

‘Not looking hard enough: masculinity, emotion and prison research’

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Abstract

In her recent article on autoethnography and emotion in prison research, Jewkes (2011) suggests that ‘most prison studies remain surprisingly ungendered texts’, and that – on the whole – the scholars who have written about the emotional dimensions of prison research have been women. This article explores both of these claims. First, it draws attention to areas of prison research in which male researchers have been relatively reflexive about matters of emotion and masculinity, while also highlighting the way that some of the emotional dimensions of prison research can be identified even within the classic studies of prison sociology. Second, it suggests that one of the most striking omissions from most studies of men’s imprisonment is the analysis of ‘homosocial relations’ between men – relations defined by flows of masculine intimacy that are submerged or expressed indirectly. Third, it describes some of the author’s experiences as a man undertaking research with imprisoned men, highlighting the degree to which entwined discourses of masculinity and class shaped the research process.

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Something seems to happen to people when they meet a journalist, and what happens is exactly the opposite of what one would expect. One would expect extreme wariness and caution ... but in fact childish trust and impetuosity are far more common ... The subject becomes a kind of child of the writer, regarding him as a permissive, all-accepting, all-forgiving mother, and expecting that the book will be written by her. Of course, the book is written by the strict, all-noticing, unforgiving father (Malcolm 1990: 32)

In her article on ‘Doing prison research differently’, Yvonne Jewkes argues, among other things, that the emotional qualities of prison research are rarely discussed in writing, and when they are, their discussants tend to be female. Jewkes makes a number of connected points, noting that ‘Most prison studies remain surprisingly ungendered texts’ (Jewkes, 2011: 68), and indicating that the emotional dimensions of prison life deserve greater attention. Janet Malcolm’s description of the practice of serious journalism – above – therefore seems highly salient: in her (somewhat essentialist) schema, while the journalist-as-researcher is (in the eyes of the subject) a feminine figure - emotionally sentient and compassionate – as a writer, he becomes an emotionally-denuded male. Having engaged emotionally in order to obtain material, the writer undergoes an affective sex change as s/he retreats to the domain of their desk. Yet if, as Jewkes and others suggest, the male writer also writes his maleness out of the text, the reader is confronted with a text that both disregards the emotions of its subject and omits the emotional and gendered experiences of its scribe.

Rather than seeking to present a complete response to Jewkes’s argument, this article seeks to interrogate and build upon Jewkes’ claims about the relatively de-gendered and unemotional qualities of prison scholarship, focussing on three main areas. First, it draws attention to one important sub-field of prison research in which male researchers have been relatively reflexive about matters of emotion and masculinity, while also highlighting the way that the emotional dimensions of prison research can be identified even within the classic studies of prison sociology, if one looks beneath the surface appearance of writerly forms of scholarly detachment. Second, it suggests that one of the most striking omissions from most studies of men’s imprisonment is the analysis of ‘homosocial relations’ between men – relations defined by flows of masculine intimacy that are either submerged or expressed indirectly. Third, in the spirit of addressing Jewkes’ concerns about the ‘pattern of gendered disclosure’ within prison sociology, and in order to provide a brief guide to the field, it describes some of the author’s experiences as a man undertaking research with imprisoned men, highlighting the degree to which entwined discourses of masculinity and class shape the research process.

Autoethnography and emotion

While it is clear that Jewkes’s article is a general enjoinder to prison researchers to acknowledge and discuss the emotional qualities of their work, it is worth unpicking the details of her case. For, on close reading, Jewkes seems to be arguing various related points, most of which are not especially new to social science, but whose differences are relevant to the article that follows and therefore should be outlined. Jewkes’s primary argument is that researchers should interrogate their own psychic interiors and personal histories in order to understand and explain the roots of their curiosity, their actions and responses in the field, and their research roles. As Jewkes notes, our subjective experiences shape ‘every aspect of the research process from choice of project to presentation of “findings” whether consciously or unconsciously so’ (p65). Drawing on Hunt (1989: 42) Jewkes goes on to make a different point, that ‘subjectivity and the self *always* intrude in research, to the extent where “fieldwork is, in part, the discovery of the self through the detour of the other”’. In other words, the

emotions that we experience during the research process may help us better understand ourselves. Elsewhere, Jewkes sees emotions as a *resource* that assists our understanding of the world that we are studying. The feelings generated by prison research are ‘eminently sociological’ (Garot 2004: 736, cited in Jewkes 2011: 64), and can help the ethnographer to become familiar with the ‘emotional vocabulary’ of the host institution (p64). Here, Jewkes notes the importance of emotion as a research topic, although there seems to be some slippage between the contention that emotions are worthy objects of analysis and the argument that their study necessitates the mobilisation and exposure of personal feelings and emotions (see p66). Finally, Jewkes makes a further argument that prison researchers should acknowledge the ‘emotional demands’ and ‘emotion work’ (p64) that prison ethnography entails, for, by not doing so, they ‘are doing a disservice to those who follow them ... who frequently approach the field with high levels of anxiety’ (64) and who would benefit from having a greater awareness of what they are likely to ‘feel’ when they enter the prison environment.

Emotions, feelings, and subjective experiences therefore carry a number of roles and functions in Jewkes’s argument. They shape our research interests and decisions, and their documentation therefore illuminates the shape and findings of our studies (*emotions as a determinant*). They provide a window on the soul and self (*emotions as discovery*). They constitute a form of knowledge about the world being studied, such that our emotional sensitivity enables a superior form of data collection (*emotions as a resource*). They are worthy of analysis as part of the world being studied (*emotions as a topic*); and their expression is a kind of professional responsibility to a future generation of prison scholars, making more transparent the personal demands and realities of prison research (*emotions as a guide*).

Jewkes’s case is well made, and I do not dispute much of it. But I think it is more difficult than she implies to reflect in meaningful ways on the links between our emotional or biographical experiences and the outcomes of our research. By definition, it is almost impossible for us to reflect seriously on the *un*-conscious drives that motivate our research. And while it may be easier for us to work out our *sub*-conscious blind-spots and biases, it is difficult to do so as a sole researcher – without the assistance of a colleague, whose interpretation of the same environment and interactions turns out to differ from our own. Alison Liebling has noted that, in a study of high-security prisons, prisoners told her male colleague but not her about the informal economy in sexual favours (see King and Liebling 2008), but it is hard to see how, without the presence of her co-researcher, she could have known what she was not being told. Likewise, Coretta Phillips and Rod Earle (2010: 374) recognise that they were better able to reflect upon their different experiences of fieldwork, and their specific responses to interview transcripts, due to the particular configuration of their research team, ‘with its classically categorical subaltern and superordinate identities and biographical histories’.

Second, we should be careful not to be too credulous of our field emotions, especially compared to other forms of knowledge, as if there is something more truthful about these responses because they ‘come from within’. As Jewkes recognises, an entire sub-field of study should alert us to the fact that our emotional states are – at least – socially constructed, so that they are at the same time highly subjective, culturally specific and by no means free from the kinds of distortions that we guard against when assessing other forms of knowledge. When we experience such feelings as fear or rage, it is hard to gauge how our threshold compares to anyone else’s, the degree to which our sensitivities are justified by external circumstances, or the extent to which they are shaped by broader social discourses of which we may be unaware. Furthermore, as Williams (2002) argues, in her response to Erich Goode’s (2002) controversial article on the implications of sexual involvement between researchers and their participants, there are risks that the closer and more intimate we are with those who we study, the more likely that our unconscious feelings may cloud or ‘short-circuit’ what she calls ‘the thinking mind’ (Williams 2002: 558). I think it

is also worth noting that the ‘information and insight’ (Goode 2002: 531) that intimacy may generate is of a particular kind. It may enhance *Verstehen* and compassion (as Goode’s article strongly suggests), but this is a certain kind of knowledge - that of subjective understanding or private and personal experiences – and it may in fact inhibit our ability to understand the factors that shape and condition those very understandings and experiences. This is not to say that emotion, attachment and identification are not important research resources; only that they should be subjected to reflexive interrogation (see Phillips and Earle 2010), rather than valorised uncritically. Whether doing this constitutes the best use of our time and intellectual resources is another matter.

Often too, we cannot see our prejudices and presumptions until many years after the time when we most need to be aware of them, as I suggest below. None of this is to cast any doubt on the importance of trying to contemplate one’s personal biases and emotional investments – only to suggest that we should not under-estimate the difficulties of coming to useful conclusions about how they have shaped our work until sometime after the ink is dry. Nonetheless – or, perhaps, in the spirit of this observation – in the final section of this article, I try to reflect back on how my masculine identity, and personal circumstances, shaped the dynamics of my fieldwork. I do so with some trepidation, but in the spirit of illuminating for others some significant features of the research environment. Prior to this, I first take issue with some of Jewkes’s claims about the absence of reflexive, gendered engagement within the field of prison research, arguing that emotions are both a loud and quiet presence in a considerable amount of prison scholarship written by men, particularly those studying imprisoned male sex offenders. In the article’s second section, as a response to one of Jewkes’s concerns, my focus is (masculine) emotion as a research topic, in particular, the striking absence within most studies of men’s imprisonment of descriptions of the underlying emotional dynamics that shape relations between men.

Prison research, emotion and gender

Gender is a central theme in Jewkes’s article. Jewkes notes that the majority of the researchers who have been willing to discuss their experiences and emotions while undertaking fieldwork in prisons have been women, and that their disclosures ‘might be thought of as “(stereo)typically” female’ (p68). Linking emotion to gender, she then comments that the latter is absent from most prison studies. Piacentini (2004: 20) makes a similar argument:

Aside from feminist prison research, where the discussion centres on the construction of various identities, as a counter to the predominantly male world of the prison, the discussion of gender remains underexplored.

The particular gender dynamic that is cited here is that of the female researcher and the male prison. As Jewkes suggests, there may be particular dilemmas and anxieties engendered by being a woman in an institution that is dominated by men, centring particularly on matters of self-presentation and professional credibility. Jewkes (2011: 68) then calls for further reflection on matters of gender, emotion and prison research:

...the experience of being a female researcher in a men’s prison or a male researcher in a women’s prison still brings with it a set of dynamics that I would expect to be worthy of a great deal more comment.¹

Notwithstanding a note in parentheses that men researching in male prisons and women in female prisons would also ‘give rise to fascinating issues and dilemmas of their own’ (p68),

¹ I might also suggest that one reason why there is so little reflexive commentary by male researchers in women’s prisons is that the study of women’s prisons has, in recent years (in the UK, certainly), been undertaken overwhelmingly by women.

Jewkes's focus is intriguing. For the implied assumption that gender dynamics are more evident or interesting in cross-sex situations seems to me mistaken. Indeed, there is considerable evidence of male researchers either explicitly reflecting on their masculinity, or implicitly exposing it, through researching other men, and of male writers expressing their emotions, albeit often indirectly, in ways that provide considerable insight – of the kind Jewkes endorses – into the emotional dynamics of prison research.

Most recently, in his description of entering Los Angeles County Jail, Loic Wacquant (2002: 378) describes himself as 'literally gasping trying to get my emotions under control', as he tries to contain 'the nauseating feeling of being a voyeur, and intruder into this plagued space'. Leaving the prison, embarrassed at his own complicity, and shocked by the conditions he has witnessed, he conveys the turmoil and sentiments generated by his visit:

... I am like *numb* coming out of this long afternoon inside [the prison], and I drive silently straight to the beach, to wallow in fresh air and wade in the waves, as if to 'cleanse' myself of all I've seen, heard, and sensed. I feel so bad, like scrambled eggs, that I chafe at writing up my notes until the following Tuesday. ... Every time my mind drifts back to it, it seems like a bad movie, a nightmare, the vision of an evil 'other world' that cannot actually exist' (2002 82-3)

From a quite different angle – based on his immersive research into the experiences of correctional officers in California – Mark Fleisher (1989) details his transition from a naïve and deeply anxious trainee officer ("Just don't look as scared as you feel", I told myself' (p96); 'at times I felt like carrion being circled by buzzards' [p100]), to a man who is not only fully accepted by his staff peers (his respect being earned 'by participating in every correctional activity, particularly in "emergencies" – fights, assaults, sticking, escapes, and a killing' [p108]), but is so fully acculturated into officer culture that he celebrates the stabbing of an inmate he dislikes (indeed, is regretful that the injury is not more severe). Fleisher's candid, reflexive account of how violence gave him a sense of belonging and credibility among staff, and his creeping loss of objectivity, is revealing both about his inner experience and the terms of prison officer culture.

Even within the classic texts of prison sociology, one finds manifest expressions of emotional feelings. In *Prisons in Turmoil*, John Irwin (1980) is open about his fury at the de-humanization of prisoners, his intense 'hate and fear of prison', while, in the appendix to *Stateville*, James Jacobs (1977) does not expose himself emotionally, as such, but he provides a frank account of the difficulties of managing demands for help from prisoners, negotiating ongoing rumours about his loyalties and ethnic heritage, and his gradual acceptance by the prison gangs whose consent he needed in order to operate safely as a fieldworker. His description of being 'summoned' to the cell of one of these leaders to be warned about the questions he was asking, and of receiving a note from a white inmate addressing him as a 'Super Liberal Piece of Shit' and a 'phoney cock sucker' (p223), due to his ongoing relations with Black prisoners, conveys fear with understated precision. Jacobs goes on to talk about his 'self-conception [being] severely threatened' by some of the challenges to his role as observer (p228), and notes bluntly that it is 'depressing to enter the din of the cellhouse, to observe men shouting at you while gripping the bars of their steel cages ... it is scarcely possible not to be hounded by the feeling that one does not care enough' (228). This might not constitute the kind of deep psychic reflection that some of the researchers cited by Jewkes have engaged in, but it provides a form of insight into both the research experience and the social dynamics of the prison that is often missing from more self-consciously 'reflexive' accounts.²

² Here, I am thinking of forms of reflexivity which tell us almost exclusively about the researcher, at the expense of helping us understand either the research process or any salient, substantive issues. Further, it is not just that some scholars emote and reflect in a manner that

Other classic texts, such as Sykes's (1958) *The Society of Captives*, Goffman's (1961) *Asylums*, and Mathiesen's (1965) *The Defences of the Weak*, are written with a style of dry detachment, in which the drives and emotions of the author are absent, that is characteristic of the era. The insights that we gain into the autoethnographic components of *The Society of Captives* can be found in Sykes's (1995) reflections, almost four decades after its publication, on 'The structural-functional perspective on imprisonment'. Aside from his account of the origins of his study, and the intellectual context in which it was written, Gresham Sykes notes that his 'experience in the army had persuaded me that, for better or for worse, people often became whatever they were assigned regardless of personal proclivities and skills' (p358). This glimpse of autobiographical detail, at a time when structural-functionalism was the dominant paradigm in sociological research, explains a great deal about the assumptions built into Sykes's analysis: his emphasis on structure over agency, and his disregard for the significance of inmates' pre-prison characteristics. Likewise, Sykes speculates that the reasons why he – and other researchers of the time – neglected the relevance of race and ethnicity to the study of prisoner social life were, first, that 'the sociologists writing about the prison were almost exclusively white' (which may have shaped both their interests and the prisoners with whom they established rapport), and, second, that 'there was an assumption that the social systems of black and white inmates ... were essentially the same' (1995: 363).

A more gendered form of reflexivity can also be identified within certain sub-fields of prison sociology. One clear – though little known – example of the form of masculine reflexivity whose absence Jewkes laments is Richard Thurston's (1996) account of collecting the life stories of male prisoners, in which he documents the need to navigate various kinds of masculinity politics within the prison. First, he describes his discomfort at the implicit requirement to be 'one of the boys' (p142) even when discussing his research aims with the senior managers of the prison he was working within. Reflecting further on the intricacies of undertaking prison research as a middle-class white man, he notes the process of being sized up by men in positions of authority, of needing to meet their definition of 'legitimate masculinity', and thus the way in which prison managers distanced themselves morally from prisoners by contrasting their gendered, professional identity against 'criminally dangerous men' (p142):

My experiences of entering this arena gave an insight then into the way the prison culture was perceived and communicated by those men with both formal and informal investments in sustaining particular identities and relations of power/knowledge from the top of the prison hierarchy. This involved the normalization of certain masculinities and, through this, the regulation and control of others. (Thurston 1996: 143)

Here, Thurston describes the way that his plans to interview men in the prison's vulnerable prisoners' unit were met with disparagement by some prison officers, with the result that he felt somewhat deterred from pursuing his research there. His sense that his own masculine status was diminished in the eyes of some staff by his willingness to listen to men whom they considered un-manly gave him direct insight into a similar process by which prison staff working with vulnerable prisoners were likewise denigrated.

It is significant that much of Thurston's discussion develops around his interest in studying imprisoned sex offenders, for this sub-field offers a fertile seam of literature in which male

overshadows their findings (or, indeed, write about these matters at an opportunity cost of detailing their findings at all), but that declarations of the researcher's emotional suffering sometimes seem designed primarily to demonstrate their ethical credentials: their superior capacity to identify with the disadvantaged and oppressed. This form of competitive moral positioning – 'I empathise more than you do' – is highly unsavoury.

researchers engage in open discussion of their personal feelings, their masculine self-concepts, and their fieldwork experiences. Malcolm Cowburn, for example, has reflected on the difficulties of being a pro-feminist researcher in prisons, in terms of his relationships with prisoners and with prison staff. In relation to the latter, he describes having to resist being collusive in sexist banter without making his position as a researcher untenable:

Daily I encountered behaviours of male staff that were both misogynistic and hostile to any form of masculinity that that did not appear to subscribe to the dominant way of behaving as a man. Developing empirical practices that were congruent with my epistemological standpoint and yet did not jeopardise the research project required me to reflect on how to behave in an ethical and anti-sexist manner that did not cause me to be viewed as alien by the majority of men working in the prison. (Cowburn 2007).

Here, Cowburn notes that his predicament was not comparable to the scrutiny and hostility experienced by female researchers, such as Genders and Players (1995), and Pauline Morris (1963), yet – as I discuss below – the parallels seem worthy of further comment.

In relation to prisoners, Cowburn details his inability to suppress his irritation as one interviewee claimed that his repeated abuse of his own daughters was an act of love. Such concerns about the potential for colluding in sex offender narratives are also expressed in Nicholas Blagden and Sarah Pemberton's (2010) article on the challenges of undertaking qualitative research with imprisoned sex offenders. While the female co-author was subjected to various forms of sexualisation, the male researcher 'also experienced uncomfortable experiences ... mainly centred on issues of masculinity' (p273), in particular, attempts to co-opt him into assumptions about the appeal of 'rough sex' (p273). Elsewhere, and to give a final example at this point, male researchers interviewing imprisoned male sex offenders have engaged in extended ethical deliberations about their personal loyalties and experiences. Waldram (2007) talks of being exposed to 'stories that can haunt, rattle, and challenge one's belief in a moral world and the inherent goodness of humankind', and his personal confusion, 'as a father and a husband and a member of the community' not just about how violent sex offenders should be treated (p966, emphasis added), but whether it is legitimate even to listen to and report their stories. How, Waldram asks, does one reconcile the feelings of disgust that the stories of our participants might engender with the feelings of warmth and empathy that our research elicits?

My aim here is partly to point out that there are pockets of prison research in which the 'pattern of gendered disclosure' that Jewkes identifies (p68) does not entirely hold. It is also to raise a question about why male researchers seem most aware of their masculinity when researching particular kinds of male prisoners. Interviews with sex offenders seem to bring into relief male scholar's self-conceptions in ways that research with mainstream male prisoners do not, despite the fact that *both* groups engage researchers in collusive discussions about natural masculinity to rationalise their actions and attitudes. Perhaps the ways in which male researchers identify across the interview table with male sex offenders, and the degree to which the latter often appear completely ordinary *as men*, exposes the continuum upon which both normative heterosexuality and criminally deviant masculine sexuality lie. While the resulting discomfort generates the kinds of open reflections and disavowals that I have noted above, there is greater silence when researchers identify positively with more heroic masculinities.

Cohen and Taylor's (1972) *Psychological Survival* thus provides an interesting sub-example, for it is a text in which gendered sentiments are not exactly absent from the text, but are submerged within it (what Phillips and Earle (2010: 362) call 'a kind of textual laryngitis in which the author's voice is apparently silent, though everywhere present and nowhere identifiable'). As Jones and Fowles (1984) note (perhaps rather harshly), Cohen and Taylor imply throughout their book that the long-term prisoners in their study – who they befriended

with a level of intimacy that itself seems significant – are heroic figures, such as Scott of the Antarctic, or are collectively comparable with non-criminal deviant subcultures. While the former comparisons are legitimate, in that Cohen and Taylor are trying to find a means of understanding the experience of long-term isolation, one certainly detects a quiver of masculine admiration felt by Cohen and Taylor for the urbane gangsters in their study, and a satisfaction in the ‘reciprocal granting of status between us and them’ (1972: 33).³ That these feelings of identification are secreted in the text, rather than expressed directly, is unsurprising for a host of reasons, and seems indicative of the somewhat macho, ‘outward bound’ character of other sociological studies of prison life (see Walker and Worrall 2000). For current purposes, the most relevant relates to the fact that men’s emotional expressions are so often oblique, disguised, or communicated indirectly.

Looking harder: homosocial relations among male prisoners

It is in some sense ironic that, despite the concealed flows of admiration between prison researchers and prisoners that I have highlighted above, one of the most significant absences in prison sociology is the analysis of emotional flows between men in prison. As I have argued elsewhere (Crewe 2006), most of the literature on prison masculinities focuses on the machismo of the prison environment, the tendency of prisoners to impugn signs of weakness and femininity, and the subsequent impulse for prisoners to ‘mask’ emotional expression and put on ‘fronts’ of bravado and aggression. It is undeniable that the public culture of most men’s prisons is characterised by a particular kind of emotionally taut masculine performance, yet it is surprising how little attention has been given either to the interior emotional worlds of male prisoners and to the underlying affective dynamics between them.⁴ Indeed, it might be precisely because the environment requires prisoners to control their emotions that it has such an emotional under-life (see Crewe et al, under review). Certainly, masculinity flows in all kinds of ways in prison, and it is incumbent on researchers to look beyond its surface expressions if they are to understand the prison experience, prison masculinities and the prisoner social world.

In seeking to describe some of these relationships between men, I want to draw on the concepts of ‘homosocial relations’ and ‘homosocial desire’, as elaborated by Jean Lipman-Blumen (1976) and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (1985) respectively. In both texts, the term ‘homosocial’ refers to same-sex social bonds (‘the seeking, enjoyment, and/or preference for the company of the same sex’ [Lipman-Blumen 1976: 16]), while ‘desire’ is used not to refer to sexual yearning, but a broader structure of emotion: an affective charge or impulse, which might just as likely be manifested in hostility as in outward attraction.⁵ Sedgwick’s aim is – in part – to highlight how the flows of emotion between men, as conveyed in 18th and 19th century English literary culture were often channelled through alternative forms. Thus, she

³ In ‘Talking about Prison Blues’, the chapter they published five years after *Psychological Survival*, Cohen and Taylor (1977) engage in a form of intellectual rather than autoethnographic retrospection, regretting that they had ‘bolted for sociological cover’ (p75) by developing a predictive typology of their participants (‘This was comparison for comparison’s sake, a sociological fetish about generalisation at the expense of differentiation’ [p75]). Given the sensitivity in their study to matters of subjectivity and self-identity, it is perhaps surprising that they were not more attentive to their own personal preoccupations investments.

⁴ The absence of such work, with few exceptions, is particularly striking given the attention paid to the emotional components of ‘masculine’ work in other contexts, such as management (e.g. Roper 1994) and advertising (e.g. Nixon 2003).

⁵ Here, then, I am not referring to the ‘renegade and dissident’ sexualities among both male and female prisoners, identified by Kunzel (2008: 3) in her historical account of intimate sexual relations in prisons.

argues that in love triangles with women at the centre, the bonds between the male love rivals tended to be stronger than those between each man and the ostensible focus of longing. Women served as conduits for the expression of desire between men. In Lipman-Blumen's (1976: 16) terms, in a world in which men can meet most of their needs through other men, since men control most desirable resources, women 'in turn become resources which men can use to further their eminence in the homosocial world of men'.

A similar point has been made by anthropologists, who analyse marriage as a symbolic and economic transaction between groups of men, in which women are the token of exchange. In all kinds of ways, men express their identifications with other men – often men who are more powerful – by steering them through female forms, and their heterosexuality (though not in itself phoney) has a higher purpose of bonding them to other men. Forms of homosocial bonding also define and regulate male relationships. Sexual and sexist joking, rites of passage, shared mythologies, and collective acts of watching and chasing women serve to create a highly bounded group identity, which bonds certain kinds of men together, while excluding alternative masculinities (Lipman-Blumen 1976; Thurnell-Read 2012). Masculinities are thus forged and affirmed in and for a direct male audience, or through what Holland et al (1998) call a 'male-in-the-head' – an imagined male judiciary (see also Kimmel 1994; Mac an Ghail 1994; Flood 2008), to whom they men feel accountable. Thus, in Holland et al's study of young people's sexual experiences, male interviewees described having 'something to chat about' (p181) – to their male peers – once they had lost their virginity, while Flood (2008) cites an interviewee who imagines his peers approvingly watching him receive sexual pleasure ('If the boys could see me now' p348).

Because 'manhood' is granted by the male peer group, and men need the approval of their peers, they engage in processes both of identification and competition with other in-group men (Flood 2008). Their feelings towards each other are thus complex, involving both closeness and distance. Kiesling (2005) argues that they are communicated through 'topic indirectness', whereby subject matters such as sport are conduits for forms of gossip and intimacy, 'social indirectness', whereby affection is expressed via conflict and competitiveness, and through a form of 'addressee indirectness', in which feelings towards individuals are communicated through pledges to a collective. Even if one does not buy these analyses in their entirety, the key points are surely instructive: the absence of openly or publicly stated affective bonds between men is no indication of an absence of feeling, but these feelings are often expressed obliquely.

Prisons – like other single-sex total institutions (Goffman 1961) – appear to be homosocial institutions *par excellence*. They create a form of forced intimacy, in which status must be achieved within a same-sex community, and 'a single personal relationship may be called upon to sustain the various functions which would be spread across several other friends in outside life' (Cohen and Taylor 1972: 75-6). The relationships that develop as a result may be sexual, non-sexual, or less easy to categorise. To quote a life-sentence prisoner from Appleton's (2010) study:

Oh, in prison I was very, very close to a lot of men without being a homosexual or anything like that. It's just I felt that when I was inside I was part and parcel of an extended family (Appleton 2010: 147)

Conversation centres on the same kind of sexual storytelling, bragging (about criminal activity and the accumulation of wealth), and 'war stories' (e.g. about experiences 'back in the day' in 'tough nicks' and austere conditions) that have been described in other homosocial contexts (see, for example, Flood 2008). These stories appear to bond prisoners through shared reference points and macho nostalgia, and to grant them differential status according to their experience of penal, criminal and sexual activity (see Crewe 2009).

Homosocial flows of desire and emotion are expressed in prison in a range of relational forms, including deep friendships, irrationally powerful loyalties, and unspoken intimacies. First, then, prisons are characterised by a range of mundane but intimate rituals, which reflect the unavoidably domestic nature of the total institution (see Crawley 2004). Prisoners develop forms of closeness through the repetition of these routines – such as the making of tea, and the watching of television, for example – which echo familiar practices of home and family:

With Tony, I talk with him, I can have a laugh with him. We don't talk about the same things over and over again. We watch the news, we talk about the world, we've got the same sort of interests. I buy a lot of things like coffee, and food, you know – I buy cakes and sweeties and stuff like that. And Tony doesn't have much, so I share what I have with him. (Den)

Through such forms, and sometimes explicitly, prisoners express for each other forms of concern and sensitivity, as the following quotes suggest:

We all sit there in a cell, having a cup of coffee and you can tell if one of us is upset because they'll be not their usual self. We'll say 'What's the matter?' and they'll go 'Oh it don't matter'; 'Come on, you can tell us'. (Aaron)

I always said to him when he was here, 'You're not going to come back, are you?' and he says 'No, no', and just before he got out I said to him, 'You're not going to come back are you?', and he hesitated and said: 'I don't know, I don't know what I'm going to do when I get out' [...]. If he's done well and he's doing alright then I'm buzzing for him'. (Ian)

Prisoners recovering from serious drug addiction often talk tenderly of cell-mates or workshop companions who have supported their efforts to rebuild their self-esteem and external relationships. Long-term prisoners describe their bittersweet feelings at seeing those with shorter terms move on – happy that their friends are progressing ('I want to see the back of Greg. I want him to get out and do something decent with himself' [Alfie]), but upset to lose their companionship: 'I'm sad to see him go, because I enjoy his company sometimes' [Alfie]). In public spaces, such sentiments tend to be expressed implicitly, through jokes and warnings - 'Everyone has been telling me to stay off the drugs when I get out or I'll end up back in prison' – or statements whose inverted forms - 'you'll be back!' – communicate a form of sardonic affection.

Manifestations of closeness and care are also seen in non-verbal exchanges, such as the manner in which prisoners pass - almost automatically – the final drags of their roll-up cigarettes to their friends and associates. They sit awkwardly against prisoners' claims that 'in prison, kindness is [always] taken for weakness'. Indeed, there appears to be a tension in prisons between the imperative for a form of social distance and emotional defensiveness on the one hand and the basic social needs of company, conversation and affiliation on the other:

If people say 'you've got to be loyal to yourself', that's not true. You might think of yourself first, like you make sure you've got your own burn before you buy burn for him, but it definitely goes more than just yourself: you gotta think of your group. [...] I pick friends because I need people to talk to, people I can relate to, that are on the same level as me. It helps me get through my bird.

You are gonna get kindness cos it exists in all social groupings. You can't exist without it, you'd be in a state of total war you know what I mean if things like that didn't exist. (Nathan)

One reason, then, why prisoners' feelings about their friendships are so often concealed is that admitting to them leaves one open to ridicule and exploitation. Emotion suggests dependence, and, in prison, to feel or be seen as dependent is dangerous. Feelings of emotion must therefore be suppressed, or expressed to a wider social fraternity. As Kiesling (2005: 721) argues, such pledges of collective loyalty are: 'are events that facilitate the indirect expression of homosociality through prescribed speech or through participation frameworks in which there is no single addressee'. In prisons in the UK, these fraternities include gangs from outside prison, collective cultures derived from religions, such as Islam (see Liebling et al 2011), and – most commonly – local communities, organised around postcodes [zipcodes] or cities. In relation to the latter, prisoners reinforce both their commitment to home areas, and the commitment of (people from) those areas to them:

If someone was to have any grief with any of the Birmingham lads, I'd have his back. Because he's totally from Birmingham. It doesn't matter what he looks like, he's still from Birmingham. (Cameron)

Coventry lad will stick together more than anybody else. I've seen it in Winson Green prison where a Birmingham lad has attacked a Coventry lad and every single Cov lad that was on that yard got involved in the fight. ... Cov lads have always, always, staunchly looked after their own. You could be in the yard and you could be a Cov lad and you might not know the other ten Cov lads there, but if somebody attacked you, them ten Cov lads will come and help you out. That's standard. (Danny)

While these commitments are in some ways instrumental (see Crewe 2009), they also carry significant emotional weight. When prisoners on a wing explain with relish that 'Leicester runs this wing' – i.e. not 'prisoners from Leicester'— they are expressing collective pride, a sense of belonging and a feeling of personal gratification about their membership of a dominant social grouping.

In other kinds of emotional connections, the basis of identification has clear roots in concepts of self and family. Here, two prisoners – one (Darren) a generation older than the other (Cameron) – explain the basis of their friendship:

How come you bonded with Cameron?

Because I like Cameron. Because for the simple fact – well, he's loud, he's very, very loud. But he reminds me of myself when I was that age, when I was twenty-one.

You've got mates and that, but Darren is a real friend. I bought him a shampoo, last week, knowing he's got no hair just as a joke, and we had a laugh about that. He got me a shirt for Christmas, and I give him some phonecards and one of my toiletries. There's not many people who'd do that in jail, who'll say 'Here you are son, here's your Christmas present'. We ain't got no things to give, but I'd give Darren fucking anything mate. [...] He looks at me as his son [...] I can always go to him for advice. I fully trust him a hundred per cent. (Cameron)

Similarly, the following extract contains themes of generational identification and brotherhood:

With Mick, I class him as a proper friend because we were padded up together, and when he went on B wing, I went on G wing, we still kept in contact. ... He's given me his home address and his mum's address. He writes letters saying, 'I'm out in a couple of weeks, if there is anything you need, just ask me'. We got on like brothers, basically better than brothers. Mick, he used to tell me everything. He said that when he was my age, he used to drink a lot as well, and piss the bed. Because I'm an alcoholic [and] one time I got that paralytic I pissed the bed, I could tell Mick but not

other people. (Jordan)

Homosocial desire is expressed in its truest form in the intense fraternities of prison cliques. When they describe such relationships, while prisoners almost never use overtly 'affectionate' terminology, as such, their metaphors are suggestive of potent emotional bonds:

I could be going home tomorrow, and you could have a beef tonight and I'd be there the next day. I'm still there for you. Because it's a loyalty thing. [...] It's a B[rethren] thing and we're all there. It's a family affair. (VJ)

[If] one of me mates got in some trouble and he needed some help, I'd help him. If it was the morning I was getting out, I wouldn't turn me back on him. If they turned their back on me then yeah it would do me head in ... because I would back them up a hundred percent no matter what the consequences were. If it meant I'd have to come back and get an extra jail sentence then so be it. (Bradley)

Such statements of unmitigated mutual support are generally expressed as markers of masculinity, rather than emotional commitment. But the language of personal umbrage ('I'd take offence if anyone hurt them [or] hurt their family' [Ashley]), trust ('there are two friends in this prison] that I trust with my life, really, really trust with my life' [Bradley]) – and sacrifice 'If somebody starts a fight with him, no matter who they were, I'd stick up for him' (Pierce) are suggestive of deeper feelings.

As masculinity scholars have argued, men may long for the 'purity' of these intense homosocial relationships – a nostalgia for the solidarity of boyhood friendships, untainted by the interference of heterosexual desire (see Kiesling 2005: 702) – but, at the same time, these forms of intimacy and solidarity threaten to spill over into dependency or real desire, imperilling masculine gender roles (Britton 1990). (As Sedgwick (1985: 89) notes: 'For a man to be a man's man is separated only by an invisible, carefully blurred, always-already-crossed line from being "interested in men"'). As a result, Segal (1990) suggests, in environments like boarding schools and the military – where, as in prison, men are bonded by need, deprivation and the absence of women – men's relationships with each other are carefully policed.⁶ Homophobia serves not just, or not even, to preclude homosexual activity – for, often, in such institutions, homosexual behaviour is itself tolerated, especially if it is conducted in a way that does not connote weakness or effeminacy.⁷ Instead, it helps to define the terms of homosocial friendships and prescribe the nature of acceptable masculinity, communicating the boundaries *within* friendships between heterosexual men (for an empirical test of this phenomenon, see Britton 1990). This function, which protects traditional, essentialist definitions of masculinity, may be all the more important in men's prisons, where, as Sykes (1958) famously argued, men may feel especially anxious about psychological threats to their masculine self-esteem (see also Newton 1994).

In the ethnographic study of a men's training prison that I conducted almost a decade ago, prisoners who appeared to be close often denied in front of each other that they were close or mutually dependent, while at the same time engaging in highly intimate routines – wishing each other goodnight by knocking out messages on adjoining walls, bringing each other morning cups of tea, and sharing personal stories and possessions. Others were fixated on homosexuality, as various extracts from my fieldwork notes reflected:

⁶ Some prisoners note that being in prison is 'Like being back at school – [i.e.] who's the hardest...' (fieldwork notes).

⁷ For example, if it is coercive or if the sexual agent is the 'active' rather than 'passive' partner in the sexual exchange.

On my first evening on E wing, lots of banter about homosexuality: ‘stop looking at his arse!’... ‘I told you there were a few gays in here!’. X and Y are joking about ‘bumming each other’: ‘I need a few johnnies’, says X, as they’re about to be locked up for the night. ‘Yeah, my arse is sore!’, says Y.

‘Has anyone told you yet that we’re all gay...?!’; jokes about raping each other, and being raped by staff.

Alongside such pretences to be gay and accusations of homosexuality, jokes about sexual fidelity among cellmates and explicit homophobia combined in complex ways that seemed to both express and regulate complex flows of male desire. Sedgwick (1985: 20) notes that this co-incidence is unsurprising:

Because “homosexuality” and “homophobia” are, in any of their avatars, historical constructions, because they are likely to concern themselves intensely with each other and to assume interlocking or mirroring shapes, because the theatre of their struggle is likely to be intrapsychic of intra-institutional as well as public, it is not always easy (sometimes barely possible) to distinguish them from each other.⁸

Views about *actual* homosexuality were extremely mixed. Many prisoners expressed relatively tolerant opinions about gay men, saying – to illustrate a position that was not unusual – that ‘they don’t bother me as long as *they don’t come near me*’ (Aaron, italics added). While other prisoners were much less liberal, this live-and-let-live discourse is indicative of the latent functions of homophobia, as a means of punishing a lack of ‘manliness’ rather than particular forms of sexual behaviour (Segal 1990). Just as in the army, the men who suffer most from homophobic bullying are often heterosexuals, who are considered inadequate soldiers (i.e. physically or emotionally weak), in prison, the men whose masculinities are stigmatised are those who are inadequate prisoners: disloyal, dependent (on other people, or on drugs), timid, naïve, and unable to cope with the demands of the environment. Researchers are judged more forgivingly, but they are still judged, as I briefly outline in the following section.

Not looking hard enough: reflections on a study

As Mary Bosworth and Emma Kaufman (2012: 194) have recently written, following Foucault, ‘The sociology of punishment is ... *about bodies*’ - their treatment in space and their confinement. Punishment is taken out on the body ‘whether it is tarred and feathered, incarcerated, or electronically tagged’. Given the hyper-visibility of men’s bodies in prison, and perennial political concerns about such issues as prisoners lifting weights, it is all the more surprising that the body – and men’s talk about their physicality – is generally absent as a topic of analysis in prison sociology (although see, for example, Carrabine & Longhurst, 1998, and de Viggiani 2012), let alone the physical experience of undertaking prison research. Reading back through the fieldwork notes of the study that I conducted a decade ago (originally sub-titled ‘Masculinity and Modern Penal Culture’), it is striking how often my entries reference prisoners’ comments on my physicality - what I wore on it, what I did with it, and what these things signified. My clothing, my manner of speech, and my comportment were subject to considerable direct scrutiny, especially in the early days and weeks of my time in the prison. Prisoners often asked about the car I drove, or commented on the brand of my

⁸ Writing about the hyperbolic prison-based television series, *Oz*, Wlodarz (2005) makes a much stronger case for the homoerotism of prison life (or, at least, representations thereof), noting the ‘closet forms of desire’ (p79) that flow between imprisoned men. More concretely, Maruna (2011) has recently argued that, given popular associations of punishment with sex, it is striking how little is written in academic journals about sex and imprisonment.

watch, shoes and clothing.⁹ Within the prisoner society, these consumer goods were symbolic of wealth and social success, but they were also a way of weighing up my credibility as a certain kind of man:

I ask who the most powerful prisoners on the wing are. They identify X (who has now come over), then Y, then Z as the “kingpins” of the wing. Joke that you can tell [who is powerful] by what trainers people are wearing. Then they are interested in what kind of trousers mine are, and say that if they are Levis (they aren't), they'll get nicked. When a rap/garage act comes on the TV, X exclaims ‘they're all wearing Icebergs!’ [a make of jeans]’ (fieldwork notes)

I was frequently told that it was obvious from the way I carried myself that I was ‘a college boy’, not ‘one of them’. On this basis, assumptions were made about such issues as my previous drug experiences (‘I bet you've done a few lines of cocaine; some ecstasy’), my attitudes towards legal norms (the assumption being that I was ‘straight’), and my suitability to the prison environment itself: ‘People like you’, one prisoner told me, ‘would think life was over if you came in [to prison. Whereas] I think: I'll watch a bit of East Enders, do a few press ups. I was made for it, made for prison’ (fieldwork notes).

In such judgments, prisoners were evaluating both my class and my masculinity, in particular, the differences between my life experiences and their own – my relative privilege, offset by my lack of urban resourcefulness, of the kind required to survive and flourish in poor neighbourhoods and in criminal subcultures. These differences were often an aid to the research process, allowing me to adopt, in good faith, a stance of relative ignorance about aspects of prison culture, such as norms about fighting, informing and the terms of the informal economy. At times, though, they created some practical difficulties. In one of a small number of uncomfortable research interactions, a prisoner used my lack of ‘street smarts’ to intimidate me, entering my personal space, and using his bodily potential and aggressive questioning to make me feel uneasy. The interaction was described back to me some days later by an interviewee who had witnessed it:

Do you remember the other week, Joe was giving you a hard time? He was seeing naivety in you, do you know what I mean? [...] It wasn't what he was saying, it was what he was trying to imply, the way he was acting with you. [...] He was baiting you. (Fin)

On another occasion, a prisoner shouted to his peers that I was ‘a bacon [sex offender], like all these university types’ (fieldwork notes). White-collar masculinity was, in this respect, suspect (middle-class male prisoners who are not convicted of fraud are generally assumed by other prisoners to be sex offenders), and I was often aware that the way I stood and communicated was more open and softer than the presentational postures and verbal styles of most prisoners. As I spent more time in the prison, a friend pointed out that I had begun to hold my body differently: more taut and upright, the way that prisoners held theirs. Thus, just as Piacentini (2004) has described her need to ‘amplify [her] femininity’ during her fieldwork, in some respects I fortified my masculinity in order to ‘pass’ more easily in the prison, under its omni-optical male gaze.

Meanwhile, as the following extract from my fieldwork diary suggests, I was subject to a good deal of ambiguous physical attention:

⁹ In a workshop one day, one prisoner took a close look at my watch before returning to his friendship group, shaking his head. When I asked why, suggesting that he did not like it, he explained his disappointment that it had not been worth stealing.

[With] E wing prisoners [in the gym]: [Prisoner X] says he will 'wash my back', and someone else jokes that I can borrow his soap. Another prisoner rubs my head and comments on my 'soft hair'. It's all in joke, but also a bit unnerving. At the end of the session, a prisoner strokes my hair and says 'I like this guy'. Someone else says 'he's a good looking young man'. Quite odd. Not a total joke. (fieldwork notes)

On another occasion, the same group of prisoners, whom I had got to know reasonably well, encouraged me to join them lifting weights: 'Tell your mates you've been working out with the guy with the biggest lats [lateral muscles] in Bolton'. This was the promise of initiation, of securing a certain kind of masculine acceptance through shared, physical activity. Looking back at my notes, it reads like a form of flirtation: non-sexual, but channelled through a discourse of physicality, and predicated on my physical subordinacy. If it was a test, or a rite of passage, then it appears that I had passed, for some days later, I was told that if I were ever in Bolton and found myself 'in trouble', I should just say that I was 'friends with [Prisoner Z]'. The tone was not entirely serious, but I was certain at the time that it conveyed a compliment. By the end of my fieldwork, I was on 'nodding terms' with most prisoners, and on good speaking terms with many. Prisoners, by this time, had nicknamed another prisoner 'Ben Junior' because he resembled me, and commented that they had 'stopped noticing' my presence in their world. The feeling of knowing the environment, of being comfortable within it, and of being known, reminded me of when I was at school, and at college. But in the prison it came with an additional twist, which I ought to acknowledge. Despite my personal misgivings about many of the things that prisoners told me they had done, about their attitudes to violence, women, authority, and other such matters, I was generally pleased to gain the approval of this smart and streetwise set of men, whose social status was subordinate to mine, at least situationally, but whose masculine status seemed in many respect higher. These are the ironies, and trapdoors, or a masculine hierarchy which grants esteem in ways that are by no means consistent with conventional markers of class.

Conclusion

If emotional intelligence is a requirement of good prison research, as Jewkes (2011) suggest, then it seems inconceivable that the classic texts of prison sociology were not conducted by emotionally literate researchers. That their emotions tend not to be present in the text may tell us about the intellectual doctrines of the time, and perhaps the style of writing is a little too disembodied - too seductive in its air of complete objectivity. At the same time, I find much of value in an approach which meets Les Back's (2012) recommendation that the writer should remember that they are 'the least important person there', and, in their reflexive content, should prioritise what other researchers can learn from their fieldwork experiences, and what these experiences reveal about substantive issues, rather than about themselves.¹⁰ To this we might add that, like other forms of data, emotions require processing and theorisation. But, as Jewkes and others suggest, they may also tell us something about the tendency of men to express their emotions in camouflaged forms. I have tried, in this article, to bring such emotions into relief, while also suggesting that much more could be done to expose a parallel form of concealment that sits beneath the apparently unemotional relationships between male prisoners.

Autoethnographic reflexivity and emotional disclosure come more easily to some researchers than others. Although there are some good examples in prison ethnography (Liebling 1999; Phillips and Earle 2010; Jewkes 2011), those to whom it comes most easily are not always those who do it best, just as people who have engaged in a lot of therapy are by no means always highly self-aware. Often, as researchers, we cannot see what is placed before our eyes, focussing too closely to catch the detail of the very things we want to see. Meanwhile, some

¹⁰ This point was also made by both of the reviewers of this article, for whose comments I am very grateful.

of the best examples of the kind of biographical reflexivity that I find most instructive have emerged only years after the original research has been conducted. For we are all blind to our blind spots, and we see them best not just by peering intently in the mirror, but by turning our heads and looking back.

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