminology. This change, he implies, is epochal. In it he recognises an element of historical regression to the 'policies devised in the sixteenth century' (p.291) which mark the return of the older, martial imperatives of statecraft, and, drawing on Young's (2003) feminist analysis of the 'masculinist logic' of the 'security state', he weaves a compelling tapestry in which the 21st Century increasingly resembles 'an amalgam of the sixteenth and nineteenth' (Retort 2004, p.12). Wacquant himself is widely congratulated and celebrated for bringing a sociologist's wider range to this criminological table, though many of his specific claims about the reach and novel character of neoliberal penalty are deeply contested (see Cheliotis 2010).

A contrasting UK penal perspective on the ways in which a 21st Century neoliberal State is becoming almost obsessively involved in the micro-management of everyday life can be found in Crewe's (2009) study of prisoner society. More modest in scope than Wacquant, Crewe's recent prison ethnography also identifies a masculine register to the transformations of prison order and control he encountered in HMP Wellingborough. In his exceptionally thorough, rich and vivid account of prison life, Crewe argues that the conventionally steep hierarchies of prison authority have been largely superseded by a more lateral and diffuse 'neo-paternalism'. This is characterised by an increasingly complex engagement with prisoner's subjectivities rather than a crude warehousing of their bodies.

Somewhat against the trend of Wacquant's dystopian vision and grand theoretical sweep, Crewe's is a more nuanced perspective on a micro-politics of prison orders that are continually in flux; maintained, resisted and reconciled around the respective, but relatively narrower, agendas, interests and biographies of prisoners, prison officers and particular prison regimes. Crewe's (2009) focus is more on the 'internal dynamics' of the reinvention of prison, those features that are 'shaped but not fully determined by [the] macro-social change' (p.20) that preoccupy Wacquant.

In both accounts though, there is an identifiable paternal thread that Collier (1995, 1998; Collier and Sheldon 2008) might identify as having common traces in more widespread projects of 'masculine renewal'. If, as Collier suggests, there are widespread ideas about a crisis of familial masculinity that underpin the stubborn persistence of an underclass/crime discourse of absent fathers and wayward sons, there are also corresponding, but far less widespread and explicitly theorised, ideas about a crisis of state masculinity (Connell 2008). These underpin, as both Wacquant's and Crewe's accounts reveal, the implicit virility of 'control talk' (Cohen 1985) around father-presence in State institutions.

Complex theoretical questions are always at stake in the ways we think about gender and the State (Connell 1990). Although early feminist renditions of the State as 'the general patriarch' may be of limited use, neglecting to examine the ways in which patriarchy is embedded in procedure, in the State's way of functioning and the institutions it maintains, are similarly blinkered. What matters are the concrete social practices of the State, and how patriarchal elements are recognisable in these practices and the social institutions that cohere around them. The institution of prison is self-evidently a political device of the State's creation, a decisive instrument in the arbitration of social power, and the archetype of its 'exclusionary enclosure' (Wacquant 2007). Within this framework, it would be surprising if prisons did not operate as a kind of 'masculinity vortex' (Connell 2008, p.243) in which masculinity is strongly thematised and frequently laced with coercion. What is surprising, as Sabo, Kupers and London (2001) remark with the opening line of their edited collection about men in prison, is that 'prison is an ultra-masculine world where nobody talks about masculinity' (p.12). In this article, aspects of masculinity are made explicit by discussing how ideas about fathers and fatherhood shape the institutional practice of HMYOI Rochester and young men's experiences of incarceration there.

The significance of these, usually submerged, patriarchal threads in penal discourse, according to Collier (1998, p.31), is that the central relationships of crime and social order are those to do with men and masculinity that criminology most consistently neglects to theorise sufficiently. He situates the theoretical deficiency as occurring at the 'interface of criminology, law and the family' and identifies the 'epistemological, methodological and political foundations of criminology' (p.ix) as contributing to this neglect.

What follows is an attempt to redress some of this neglect and omission. In this article, I use a series of vignettes to synthesise a wider range of fieldwork experiences, including 60 semi-structured interviews in HMYOI Rochester, into a summary thematic form. By using vignettes and discussing, in the section that follows, Raymond Williams's concept of 'structures of feeling', I attempt an analytical procedure that acknowledges the largely unspoken territory of emotionality and affect in criminological research (Gadd and Jefferson 2007). The vignettes draw closely from contemporaneous fieldnotes and are presented loosely reworked to convey some of the immediacy of the experiences and emotions encountered in ethnographic fieldwork. The vignettes accommodate a reflexive approach consistent with ethnographic intentions to render rich, evocative and thick data that can convey to the reader something of the character of the research setting and researcher (see Phillips and Earle 2010).

Vignette 1: Chapter and Verse – Observations of the Parenting Class

At HMYOI Rochester, parenting classes were offered to prisoners who choose to attend the course rather than the conventional prison work-

shops. As the period of fieldwork began in July 2006 the course was approaching its conclusion and we were only able to attend a single session. The parenting class we observed was run by two middle-aged white women, external trainers, rather than prison officers. There were seven young men, two white and five black and mixed race. The session was scheduled to run for two hours, probably longer than the trainers would have liked, but it had to fit the prison workshop timetable. It was highly structured using flipcharts and worksheets. The seven young men and the trainers sat around a large wooden table at one end of the large and airy chaplaincy building. Coretta and I sat outside the group, in a formal observational role, not wanting to get involved in what was clearly a well-planned delivery by the two experienced trainers.

Our fieldnotes record that nearly all the young men seemed keen to demonstrate their competency in the craft of parenthood, how knowledgeable they were of the issues the trainers were presenting. My notes record an impression that 'one in particular seems to have swallowed a parenting handbook and likes to tell how it should be done'. The trainers appear to anticipate this display of masculine competency and wrote up on their flip charts various domestic scenarios: "You are tired . . .", "your child wants . . ." and so on'.

The trainers seemed to be trying, with rather limited success and a degree of weary familiarity, to encourage the young men to be a bit more realistic, to acknowledge some of the difficulties and struggles of being a parent and looking after a baby or young child.

The most animated part of the training session was a lively discussion about what makes a good dad. It involved extensive and expert comparisons of two dads on the popular television serial, *Eastenders*, one of whom was characterised as a 'slob dad' and the other a 'crook dad'. There was laughter and good humour over their ready identification with these two models of fatherhood but my fieldnotes record that the session as a whole felt a bit formulaic and contrived, a way of passing the time in a different way.

Vignette 2: Kiss Daddy Bye-bye – Prison Visits

Once a week, on Friday afternoons, prisoners are allowed visits. The visiting room is large and brightly lit with fixed tables and chairs but no barriers against mingling. It has a small play area for young children accompanying visiting partners and family members. I observed the young men as they were counted into the visits room wearing the bright orange security bibs that are used to distinguish them from the folk visiting them, by the watchful prison officers. I found myself quickly and unexpectedly affected by the emotions that the visits room evoked. It brought back vivid memories of my own experiences in prison and the bitter-sweet anguish of outside contact. I recognised the sudden intimacy, the awkward physicality, the sexual hunger of a young man extravagantly caressing his girlfriend, the exuberant disorderliness and chatter of little children. The children themselves

gravitated toward the play area and some were unspecifiable in terms of their relationship to any particular prisoner, until the moment the visiting session ended. In the small groups around the tables there were so many competing claims on the prisoner's attentions, so much emotional work to do in so little time. A prison officer loudly announced into a microphone: 'It's Four O'Clock! That is Time, Thankyou'. The harsh metal-toned amplification broke across the murmuring intimacy of conversation. From a table nearby I heard someone say: 'Kiss Daddy bye-bye then'. They rose, the groups around each table, and each prisoner was suddenly in an embrace, hugged close and hard, before their visitors parted and took their leave. The young men were patted down and searched before leaving, the cool of suspicion and security returned. One young man discovered his child had left a beaker of juice behind and he asked if it could be quickly taken to the gate so that his kid would not miss it and be upset – an officer obliged him without fuss. It was an odd moment because every article a prisoner has or touches in the visiting room is scrutinised with suspicion but the beaker incident seemed to transcend this, an ordinary tender moment in extraordinary harsh circumstances. The visiting room afforded me a rare and tiny glimpse into the young men's lives in relationship to family, children and intimates. Researching these relationships with sensitivity and respect is not always easy, as the next vignette demonstrates.

Vignette 3: An Interview Implodes

In one interview I was unexpectedly confronted with the dilemmas of initiating such discussion. I was interviewing Mario,⁴ a young man midway through serving a long sentence for a violent offence. He was a trusted prison orderly who had been chatty and helpful and we had established a good working rapport that included his volunteering to be interviewed.

The interview had progressed well, but when I got round to asking Mario about his child and about being a father, I think we were both surprised by how quickly and intensely it changed the interview, and the feelings it provoked in both of us. When I asked Mario whether his life changed much when his son was born he started to struggle to contain the bitterness he felt at being denied the opportunity to be a proper father, as the quote here indicates:

Mario: It changed my life when my son was born and that, yeah. It showed me that I've got big responsibilities. But there's nothing I can do right now. I've just got to get out and be there with my son. At the end of the day I'm just a man in a big bright orange bib who's got sweeties for him, that's all I am really.

Interviewer: Oh, you mean on a visit?

Mario: In everything. I come to jail when he was really young so all I am to him, he calls me 'daddy' and that, he knows who I am, I think, but to

him I'm just the sweetie man in a big bright orange bib. That's all I am mate. I can't really comment on that mate, sorry about that.

His comments about himself as a diminished man, almost a non-father, seemed to dislodge his self-possession. It was awkward because he suddenly appeared close to tears, and in emotional turmoil, disoriented and angry. It was, I think, an anger not directed at me for bringing these feelings to the surface, but anger at himself for failing to control them. As I realised the effect my question had had, I also felt upset and unsettled, troubled by his distress and anxious about what I had done. We moved swiftly on to another topic, but he suddenly remembered that 'he had to go', that he 'had a shower booked', so we would have to terminate the interview, which we did, though we agreed to complete it on another day. I could feel the urgency of his need to extricate himself from the interview.

The moment stayed with me, not only because I felt bad for causing him distress, and for the way it exposed the simple routine pains of imprisonment so frequently obscure to researchers or contained by prisoners, but because it stood in such contrast to the kind of by-the-book fathering discussed in the parenting class. I had unintentionally breached Mario's defences, defences carefully raised to endure the prison experience but defences found wanting when I came along with what I naïvely thought were relatively innocuous questions about being a father.

What feelings had I so clumsily bruised? It seemed to be about how men feel about being a father, more than what men do or do not do as fathers. Also, if I am honest, I felt the sting of recognition in Mario's moment of inarticulate vulnerability, of emotional awkwardness. I recognised that welling up of inchoate, but sentimental, feelings about being a father or talking of fathers, and the unnerving disorientation prompted by a loss of self-control. Although it is not something I can take much pride in, I felt we had shared something, although not in a particularly reciprocal way, that suggested a common 'structure of feeling' (Williams 1977). It is this, almost more than anything else, that contributes to my interest in analysing the idea of the fathers inside prison and the programme which I consider in the final vignette.

Vignette 4: Fathers Inside – Men Outside?

I attended two sessions of the 'Fathers Inside' group. The programme had more or less run its course by the time we entered the prison so I only caught the final session when the group was making presentations of the outcomes of its workshops to an invited prison audience, and then subsequently an informal, post-completion, gathering of the young men who had done the course. The convenors were two enthusiastic prison officers, one white mid-40s man, and one slightly younger white woman. They had clearly worked hard to establish a strong group identity among the participants who all wore T-Shirts printed with a 'Fathers Inside' logo.

The workshop presentations took the form of improvisational role plays developed over the course of the programme, around themes of family

dynamics, parenting and 'the perils of growing up'. The audience consisted of prison and voluntary sector staff with a sprinkling of young inmates invited by the participants. This fieldnote extract indicates the content:

... then a short skit on parenting styles. The guys have to play Mum, or Dad, and siblings, and clearly enjoy hamming it up a bit. The audience has to guess what kind of parenting is presented in each skit. The answers, held up on a large placard, are 'Permissive', 'Authoritarian' and 'Authoritative'.

Inevitably and somewhat predictably, much emphasis was placed on how only the latter could be considered effective.

The presentation was a good-humoured, celebratory event, telling me more about how the 'Fathers Inside' course was regarded as a significant achievement for the prison and for the participants than it did about the young men's interests in, and experiences of, being fathers or fathers-to-be. The event conveyed the pride among the young men, the officers attending and the regime, on accomplishing an innovative course.

At the final informal session which I attended the following week there was little more going on than the distribution of cake and congratulations. The female officer let the young men have a more or less free, unstructured session and I took the opportunity to chat about the group and my research. I found it hard going. It was still the early days of fieldwork and I had little to go on in terms of rapport. Standing outside the workshop room with a small group having a cigarette break I got to talking with one of the young men, as this fieldnote extract records:

Standing around in the sun/shade having a fag with a group I ask one about being a dad. He's got a 6 month old son (I ask his name and we have a nice chat about names) and a lot of disputes with this girlfriend and social services – all very messy. The advice from the other lads is to 'smack em both hard' [girlfriend and social worker]. A lot of talk about sex, girlfriends and shagging. Lots of physical enactment, pumping hips, miming of hand jobs, etc.

The impression I got from this brief encounter is of tangled relationships, raw with conflict, and of anguished, aggressive, urgent sexuality, so different from that of the previous week. Again I felt an uncomfortable glimmer of recognition from my own adolescence.

Who's the Daddy Now?

These vignettes are clearly selective, drawing from small parts of eight months of fieldwork and my own biography. They are constructed purposefully to draw attention to specific features of the research project's focus on men's gender identities and social relations. They are put together as a vehicle to highlight aspects of my encounter with the way young men think about being fathers and the way the prison thinks about young men. What I hope the vignettes suggest, and what I explore in the next section, is the double life of ideas about fathers in prison.

This double life draws from Bittman and Pixley's (1997) analysis of the myths and hopes that cluster around the idea of the nuclear family. Bittman and Pixley's work is helpful because they explore the functionality of the myth of the nuclear family. The well-established empirical reality of the diversity of family form and experience (that is, that the nuclear family is but one among many) is compared to the durability of myths about its singularity and pre-eminence. Using time-use diaries and interviews, their study examines the way men and women in families talk about the importance of such things as symmetry and intimacy even as their diaries reveal the opposite. Their work demonstrates how empirical work on family diversity and feminist exposure of its intimate violence seemingly fails to impact on the myth-image of the family, the myth's cultural standing, and its social and personal efficacy. This mythic quality, this double life, seems very evocative both of ideas about fathers and the prison's durability in the face of sustained empirical challenges to its efficacy.

On the one hand, in the parenting classes and 'Fathers Inside' course at HMYOI Rochester there is an official concern to engage the young men as fathers. This deploys, or perhaps seeks to activate, what Meek (2007b) has called the 'parenting selves' of young men in prison. These ideas are prompted by the question of the men's biological paternity and, as ever in the prison, their perceived personal and social deficits. The young men are met with an instrumental conception of identity as a role, with specific skills, aptitudes and attitudes that require replenishment or correction. Where once the State might have been concerned to have the prison make men fit for work, it now also wants them made fit for family life.

On the other hand, in the interview and visits' vignettes there are other ideas, much less coherent, troubled and difficult ideas about fathers, of being a father, which connect with equally troubled ideas about being a man. To use Raymond Williams's (1977) terminology, there is a structure of feeling around fathers' changing position in society, a sense that it is significant but remains less than intelligible.

Structures of feeling, Williams suggests, are 'social experiences in solution, as distinct from other social semantic formations which have been precipitated and are more evidently and immediately available' (pp.132-3). Structures of feeling as an analytical approach seems to fit with my ethnographic experiences in HMYOI Rochester because they are often found to be antagonistic both to explicit systems of values and beliefs (fathering is, men are, in crisis) and to dominant ideologies within a society (fathers exert discipline and control). As such they tend to exist at the threshold between the public and the private, the rational and the emotional. Williams (1977, p.130) offered some further elaboration of this mode of analysis by distinguishing structures of feeling as being 'residual' or 'emergent', indicating their trajectory through history. As he notes, they exist as a kind of feeling and thinking which is both social and material in effect, but also in a phase of development (or decline) that is neither fully articulated nor clearly defined. He observes how through the structure of feeling a culture might be:

reaching back to those meanings and values which were created in actual societies in the past, and which still seem to have significance because they represent areas of human experience, aspiration and achievement which the dominant culture neglects, undervalues, opposes, represses or even cannot recognize. (p.130)

It is to these troubled and troubling experiences that some recent ethnographic work on men as fathers are helpfully addressed (see Aitken 2005, 2009). Such research with men around their experiences of children, families, wives, partners, friends, work and leisure serves to indicate the ideological fatigue and contradictions in existing arrangements for fathering.

The vignettes help to indicate a structure of feeling that applies to the anxiety and ambivalence about what fathers are for (Hobson 2002; Collier and Sheldon 2008) and persistent tensions in the legitimacy of the rehabilitative functions of incarceration as prisons search for new and more effective ways of reshaping the lives of men. The structure of feeling reflects uncertainty about historical ideas of fatherhood as a simple set of biologically-precipitated entitlements and responsibilities, and ideas about fatherhood as a set of relations between men, women, children and the State, historically structured through patriarchy. In the research we conducted about men's identities in HMYOI Rochester we encountered this sense of a social experience surrounding fatherhood still very much 'in solution', indistinct but identifiable and present in a variety of forms that I have tried to represent in the vignettes.

In this structure of feeling there is a reification of fatherhood, of fatherhood as a self-contained identity rather than a set of more fluid and contingent social relations involving masculine authority over women and children, their love and care, and the State's role in managing these relations. In the prison context of the 'Fathers Inside' and parenting skills groups this 'off-the-peg', ready-made identity acquires even more rehabilitative, potentially redemptive, qualities as it appears to provide men and, not insignificantly, the prison itself, with a powerful narrative of change. As both Maruna (2001) and Walker (2010) suggest for men to change, in prison and out, they need a story that takes them from one sense of themselves to another, and being a father offers a very tempting script (Plummer 1994).

The re-idealisation of fatherhood (Nikunen 2006; Wall and Arnold 2007) as an aspirant social identity for men presents many dilemmas, not least for those in prison for whom it offers an officially-endorsed, though poorly-resourced, identity through which they can fashion their rehabilitation (Meek 2007a; Jarvis *et al.* 2004). Some ideas about fathers seek to position men safely in family relations and far from the anxious, displaced, masculinities that have surfaced in the wake of feminist and gay scholarship and social movements. These critically reposition gender and sexuality in wider social relations of power and hierarchy (Stein 2005). A father identity may be embraced by both prison and prisoner because it foregrounds the men's social capacities and identities rather than their criminal potential for relapse. However, it also offers men an instrumental and

strategic investment in simplistic and familiar gender binaries in which, for example, a learned fatherhood is counterposed against natural motherhood (Collier and Sheldon 2008; Featherstone 2010). It offers a rhetoric of fatherhood for young men to buy into at the very moment they are most effectively removed from the possibility of acting on its potentials in terms of financial resources, physical and emotional labour. The institutional and policy focus on father absence more implicitly signals wider anxiety around masculinity in the family, and men's identities more generally (Weeks 2005; Featherstone 2010). As such, it presents men in prison with the unnerving paradox of the punitive denial of the conventional pillars of masculine identity; work, authority in the family and heterosexual relations, while asserting the centrality of masculinity, by way of fatherhood, to their redemption. With many contemporary studies of motherhood revealing its contingent, variable form and the way many women's lives are tangled in its psychic and material insecurities (Thomson *et al.* 2011), the apparent simplicities of 'good fatherhood' may be as seductive as they are imaginary.

Furthermore, as Comfort (2008) discovered in her study of how men's relationships with women are sustained through a prison sentence, imprisonment redraws the boundaries and contexts of personal relationships with women so profoundly, and usually at men's expense, that both can be tempted into idealising the process as one of renegotiated commitment. 'Fatherhood', in particular, appears to offer a recognisably viable masculine identity but this imaginary masculine/criminal rehabilitation, as Comfort points out, does little more than sustain the myth of an effective prison sentence. For men it may offer a thinly-veiled, lightly-reconfigured, validation of traditional patriarchal preoccupations with a binary conception of gender: a conventional heterosexual masculinity in which paternity is the new virility – the good old father is back (Featherstone 2010). This is not to dismiss efforts by men in prison, penal practitioners and policy makers to address men's role in the care of children, but it does mean proceeding with caution, sensitive to the tenacious lure of power and privilege that patriarchal relations offer men, and the ways these are configured through the State. If, as both Sykes and Wacquant indicate, the State-as-father is so recognisable in the prison, I question whether it is within its gift to offer men a more egalitarian vision of gender and care (cf. Cowburn 2007).

It is worth recalling the popularity of the street and prison wing vernacular that asks who represents the ultimate in authority by posing the question: 'Who's the daddy?'. As Kyle, one of Crewe's Wellingborough respondents, remarks: 'We're a jail full of silver back gorillas [but] the game is not to try and be the daddy all the time, it's to try and work alongside the zoo-keeper' (Crewe 2009, p.271). Kyle's comment neatly captures the ironic but self-serving comfort men frequently take in atavistic images of themselves and their ambivalence toward institutional and familial forms of masculine authority. The urgent empirical question behind this image is: 'what, precisely, is a child-caring man?': 'Who's the daddy?' How is it, simultaneously, the man who is boss on the block and an object

of fear, the man in the prison uniform, the man who ensures the return of his child's forgotten beaker and the man who is undone by the loss of his capacity to be known and loved by his child?⁵

Notes

- 1 Available at: <http://www.open.ac.uk/socialsciences/identities/findings/Phillips.pdf> (accessed 8 April 2012).
- 2 In a young offender institution (YOI), young men aged 18-21 years are kept apart from older men in the adult prison system. HMYOI Rochester held approximately 400 young men.
- 3 The research team consisted of the principal investigator, Dr Coretta Phillips from the LSE and the author. The collective term is used to reflect our joint enterprise in conducting the research, although the author remains solely responsible for the content of this article.
- 4 Not his real name.
- 5 The author would like to thank the governor, officers and young men held at HMYOI Rochester for their co-operation. He also thanks the two anonymous *Howard Journal* reviewers for helpful comments. Coretta Phillips of the LSE remains a source of inspiration, advice and guidance.

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