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# SUBORDINATE KINSHIP

## Families Living With Incarceration

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**Victoria Jane Wood**

Submitted for the Degree of Doctor in Philosophy

University of Durham

Department of Anthropology

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# ABSTRACT

## Subordinate Kinship: Families Living With Incarceration

## Victoria Jane Wood

This thesis explores the relationships and kinship practices of women, in the North of England who have a husband or partner in prison. In particular it focuses on how kinship in the context of incarceration is subordinate. The study is addressed from the perspective of the mothers of prisoners' children who are the wives and partners of prisoners. The study derives from qualitative ethnographic research which was undertaken between May 2004 and September 2005. During this time participant observations at the Visitors' Centres of a category B male local prison and a High Security Estate prison were conducted as a means of gaining valuable insights into the way in which the rules and regulations of the prison establishment govern the different forms of contact between prisoners and their families. This was supported by unstructured in-depth interviews with eleven women who were the wives or partners of male prisoners with the aim of collecting more detailed biographical case study data, focusing on their experiences.

The issues which this thesis addresses and which derived from the research data collected were questions concerning what is the relationship between the family and the prison; how the tensions between exacting justice and the families welfare impact on health and well-being of mothers and their perception of the impact on their children, the effect of incarceration on kinship practices, and the extent to which incarceration influences the lives of these women beyond the institutional setting, with emphasis placed on their relationships and social networks.

The theoretical focus of the study is orientated towards a contextualisation of the family and the use of imprisonment in both a contemporary and historical context, drawing, in particular, on the work of Foucault and his ideas concerning discipline and surveillance. The themes used revolve around, experiences of separation, notions of exchange and gift giving, ideas of the Visitors' Centre as a liminal space,




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secondary prisonization, and stigma. The conclusions drawn bring these ideas together to show how 'a subordinate kinship' is manifest in this context.

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# CHAPTER ONE

## Subordinate Kinship

**Tolly**
You got no problem on this score then, Fletch? Marriage like?
**Fletcher**
No, No. I been married a bit longer than you lad, ain't I? And she knows her place.
**Lukewarm**
Doesn't she get upset that you keep going inside all the time?
**Fletcher**
I don't keep going inside all the time.
**Lukewarm**
You are fairly consistent. And she's got a home and three kids to run – I don't know how she does it, I don't know how she does it.
**Fletcher**
Oh, I'm not saying it ain't hard, obviously. A few weeks ago she had to build a new coal bunker. That's a terrible job for a woman isn't it?
**Lukewarm**
You mean she had to mix all the cement and all that?
**Fletcher**
Oh no, no, no, that was all right. Her mother came over and did that.
(Porridge: Webber, Clement and Frenais 2002: 122-123)

Although the above dialogue between prisoners is fictional, the sentiments expressed and the scene portrayed, appropriately capture the central issue that I will deal with in this thesis: the relationship between prisoners and their families and, in particular, a focus on how women manage family relationships when they have a husband or partner in prison.

The issue is important. Women are by far the main supporters of men in prison (Codd 2002: 334; Fishman 1990: 262) and research suggests that most imprisoned parents are fathers (Wolleswinkel 2002: 191). In spite of their position, however, and the role that these women play in keeping their families together, their status is both 'socially and politically marginalised' through their association with the prisoner (Codd 1998 & 2002: 335). They are also 'neglected in academic research, prison statistics, public policy and media coverage' (Murray 2005: 442), and the lack of information that they

are given restricts their involvement in the prisoners' welfare (SEU 2002: 112). Despite the fact that they are marginalised in this way, however, the body of research pertaining to the difficulties that prisoners' families face, and acknowledgement of these difficulties, has, in recent years been steadily growing. However, by far, the main brunt of this is in the field of prisoners' children and/or fathers (see for instance: Bernstein 2005; Boswell and Wedge 2002; Boswell 2002; Brookes-Gordon 2003; Clarke et al 2005; Farrington and Murray 2005; Hairston 2002; Laing and McCarthy 2005; Meek 2007; Murray 2005; Murray and Farrington 2006; Murray 2007; Wolleswinkel 2002), with a much narrower focus on the family (for instance see: Braman 2004; Codd 1998; Smith et al 2007) and women (see Brink 2003; Codd 2002; Comfort 2002; Comfort 2003; Devlin 2002). In order to broaden this focus therefore, the main questions which I address in this thesis are as follows: What is the relationship between the family and the prison? To what extent do the judicial practices which accompany a husband or partner's incarceration influence the health and well-being of mothers and their children? How does imprisonment shape the way prisoners' families are able to practice kinship? To what extent does imprisonment influence their lives beyond the institutional context and, in particular, what happens to their relationships and social networks? In addressing these questions my main aim is to bring the topic into Anthropological focus. I argue that the reason why prisoners' families, and in particular women and their children, experience this kind of marginalisation and exclusion is because kinship in the context of incarceration is rendered subordinate to other forms of kinship relationship.

My definition of a 'subordinate kinship' is one which is deemed to be less worthy or regarded as of lesser importance than other forms of kinship. Certain features and characteristics which form an integral part of the way in which 'subordinate kinship' is lived, can be used by others to mark it out as different or inferior and therefore as having less status and significance than 'accepted' or more normative models. In this respect, the meanings that others outside the relationship attribute to a 'subordinate kinship' are largely negative. As a consequence it becomes more vulnerable and open to abuses, interventions and restraints being placed on it by external influences and agencies. This is despite the fact that this often stands in opposition to the meanings which the primary actors choose to attribute themselves. The term 'subordinate kinship' is one which I have developed as an explanatory device to help me explain

how kinship works in the context of incarceration. The question is how does this fit in with other ideas about kinship and ideas about the family?

**The Family And Kinship**

Relationships are important to prisoners and their wives and children. In terms of understanding the importance that they invest in their relationships the approach that is usually adopted is one which examines the issue in terms of the concept of 'family'. Prior to the 1960s, reference to 'family' was typically the 'nuclear' family consisting of 'two adults living together in a household with their own or adopted children' (Giddens 1993: 391). In such families, the kinds of transactions that traditionally took place between the husband and wife were those of 'cooking, caring, sex, cleaning, household maintenance and repair, childcare, household provisioning, transport and shopping' (Simpson 1998: 116). Indeed, these kinds of transactions still play a significant role in many intimate family relationships. However, the increase in single parent families and divorce and remarriage has led some theorists to conclude that the family was declining or breaking down (see Dennis and Erdos 1992 Murray 1996; Popenoe 1993; Rodger 1996: 2-3; Silva and Smart 1999: 2). More recently, however, attention has begun to shift to examining these issues in terms of the increasing diversity of household arrangements rather than focusing on the decline of what is often articulated in terms of the 'traditional family' in western society (McRae 1999: 1-2). Nonetheless, the notion of 'family' continues to be imbued with assumptions about normative structures and the roles and obligations prescribed for its members.

Such structures continue to be evident in the way in which the state regulates family life. As Finch points out, the mismatch between normative family structure and actual practice is problematic for British governments in light of the flexibility which exists in the organization of personal relationships in contemporary society (Finch 2003: 36). As she goes on to say, in order to regulate family life "governments are always in danger of presuming a 'standard model' for which they can regulate, by making the assumption that families do in fact operate in particular ways" (Finch 2003: 31).

However, this observation is not something that is new; in historical terms this type of regulation of family life stretches back to Tudor poor laws which were said to

reinforce 'patriarchal notions of service, dependency and family responsibility' (Gittens 1993: 137). These interventions came about due to increasing fears over the financial threat posed to governments 'at both a local and national level' because of increases in illegitimacy, and women and children living outside what were seen to be 'acceptable' household arrangements (Gittens 1993: 139-140). The regulation of family by the state manifested in the form of various acts of legislation which some scholars suggest have been responsible for reinforcing 'the middle class ideology of the private nuclear family made up of dependants and male breadwinner' (Gittens 1993: 153-154). )

Furthermore, fears about the number of women and children living outside of marriage and long term partnerships, have been a re-occurring theme of governments in both the UK and the USA throughout the last decade. Certain family forms, such as 'loneparent families', are seen as one of the major contributing factors to an increase in social disorder. This is in contrast to 'the norm' where strong families are based on 'heterosexual parents with an employed male breadwinner' (Silva and Smart 1999: 2-3). As Smart and Silva go on to suggest, while there seems to be 'wide spread consensus that society is undergoing a process of rapid and radical change....[...].... political rhetoric tends to claim that the family is an institution which must not change' (Silva and Smart 1999: 2). Evidence for this can be seen in government documents which propose that '[s]trong and stable families provide the best basis for raising children and for building strong and supportive communities' (Home Office 1998: 30), and in their articulation of the role that the family plays in 'fostering a climate of 'respect and responsibility' (Home Office 2003). In this respect, the notion of 'family' is still strongly imbued with assumptions about the structure it should take and the roles and obligations prescribed to its members. The rhetoric is powerful and can obscure what is actually going on in relationships and what is important.

As an anthropologist, I am keen to introduce the notion of kinship as a way of understanding the way that relationships are actually lived and given meaning by prisoners' wives and partners rather than how they ought to be lived. The advantages of using an anthropological approach to kinship rather than one that focuses on 'family', is that kinship allows us to focus on the meanings and understandings that

those involved attribute to their relationships. In this sense, kinship is much less rigid, in that it focuses on the fluid and negotiated aspects of relationships (Finch 2003; Strathern 1992). The obligations and responsibilities between kin are often negotiated according to the circumstances of the individuals involved in the relationship (Finch 1989; Finch 2006; Mason and Finch 1993; Mason 2004). ). As Carsten points out, the anthropologist's notion of kinship is a useful way to approach such relationships as it is as much about everyday practices such as eating and the sharing of food and spending time together as it is about procreation and marriage rules (Carsten 2000: 18, Carsten 2004). In the context of incarceration, the creativity and flexibility of kinship is key to understanding how relationships are organized and come to have meaning.

There are, however, certain patterns of relationship that are seen to reflect the kinds of kinship most frequently found in western society. The Euro-American tradition of kinship can be seen to place a strong emphasis on biological and social relationships. Biological relationships are understood first of all in terms of blood relationships; these are perceived to be 'natural'. Secondly, the emphasis is on relationships reckoned through code – or law, which are taken to be man-made or added, or as 'after nature' (Strathern 1992 cited in Franklin and Mckinnon 2001: 15-17). Strathern, goes on to propose that the particular forms that English kinship takes is more individualistic, and that the focus is on 'persons not positions' (Strathern 1992: 14; Finch 2003: 34). According to Finch this 'means that we tend not to relate to each other as 'mother', 'sister', 'son' in the sense of playing out a role whose normative characteristics are pre-defined' (Finch 2003: 35). Although, as Finch further points out '[i]n reality the balance between the personal and the positional elements may vary within any given relationship' (Finch 2003: 35).

However, the idea of kinship is often used interchangeably with the notion of family. According to Finch broader readings of kinship have now 'become a more recognized feature of family life alongside a greater diversity of intimate and domestic arrangements' (Finch 2006: 295). Whereas '[K]in relationships are about how individual persons are connected to one another' (Strathern 1992: 78), the family, on the other hand, is more often described in classic functionalist terms as 'an institution' and conceptualized as having certain characteristics such as two adults of

both sexes who share a common residence with their children. A structure which is deemed to be necessary in performing a variety of functions that are seen to be crucial to the continuation of society, such as, 'economic co-operation', 'reproduction' and in particular the rearing and socializing of children (Gittens 1993: 60). Indeed, this perspective is rooted in some of the early anthropological attempts to theorize the place of the 'family' in human society. For example, Malinowski and Fortes proposed that the nuclear family was 'a universal social institution' and an essential feature of 'producing and rearing children' (see Carsten 2000: 17; and 2004:10). Carsten goes so far as to argue that the idea that the nuclear family was universal was central to the way in which the field of kinship studies developed (Carsten 2004: 10).

Malinowski, in particular, drew on the principle of legitimacy to suggest that social attachments such as fatherhood were underpinned by the institution of marriage (see Malinowski 1974). Marriage was important because it established who the legal father [*pater*] of the child was. As such, the legal father was also the social link between the child and the wider community. Assuming the role of 'guardian' and 'protector' as well as providing a positive social status for both the child and the mother. Consequently, the father's role was seen as 'indispensable' to the continuity of society (Malinowski 1974: 51-63).

Other theorists, such as Radcliff-Brown, argued that although the structure of society was constantly in 'flux', certain social forms remained stable. These were the institutions of society, such as marriage which served both biological and social needs (Kuper 1996: 50-52). The classic functionalist account of marriage was that it was important because it contributed towards social integration, building up networks of relationships which were seen to aid in the transmission of norms and cultural values from one generation to the next. Its role was thus to inform individuals how to behave; this in turn created a stabilizing effect (Eriksen 1995: 84).

At the same time, in western society, kinship was believed to be 'a relatively minor aspect of social organization, 'divorced from political, economic and religious life, and more or less reduced to the nuclear family' (Carsten 2004: 15). As Carsten puts it 'kinship is something "they" have; "we" have families (Carsten 2004: 15). However,

studies of kinship have gradually evolved to bring about a greater questioning of division between the public and private spheres of the family, and the increasing visibility of the women's position in these studies (See Carsten 2004: 15-16; Yangagisako 1979). An important moment in this evolution was the work of David Schneider who raised important questions concerning the centrality of biology in reckoning kinship relationships in western societies (see Schneider 1980: 26.-30).

David Schneider's work on *American kinship* is thought to have been pivotal to the way that kinship is studied in western societies. In his questioning of the divisions between 'what was apparently biological and what was cultural in kinship', and his suggestions that the biological grounding for kinship was ethnocentric and that it did not 'apply cross-culturally', Schneider opened up new avenues of study (Carsten 2004: 20). In particular, he argued that:

> ...sexual reproduction was a core system of kinship in a system that was defined by two dominant orders, that of nature, or substance, and that of law, or code. The sexual union of two unrelated partners in marriage provided the symbolic link between these two orders. It resulted in children connected to their parents through blood ties, or 'shared biogenetic substance' symbolising 'diffuse, enduring solidarity'. The idiom of nature was crucial to American kinship: 'The family is formed according to the laws of nature and it lives by rules which are regarded by Americans as self-evidently natural' (Carsten 2000: 7).

His questioning of these divisions led to a reinvigoration of kinship within the anthropological discipline and prepared the way for more recent explorations of issues of gender and personhood in kinship studies (Carsten 2004: 21).

The emergence of a 'new kinship' was also part of this reinvigoration as the focus widened to encompass new reproductive technologies such as IVF (in vitro fertilization) and AID (artificial insemination by donor). These issues 'raised new questions about the nature of motherhood, of fatherhood, and of connections between children and their parents' (Carsten 2004: 21). Bringing the study of kinship to bear on such forms enabled closer attention to be paid to the flexibility and creativity through which people practice and reckon their relationships. (also see Carsten 2000 and 2004; Franklin and MacKinnon 2001; Howell 2001: Strathern 1992; Weston

1991 for other examples). However, not nearly enough has been done about what I would call 'ordinary' kinship relationships in the UK, and I would see my work exploring some rather more mundane contexts than the new reproductive technologies offer. The point that I wish to make here, however, is that by bringing a kinship approach to the study of prisoners' families, I am able to capture the flexibility and creativity present in the organization of kinship relations and which is often absent from more formal rigidly structured notions of family found within some sociological and criminological approaches. In particular, the ideology of 'normal' family relationships, which often suggests to people how their relationships should be conducted, often results in what I refer to as 'a subordinate kinship', a theme which I develop throughout this work. Before I move on to develop this theme further however, it must be acknowledged at the outset that this study does not explore models of promoting kinship in other jurisdictions but looks specifically at the situation in England and Wales.

In addition to making contribution to the literature on kinship, I also intend to make a contribution towards 'an anthropology of prisons' (Rhodes 2001). This is a newly emerging area of the discipline which as Rhodes puts it 'calls out for exploration through ethnographic and oral history approaches to those directly involved as prisoners, families of prisoners, correctional workers, administrators, architects and manufacturers' (Rhodes 2001: 76). The 2004 EASA conference at which this topic was first broached also featured the workshop 'Paradoxes of Social Remoteness and Immediacy: The Prison as a Site of Anthropological Inquiry' which further attests to the interest being shown in this area by anthropologists. Given the way in which '[a]nthropology...has always had a strong tradition of representing the minority, the underdog, the dependent and disempowered' (Edgar and Russell 1998: 1), and given its wealth of understanding about the different ways in which people live their lives I would suggest that anthropology can add significantly to our depth of understanding on the subject of prisons and the influence this has on the lives of those who come into contact with these institutions.

In writing this thesis I have drawn on the literature of a variety of disciplines. In particular I have drawn upon anthropology, but also on sociology, criminology and some divorce and family studies. I have also touched on a number of different

perspectives – post-structuralist, functionalist, constructionist. My justification for doing this inter-disciplinary approach has been that it is necessary in contextualizing the research and achieving a more comprehensive picture of the lives and experiences of the women who participated in my research. I hope that in doing this, I have been able to convey an in-depth insight into the sheer extent to which a husband or partner's incarceration becomes an influence in the lives of women and their children. In the next section of this chapter I will move on to describe the structure of this thesis.

**Structure Of The Thesis**

In **chapter two** of this thesis I will focus on the methodology that I used to guide the study; beginning with a discussion of my initial aims and how this was based on the principles of qualitative ethnographic research. I will then move on to explore my motivations for conducting the research, and in particular how this links in with ideas of anthropology at home, insider research and reflexivity. Following this I will then examine the methods that I used such as participant observation at the Visitors' Centres of a Category B male local prison, and a High Security estate prison, describing the role I undertook as a volunteer, and how this served as one of the techniques that I used in order to find women who would take part in further interviews. Eleven women who were the long term partners of prisoners took part in detailed, case-study interviews which were designed to take place over an extended period of time, with the aim of collecting detailed biographical data. The ethical considerations of the research will then be discussed before I finally move on to provide a descriptive account of the neighbourhoods in which many of my research participants were living during the study.

In **chapter three** I contextualise the relationship between the family and the prison in order to locate where the family stand in relation to the predicament of imprisonment. In doing this, I will begin by looking at some of the issues which were current at the time that the research was taking place such as the increasing prison population, and how this has culminated in fears and concerns that prisons are overcrowded due to a crisis in the penal system. I will then move on to provide a simplified account of the main contributing factors, which some scholars in the field of criminology have proposed to have led to this crisis, such as the introduction of managerialism,

privatisation and an ideological shift in regarding the values and purpose of imprisonment. I will highlight the government's response to these issues and speculate about what the implications of this might be for the families of offenders. The reason why I have adopted this approach is because these issues are equally relevant to families who have family members in prison, and yet, what the ramifications of this might be seems to have escaped official acknowledgement.

Following this I will move on to examine where the family does feature in official reports, and how these often imply that they are an underutilised resource in the war against re-offending, and the revolving door cycle of imprisonment. In particular I will argue that the place of the prisoners' family is so deeply ingrained within the system of imprisonment that the fact that the focus revolves around the prisoners' welfare at the expense of the family and their welfare is an issue that is rarely ever questioned. I will then move on to look at why this should be the case, by attempting to understand where the prisoners family feature in the history of the modern penal system, as well as examining this issue in relation to ideas of family and kinship. In addressing these issues I hope to provide a more thorough understanding of the relationship between the family and the prison, as a means of bringing about a greater sense of awareness and understanding of their position, and as a method of contextualising the chapters that follow, based on the primary data that I collected during the fieldwork.

**Chapter four** is based on primary research in which I examine the tensions between justice and welfare and the impact of incarceration on mothers, and their accounts of the impact on their children. The chapter begins with women's experiences of arrest and separation and in particular their accounts of how events which accompany incarceration impact not only on themselves but also on their children. I will examine how these experiences relate to other forms of separation such as divorce, and how this situation serves to influence their health and wellbeing, and the practicalities of family life such as parenting and domestic routines. Following this I will go on the look at the implications of this for the fathers in prison and what this means in terms of their roles, responsibilities and the contribution they make towards family life.

In **chapter five** I examine the culture and performance of prison visiting, by focusing on the approach of the institution alongside visitors' accounts of their experiences. In particular I will examine Comfort's (2003) suggestion that the visitors waiting area, or in this case the prison Visitors' Centre is a liminal space, in addition to her argument that women experience a kind of secondary prisonization.[1] I will also examine how this accords with ideas about liminality put forward by theorists such as Turner (1969) and Van-Gennep (1960). The data that I gathered and which I have used to inform this chapter is based on a combination of participant observation and conversations with women at the High Security estate prison, as well as insights gained from the interviews based on women's accounts of their experiences of visiting. In doing so I have structured this chapter so that it accords with the way in which families experience the processes of visiting and how the event unfolds. This begins with the preparations that families make for their visit, and their experiences of travelling to the prison before moving through the various stages which families must accomplish in order to gain entry into the room inside the prison where their visit with the inmate takes place.

After examining the culture and performance of visiting I will then move on to **chapter six** in which I examine how women practise kinship when they have a husband or partner in prison. In particular I will focus on the various forms of contact and communication available to them, such as visiting, letter writing and phone calls. In doing this I will also examine the approach of the institution and the implications of this in relation to various ideas about kinship such as physical contact, privacy and intimacy. Family celebrations and special events such as Christmas time and gift giving will also be discussed, with emphasis placed on how these family events take place within the context of the institutional setting. How the practices which accompany ideas of family and kinship such as responsibility and obligation are shaped by the rules and regulations of the establishment will also be examined, by looking at how some of the wives/partners of prisoners orchestrate their own involvement with the prison by becoming actively involved with requests and complaints concerning their husband's or partner's welfare.

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[1] The example that Comfort (2003) provides is based on research that she conducted in the waiting area of San Quentin prison in California –whereas I am proposing that the equivalent of a waiting area in British prisons is the Visitors' Centre.

In **chapter seven** I move beyond the confines of the penal establishment in order to examine how the incarceration of a husband or partner influences the lives of women and children outside the institutional setting, with regards to their relationships and social networks. This chapter is predominantly based on the in-depth case study data that I collected during the fieldwork, and will focus on the way in which a variety of different factors serve to influence the support that mothers and their children receive. For instance, whether they were native to the community in which they were living and in particular the type of crime their husband or partner had committed. In doing so my aim is to show how not only the level of support but also the level of stigma which women experience due to their association with the prisoner varies in accordance with these issues. I will also examine how women deal with that stigma and the lack of support by limiting information, and in some cases creating fictive kinship relationships as a substitute for those which have deteriorated.

Finally, in **chapter eight** I will reflect on how kinship is subordinate in the context of imprisonment, by discussing the issues that I dealt with in the main body of the thesis, as well as discussing how a much more family and kinship orientated approach to imprisonment is needed. Following this I will then draw the thesis to a close by making suggestions for further research.

# CHAPTER TWO

## Methodology

In the last chapter the idea of subordinate kinship, where this idea fits with the literature on kinship, and the structure of the thesis were examined. In this chapter I will move on to look at the methodology which I used to inform the research. I will examine the qualitative methods that I used to collect the data and the ethical implications and code of conduct which I devised as part of the processes of conducting research. In doing so, the initial aims of the research and how this research fits in with ideas concerning ethnographic study will be examined. I will also explore my motivations for conducting the research in which I reflect on my own position as a prisoner's wife; before moving on to explore how this fits in with the concept of 'anthropology at home' and insider research. I will then describe my experience of working as a volunteer in the prison Visitors' Centre, the justification for undertaking this work and how this experience enabled me to expand my knowledge of the topic and simultaneously draw a more distinctive boundary between personal life and research. The connection between the voluntary work and the qualitative methods such as participant observation and interviews will be explored, before I move on to examine these methods in more detail. After this I will then address the problems which arose during the course of fieldwork before reviewing the ethical implications and code which I devised in order to guide the research. Before I do this however, I will first of all examine the initial aims of the research.

### Initial Aims Of The Research: An Ethnographic Study

When I began the research my aim was to explore the kinship ties of prisoners' families. Focusing on topics such as the symbolic role of gift transactions, the way in which roles, responsibilities and expectations of relationships change, the significance of the different forms of contact that families use to keep in touch, the impact of incarceration on emotional and material wellbeing, and the type of contact that women have with others in similar situations and last but not least whether they make use of prisoners' family support groups. My intention was to explore these

issues from the perspective of women at the centre of these networks and roles, by using the qualitative methodology of ethnographic research (Crotty 1998: 4).

Bryman (2001: x) describes ethnography as having five key features:

1. ethnographers immerse themselves in a society
2. they collect descriptive data via fieldwork
3. they concern themselves with the culture of its members
4. they strive to understand the perspective and meanings that members of that society attach to their social world
5. and then they render the collected data intelligible and significant to fellow academics and other readers

In terms of traditional ethnographic study the anthropological endeavour involves immersing oneself in a culture distinctly different to one's own in terms of geographical distance and mode of subsistence (ibid). The image of the anthropologist was one who travels to exotic places, discovering and exploring the unfamiliar territories of so called 'primitive' societies (Peacock 1986: 8-13). For me however, there was little that was exotic about this study, in that the culture that I chose to explore was very much one that I was part of already. In order to explore the implications of my position in relation to 'the field' I believe that it is, first of all, necessary to explore my motivations, and how my experiences of research relate to my insider status.

**Motivations For Research**

My motivation for conducting research with prisoners' families stems from experiences of my husband's arrest during December 1996. At his trial my husband received a twelve year prison sentence for armed robbery, which he went on to serve in a High Security Prison. Because of my own upbringing and social background I had relatively little experience of institutions such as prisons, the criminal justice system or the police. I had what my husband refers to as a 'naïve, cushy, middle class upbringing', free from the instability of 'street life, crime and poverty'. His arrest was a 'wake up call', my introduction to a side of life that was different to anything that I had experienced before; it was an event which changed my life and

the lives of close family members. This was my introduction to a new status – that of criminal's wife, 'the gangster's moll' and an increasing awareness that I had been labelled and reassigned into the niche which I now know as the one referred to as an 'underclass family'.

My husband's arrest and imprisonment initiated a period of time in my life which I recall as deeply distressing. Most distressing of all was the changing status of my relationship which took me from being happily married and in a conventional family arrangement, to being a separated parent bringing up my two children on my own; a change which seemingly happened all within the space of twenty four hours. At that time I went from having no experience of the criminal justice system to being submerged in a life that brought me into frequent and on some occasions daily contact with police, solicitors, courts and prisons. As a result of this, my life changed substantially in order to accommodate the penal system into my daily routines. With the exception of my family and friends, the reactions of people whom I came into contact with also changed; I felt that I was now seen by others as also being on the wrong side of the law. The situation which I was experiencing was 'guilt by association'; one which is often described by those who have worked with prisoners' families (Brink 2003; Mathews 1989; SEU 2002). I found the situation particularly distressing because it clashed strongly with the values I had derived from my upbringing and which were held by most of my family and friends.

Changes in status, the destabilisation of moral values, and the disruption and alteration to routines, and the speed at which they take place are significant, in that they provide insight into a more widely experienced form of disruption which becomes central to the daily lives of many prisoners' families. I would argue that it is often these experiences which become problematic to notions of family and kinship, and which set these families apart. A further exploration of these kinds of problems which families experience, as well as the similarities and differences between the prisoners' family and more widely acknowledged ideas concerning family and kinship, will be dealt with in more depth in later chapters.

Another of my motivations for conducting this study is equally rooted in my attempts to locate the whereabouts of literature specific to prisoners' families which revealed

the gaps in much of what was being written. In order to explain this further it is necessary to draw briefly on an article by Coleman and Simpson (1999) in which they examine the reflexive nature of the discipline of anthropology. In particular, they pose the question of whether students of anthropology apply the techniques that they have learned to their everyday interactions. In my own case the answer to this would almost certainly lean towards the affirmative, in that my quest to locate prisoners' families in the anthropological literature was as much to do with the ideas that I was learning about and applying to my experiences of imprisonment, while I was studying for my anthropology degree as an undergraduate student. Indeed it was partly as a result of this that I began to question the situation, and it was due to this form of questioning that I was able to ascertain that although anthropology has always placed particular emphasis on studies of kinship and family there were at that time few anthropological studies that I could find which explored kinship in the context of imprisonment (the topic is now however gradually becoming more popular, for instance see studies by: Braman 2004; Codd 2002; Comfort 2002 and 2003).

To a certain extent this is hardly surprising given the fact that difficulties conducting research in this sphere have been thoroughly documented (Mathews 1989; Murray 2005: 456; SEU 2002: 15.6). To date, the majority of studies which address this topic are criminological or sociological, and although some of these do focus on the prisoners' family (see: Brink 2003; Codd 1998; Davis 1992; Fishman 1981; Light 1989; McDermott and King 1992; Morris 1965; Richards et al 1994; Weintraub 1976) there seems to be little if any acknowledgement of the relevance of kinship per se. Furthermore, by far the most popular research topic at the present time seems to be those which focus on prisoners' children (see: Boswell and Wedge 2002; Bernstein 2005; Farrington et al 2001; Laing and McCarthy 2005; Murray 2005; Murray 2007; Murray and Farrington 2006; Sharp and Mendoza 1997; Shaw 1987 & 1992; Simmons 2000). This in itself however highlights one of the gaps that needs to be addressed – that is that in the quest to remedy the difficulties that children experience in these types of situations, the mother seems to have been forgotten, marginalised as unimportant, and then sometimes even cast under the rubric of the carers of prisoners' children with little acknowledgement of their own parental status. It is on this basis therefore, that one of the main issues which I will address is

the impact of imprisonment on the wives and partners of prisoners; in particular mothers and their perception of the impact that incarceration has on their children. Because of my familiarity with this topic and with the location in which the research took place in the next section of this chapter I will explore ideas about the status of insider research and 'anthropology at home'.

**Anthropology At Home**

Although anthropology has its roots in the exotic, the idea of conducting 'anthropology at home', and in particular in Britain is one that has been steadily growing in acceptance (Rapport 2000: 20). As Periano (1998: 105) points out however, the idea of 'anthropology at home' may mean different things in different contexts. The context in which I use this term refers not only to my status as the wife of a prisoner but also to my familiarity with location of the study which took place in North of England; the region where I grew up, and to which I would consider myself 'native'. In addition to this there were also great similarities between myself and many of the women who became the focus of the research – in particular my age, 30-40, and ethnic group - white British, and a large proportion of my time spent living in poorer working class neighbourhoods living on welfare benefits. (see section on interviews for more details on interviewee demographics).

Conducting 'insider research' and 'anthropology at home' is not necessarily straight forward as brings with it a host of issues that need to be considered if the anthropologist is to succeed as ethnographer in their native setting (Jackson 1987). For instance, as Young (1991: 8-9) points out there can be difficulties in distancing oneself and drawing a distinctive boundary between research and personal life.

On the other hand, as other anthropologists have argued, the issue of being 'native' or 'belonging' to a group is not a concept that is static or unchangeable, but is something that can differ depending on religion, social status and educational background (Bell 1996: 87; Narayan 1993: 672-673). In particular, Narayan (1993: 672-673) points out that the researcher may have what she calls a 'multiplex identity', belonging to a number of different social groups which 'may at different times outweigh the cultural identity we associate with insider or outsider status'.

Other researchers have also suggested that as an insider to the research group or setting, this may mean that one can achieve greater empathy and understanding with the subject; benefiting the research in that by 'speaking the language' the researcher can access a greater depth of information that to the outsider may otherwise remain hidden (Russell 2001: 221); and that despite a few teething troubles, familiarity with the setting can result in successful ethnographic work (See Russell 2001; Young 1991). In particular, Rapport points out that there have been many good examples of this type of research, particularly in Britain, in addition to arguing that:

> ...an anthropologist thoroughly at home in linguistic denotation is more able to appreciate the connotative: to pick up on those niceties of interaction and ambivalences and ambiguities of exchange where the most intricate (and interesting) aspects of socio-cultural worlds are constructed, negotiated, contested and disseminated [...] the fieldworker at home in Britain is well placed to identify those vital differences and diversities (between ideals and practices, between appearances and actualities, between sayings and doings of different individuals or the same individual at different times). (Rapport 2000: 21)

In reflecting on this I would say that maintaining a distinct boundary between data collection and personal life has been a problem that I have had to contend with throughout my research. I often found it difficult to detach myself from the emotional impact that incarceration engenders and as it was described to me by the women who formed the basis of my case studies. Listening to their stories, which were in some ways very similar to my own experience, was in some ways like reliving my own nightmare - I often found it upsetting and on some occasions disturbing. In particular, I have also found it difficult to remain 'objective' towards the approach adopted by various institutional bodies in dealing with the wives and partners of prisoners, and this is no doubt reflected in the approach that I have taken in presenting my research. Far from arguing that this detracts from or undermines the study however, I would argue that these problems should be seen as a manifestation of my insider status, which therefore contributes towards a more thorough understanding of the way in which families, and in particular mothers and their children, experience imprisonment.

At the same time, however, I should perhaps also point out that while there may be great similarities between the participants in this study and myself, there are also a few important differences that should be highlighted. The first of which is my childhood background, which I have already briefly mentioned. In particular the neighbourhood which I grew up in was free from any visible signs of poverty or disadvantage; and the fact that both my parents worked and had a stable relationship also meant that we had a good standard of living in which many of the basic necessities which they provided such as food, clothing, and heating were ones I took for granted. There were also regular family holidays and plenty of quality time and money spent on enjoyable activities such as walking, climbing, swimming, canoeing and shopping. There was relatively little if any crime in our neighbourhood, and I was never aware of any of our friends or neighbours that had a criminal record. The only visible sign of a police presence was my friend's father, the local chief constable who lived round the corner. There was also a distinct absence of conflict between the local citizens and those who impose law and order.

To a certain extent, this is reflected in the ideals which I was brought up with, whereby the police were to be respected and trusted, they were there to be helpful and to be called upon when and if needed. I was led to believe that the police were a guiding example of honesty and righteousness; criminals, prisoners and their families on the other hand were dishonest and untrustworthy. These were the principles that I held, up to the point of my husband's incarceration. It is these experiences which set me apart from a number of women who took part in my research, who were brought up in working class neighbourhoods, in which the fabric of daily existence is a lot harder because of the higher levels of crime, poverty and disadvantage (see the last section at the end of this chapter on setting the scene for more information on the neighbourhoods in which the research took place).

The second important difference between my participants and myself is the fact that I am in the process of writing this PhD thesis – which stands as evidence that I have been afforded the opportunity of pursuing a higher education.[1] In the context of some

[1] According to SEU report (2002: 44) 'Half of all prisoners are at or below level 1 (the level expected of an 11 year old) in reading; two thirds in numeracy; and four-fifths in writing'. It has also been acknowledged that prisoners' children are educationally disadvantaged. I have yet to

prisoners' wives and partners at least, this may seem like an irrational luxury, which relies on an expanse of time and a measure of delayed gratification which does not fit into the context of 'real life', because in the immediate world at least, it will not pay the bills and neither will it help to feed and clothe their children. To a certain extent this is one of the reasons why these women need a voice, and a platform from which to advocate their position, because the opportunities that present themselves are usually much more limited for those with a husband or partner in prison.

Because I am connected to the object of study as both participant and observer the issue of reflexivity has had to be a major consideration throughout this study. The issue of reflexivity is one that has, in recent decades, become an increasingly important aspect of anthropological study, because as Davies (1999: 3-11) highlights '[a]ll researchers are to some degree connected to, a part of, the object of their research'. Bourdieu (2003: 282) refers to this type of reflexivity as 'participant objectivation' which he describes as 'the *objectivation of the subject of objectivation*, of the analysing subject – in short, of the researcher herself'. Indeed he suggests that:

> Participant objectivation undertakes to explore not the 'lived experience' of the knowing subject but the conditions of possibility – and therefore the effects and limits – of that experience, and more precisely, of the act of objectivation itself (Bourdieu 2003: 282).

In order for the reader to better comprehend 'the conditions of possibility' and how this has shaped the research it is for this reason that in this chapter I have set out my relationship to my object of study. At the same time, because of my status as an 'insider' I felt I had to find some way of drawing a more concise boundary between research and personal life. As a result of this and in preparation for the research I undertook a post as voluntary worker for one of the welfare organizations that run the Visitors' Centres at some of the prisons in the North of England. In doing this, I hoped that I would be able to increase my contact with other prisoners' families, whilst also broadening the scope of my knowledge about the problems and

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find any statistics for prisoners wives – but during the pilot study at the local male prison (see p7) I recorded numerous occasions in my fieldwork diary when women who approached the desk at the visitors' centre needed help to fill in their personal details such as names and addresses of visitors on the forms to get into the prison. I also recorded numerous cases where parents would have to get their children to fill the forms in for them because they were unable to do it themselves – both in the case of British visitors and also those who were foreign nationals.

difficulties that they face. Also by working in the Visitors' Centre I hoped that this would give me a greater insight into the workings and practices of the institutional side of the Visitors' Centre, and the rules and regulations which govern the different forms of contact between prisoners and their families during prison visiting.

**The Link Between Voluntary Experience And Fieldwork**

The prison in which my experiences of voluntary work began is a High Security establishment housing Category B local male prisoners in addition to housing female prisoners in a close supervision centre.[2]

During my time as a volunteer working in the Visitors' Centre I undertook a variety of different roles. My main role was working behind the desk, helping to book the visitors in when they arrived, providing them with information about prison visiting, such as how to claim financial assistance for visiting, how to book a visit, how much money they would be allowed to take in and conversing with the officers about the visitors' details and what time to send them over to the prison. The Visitors' Centre workers were also the first port of call for families who had any worries or concerns about the prisoner they were visiting; for instance health care, bullying and enquires concerning personal cash and letters which they had sent and which the prisoner had not received or had gone missing. In this way my role as a volunteer also included making enquires with the prison in order to find an answer to these concerns and pass the information back to the families who had raised them. Another of my roles as a volunteer was working in the kitchen, serving drinks and snacks, listening to the visitors if they were upset and needed someone to talk to, and handing out tokens for the lockers. I also worked in the crèche which was located inside the prison; and on a number of occasions I worked in the youth project room supervising the teenagers who were waiting for their visit to begin.

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[2] 'A guide to the Criminal Justice System of England and Wales' (RDS 2000: 24) suggests that there are 137 prisons in England and Wales. These prisons are divided into different types of establishment which are 'high security prisons, local prisons, closed and open training prisons, young offender institutions (for sentenced prisoners under the age of 21) and remand centres' Prisons hold different classifications of prisoner who will have been allocated to one of four different security categories – A, B, C, or D (ibid). Each of these categories is based on how dangerous a prisoner is deemed to be and their potential risk to prison security (see Cheney 2002: 283). My research concentrated only on one Category B male local prison, and a High Security Estate prison.

Throughout this period I worked a regular shift one afternoon every two weeks as a member of the Visitors' Centre team, and I also worked on different shifts in the morning and afternoons when I would fill in for volunteers who were sick or on holiday.[3] As a result of spending so much time at the Visitors' Centre I decided that it made sense to combine the voluntary work that I had begun with a pilot study that I conducted during the early stages of the research, which focused on the distinctive culture that prevails around the act of prison visiting.

**The Pilot Study**

Drawing on the work of Spindler et al, Ellen suggests that 'many anthropologists find it necessary to find a regular task which is comprehensible to their informants under the auspices of which they are able to conduct their research' (Ellen 1984: 112-3). I therefore felt that it was appropriate to combine the work that I was doing as a volunteer with participant observation as it allowed me to make direct contact with many of the families who pass through the Visitors' Centre whilst assisting me with the collection of data that would otherwise have been difficult for me to obtain. In addition to this I also interviewed five of the volunteers from the Visitors' Centre, as well as interviewing the Co-coordinator, the secretary, and the manager of the welfare organization.

The findings of the pilot study served to demonstrate how the welfare organization, and their influence at the Visitors' Centre, play a crucial mediating role, in the way that they undertake a variety of projects which they believe will assist in the maintenance of relationships between prisoners and their families; the way in which this relates to ideas of subordinate kinship is one which is taken up in greater detail in the following chapters of this thesis. Following the pilot study the next phase of research was participant observation at a local male prison.

**Participant Observation At A Local Male Category B Establishment**

The main period of data collection for the PhD research took place in 2004 and 2005.

This formed a straightforward continuation of the voluntary work and the participant

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[3] Between September 2002 and September 2005 I worked 107 sessions at the Visitors' Centres equalling a total of approximately 321 hours; breaking down into 20 sessions between September 2002 and December 2002, 37 sessions between January 2003 and December 2004 and 50 sessions between January 2004 and September 2005.

observation, which I had already begun and during which I had continued to make notes and write them up in my fieldwork diary. During this time a number of changes were taking place. For instance, the wing housing female prisoners was closed down and the female prisoners were moved elsewhere. The prison was also re-graded to a 'community prison', and a group of people referred to as a 'community integration team' were appointed. The community integration team comprises a small number of staff with previous experience of working with prisoners, either as prison officers or because they were involved with probation. They articulated their slogan as 'Bridging the Gap' on the basis that although they work for the prison they provide an outreach service in which they follow the prisoners back out into the community to deal with resettlement problems such as drug abuse, housing issues and job seeking. Despite their remit of bridging the gap however, in my conversations with them they suggested that their access to the families of prisoners was limited and therefore they could be of little assistance in helping me to find families to take part in further research. At around the same time, one of the prison officers from the establishment was appointed as a family liaison officer. Conversations with the family liaison officer were similarly unproductive, in that she suggested to me that she knew relatively little about the families of prisoners and therefore any help that I could give her in finding out more information for her new post would be greatly appreciated. Whether or not the introduction of family liaison officers in British prisons is helpful to prisoners' families remains largely unknown. I continued to work at this Visitors' Centre until August 2004, at which point I shifted my attention to a male High Security establishment which housed those serving long term prison sentences.

**Participant Observation at The High Security Estate Prison**

The High Security prison where I chose to conduct further research was the same establishment in which my husband had served a large part of his prison sentence. By the time I began this part of the research however my husband had been moved to an open prison. During the time that I had spent visiting my own husband at this particular establishment there was no designated Visitors' Centre. Instead, the families of prisoners, including myself would queue up outside the doors of a small brick built building just beyond the perimeter of the walls of the prison. It was not unusual for visitors to be standing outside for a couple of hours waiting for one of

the officers to open the doors. On many occasions the officers could be seen sitting eating their dinners and basking in the warmth, well aware of the women and children standing outside peering in at them though the glass panelled doors. When I returned to this centre to conduct participant observation however the welfare organization had since taken up residence inside the building; designating it a Visitors' Centre, by opening the doors early and providing more information on the rules and procedures of visiting, as well as a place for visitors to purchase refreshments while waiting.

Participant observation at this Visitors' Centre therefore consisted of a period of time during which I 'hung out', at least once, sometimes twice a week so that I could sit and talk to the families while they were waiting for their visits. After doing this for about two months I was able to build up relationships with some of the regular visitors who began to include me in their conversations while they were waiting for their visits. On a number of occasions I also provided transport for a number of women who were experiencing difficulties getting to the prison. In addition to this I also conducted voluntary work at this Visitors' Centre; once again filling in for people who were sick or on holiday. The duties involved were similar in many ways to those I undertook at the local prison, such as greeting the visitors and marking them off the visits lists as they came into the Centre, explaining the rules and regulations and serving snacks and drinks. These occasions provided excellent opportunity to gather data comprising of detailed observations which were later written up as part of the fieldwork. In addition to participant observation I also conducted a series of in-depth interviews.

**Interviews**

At the outset of the research I made the decision not to approach the prison service for access to families, because I felt that it could potentially compromise the type of non-hierarchical relationship between researcher and participant that I was keen to create. Various other avenues for recruiting women were therefore explored, such as meetings with the community integration team, and meetings with various members of charitable organisations. As I suggested earlier however, because their own access to families is often limited the meetings only served to further establish the difficulties in finding women and their extended families who would be interested in

taking part in such a project. As a result of this I decided that I would recruit my sample of women via the Visitors' Centres. Since the sample of women that I obtained through this method of recruitment is comprised mainly of white, working class mothers from the North of England, however, it must be acknowledged that this limits the generalisability of my research findings.

The initial target was to recruit twenty women who would take part in further research over a period of twelve months; with the intention of gaining access to their extended family members who could also be included in the research. My intention to gain access to extended family members, however, was thwarted by time constraints, and difficulties in making arrangements to meet with the women themselves. Largely because of these difficulties I only managed to make arrangements to interview the extended family members of one of the research participants, Silvia; and in this particular case the arrangements subsequently fell through when Silvia unexpectedly withdrew from the study. The intention to interview extended family members did not therefore come to fruition during the course of the research, and as a result of this, the subject of this thesis is addressed almost exclusively from the perspective of the mother.

In addition to these difficulties, I also found that achieving the size of sample (twenty women) was difficult. Firstly, this was because prisoners' families are often suspicious of the attempts of researchers who try to engage them in their projects (Murray 2005). To a certain extent the reasons for this can only be understood by reading the chapters that follow on from this one and by trying to understand the experiences of the women, and the impact that the interventions of imprisonment which serve to subordinate kinship has on their lives, and on their health and wellbeing (see Chapter Four). However, there is also another dimension to this for which I will need to draw further on my own experiences.

For instance, when I first began the research I was informed by one of my associates[4] that I was wasting my time. In his opinion:

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[4] I use the term 'associate' to denote a person who forms part of my own network, and who I have come to know during the period of time in which my husband was incarcerated either because they were the wives of other prisoners' or because they were the men who my husband

> no prisoners' family or criminal who are worth their salt will talk to you about their family ties and social networks – that is not the way things are done

Because of my own experiences I already understood these difficulties and I could anticipate the problems, nevertheless I was determined to find women who were willing to speak to me because of the importance that I placed on gaining a clearer understanding of the situation that families like my own were in. I was also aware that there were a small number of studies that had already been conducted and which touched on this area of research (such as: Boswell and Wedge 2002; Morris 1965; Shaw 1987 & 1992 & 1997; Richards et al 1994), and I therefore took this to be a sign that although it might be difficult it would not be impossible.

My associate's analysis of the situation however was to a certain extent correct, because although it is not exclusively the case, the women who are most likely to respond to those conducting research are the 'first timers', that is the wives and partners of prisoners who have relatively little previous experience of imprisonment, and who are struggling to come to terms with the rules of the system and the extra pressures that many of the interventions which I review in other chapters place on them. Those who have previous experience of the system and know what it entails are only too well aware of the fact that all information is precious and needs to be closely guarded. This hesitance at imparting information is one that is picked up by Young's (1990) study of policing, in which he describes the way in which criminals and their families are often vague about certain issues. Indeed, taking part in research implies imparting information and knowledge, which in most cases does not benefit the prisoner but instead the system of imprisonment – and hence the suspicion towards those, including academic researchers, who are always full of questions.

In this respect it is the same principle that governs the prisoners' dislike for informants and grasses, which as Foucault points out are often recruited from

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spent his time in prison with. I do not think of most of my associates as friends because the relationship is decidedly different, in that there are many rules and conventions that my associates indulge in that I do not participate in or agree with. However, it should be noted that this differs from some other prisoners' wives and families in that some networks are founded on more than 'doing prison time' together, in that they are frequently intertwined with their kinship ties and the social networks already in existence.

amongst the prison population (Foucault 1977: 267). Under these circumstances the prisoner and his family, who are vague or non-committal, are therefore seen as an asset, because it signifies that they are among those who can be trusted, or as one of my associates put it 'that they can keep their mouths shut'; in order to prove that one is trustworthy this relies on earning a reputation which proves as much. Since one's associations and networks are very often intertwined with kinship ties, it is primarily this which makes researching this topic, and finding families who are willing to talk to a researcher, a difficult feat to accomplish.

Another reason why achieving my original sample size was difficult was because some women dropped out of the research before completing the series of interviews. In particular there were a couple of instances where women dropped out of the research because their partners were on remand and subsequently released from prison. In these instances I was told by the women that they did not see any point in continuing. Furthermore, their partners had expressed their wish to get on with their lives and forget about the prison. As a result of this, I only managed to recruit eleven women who each took part in at least three interviews or more and a further three with whom I conducted one off interviews. The interviews were primarily aimed at collecting in-depth case study data and the biographical experiences from women, with children, who were the wives and partners of male prisoners. The interviews varied in length, each lasting anywhere between half an hour up to two hours. The interviews in which I took notes rather than taping the conversations were often the ones that lasted the longest. The reason for the variation in duration of the interviews was also because of the particular type of interview structure that I used; I will review the structure that I used in these interviews following my description of the sampling techniques which I used to generate my sample of interviewees.

Two techniques were used to generate my sample of interviewees; these have been referred to as snowball and convenience sampling. The first of these was what is referred to as snowball sampling, which is described by Bernard (2002: 185) as a process in which 'you locate one or more key individuals and ask them to name others who would be likely candidates for your research'. The key individuals who fulfilled this purpose were some of the volunteers and staff from the Welfare Organization of the local male and High Security establishment. After requesting

their help in trying to locate families who would be willing to take part in further research I was contacted on a number of occasions by the staff and volunteers with contact details for people who had shown an interest in taking part. However, although I always followed the referrals up, in a number of instances the families really actually wanted advice and did not take part in the interviews which were aimed at extending the research. A total of three out of the eleven women who took part in the study were recruited through this method.

The second technique which I employed has been referred to as convenience sampling, described as 'grabbing whoever will stand still long enough to answer your questions' (Bernard 2002: 184). Eight of the women were recruited through this type of sampling technique. Convenience sampling was used because of the difficulties that I was experiencing in finding families who were willing to take part in further interviews. Some of my convenience sample was collected during spells of participant observation. This particular method of collecting research participants was in some ways problematic, because, as I mentioned earlier many of the women that I approached were often suspicious, in some cases citing fear of media involvement as the reason why they did not want to take part, whilst in other cases they were just generally abrupt and disinterested. In order to overcome these difficulties I printed leaflets and posters which I left in the Visitors' Centres, which contained information about the research as well as a brief summary of my own experience and contact details (See Appendix A for further details).

All together then, a total of 47 interviews were conducted with eleven women who were the wives or long term partners of prisoners. The range of interviews, and the duration over which the women were involved in the study varied.[5] Details of their age, number of children, housing, financial status and details on their husbands/partners sentence are as follows:

**Miranda:** aged 20-30; she had two children and she was living in a council house on welfare benefits. Her partner Iain was a VP (vulnerable prisoner – see chapter five for explanation of the difference between VP and normal location prisoners). Iain

[5] See Interview schedule Appendix D

was serving a life sentence at a High Security Establishment for a particularly serious crime; this was both Iain and Miranda's first prison sentence. In addition to the interviews that I conducted with Miranda I also spent a considerable amount of time with both her and her children during my fieldwork; which involved taking Miranda and her children to the Visitors' Centre and taking part in social gatherings such as going out for meals and going to her children's' birthday parties along with Lois and Beth – two of the other women who were also participants in the research. During this time I also spent a couple of weeks looking after her children for her while she was in hospital, because she had no one else to take care of them. Against my better judgment,[6] I did inform social services who I was (i.e. researcher) so that they could find someone else to look after them. Despite this however I was informed that they had no where for them to go and that they were better off staying with me because that is what their mother wanted. In addition to this I also wrote to Iain, Miranda's partner, and, I spoke to him on the phone on numerous occasions. I also received an invitation from Iain to attend a concert that he was playing in at Christmas time, however the governor of the prison subsequently withdrew the invitation, and in his letter stated that the concert was for prison officers and prisoners only, and that Iain had made a mistake in sending the invitation as the concert was not and never had been at any stage open to the families of prisoners. Once again, this is an issue that relates to the wider theme of subordinate kinship that I will draw upon throughout the chapters of this thesis.

**Amy:** aged 20-30; had two step children and was living in privately rented accommodation on the outskirts of a Northern city. Amy was on welfare benefits. Her husband Tony was a normal location prisoner serving six and a half years for burglary. This was Amy's first sentence, and Tony's third sentence, which he was initially serving at the local male establishment, before being transferred to the High Security prison.

**Paula:** aged 20-30; she had five children, and lived in privately rented accommodation on a council estate. Paula was on welfare benefits. Paula's husband was a normal location prisoner, who was serving his time at a High Security

[6] I say this because many families are very wary of social services and would not welcome their involvement in their affairs.

establishment, and he had a long history of imprisonment; but this was Paula's first prison sentence.

**Karen:** aged 30-40 Karen had four children, and lived in privately rented accommodation on the outskirts of a Northern city. Karen worked in a nursing home. Her partner, Jimmy, was a normal location prisoner serving his sentence at a High Security establishment. Jimmy had a history of violence and imprisonment, but this was Karen's first sentence. I also spoke to Jimmy on the phone on two occasions during the fieldwork, when he asked me for my help and advice on matters relating to the prison.

**Ann:** aged 20-30; Ann had one child and lived in a council house on welfare benefits. Her partner Tommy was a normal location prisoner serving a sentence for violent crimes. Tommy was also a heroin addict, serving time at a High Security prison. He had a long history of imprisonment; but this was Ann's first sentence.

**Sharon:** aged 40-50; Sharon had two children and lived in a privately owned house on the edge of a council estate. Sharon worked as a cleaner at the shipyards. Her partner, Richard, was a normal location prisoner who was serving a nine year sentence, which he initially served at a Local male establishment before being transferred to a High Security prison. This was Sharon and Richards second sentence. Sharon was therefore the only woman in my sample of research participants who had previous prison experience.

**Silvia:** aged 30-40; Silvia had two children – one of whom was disabled. Silvia and her husband Neil owned their own home on a private estate. At the start of her husband's sentence Neil's employer continued to pay Neil's wages until shortly after he was convicted, at which point Silvia went on to welfare benefits. Neil was a normal location prisoner serving a three year sentence for a white collar crime. Silvia was also charged with the crime but not convicted. This was their first sentence.

**Meena:** aged 30-40; Meena had two teenage children and lived in a council flat in another area of the country. Meena worked as a cleaner in a supermarket. Meena's partner was a vulnerable prisoner serving an eight year sentence. This was their first

sentence. Meena was my only research participant from an Asian background. The reason for this is because I found even greater difficulties in finding research participants to take part in the study who were of a different ethnic group or nationality. In some respects this was because the majority of those who attended the Visitors' Centre were white British. As a result of this the way in which imprisonment affects the kinship ties of different ethnic groups is therefore one that remains a much neglected area. Because of the emotive nature of the topic I would suggest that this is in any case an area of study which would be best undertaken by an anthropologist who has experience of kinship in these particular areas.

**Beth**: aged 50 +; Beth had four children (now adults) and she lived in a council house on welfare benefits in another area of the country. Beth's husband was a vulnerable prisoner, who was serving his first sentence at a High Security establishment. As I have already mentioned I spent a considerable amount of time with Beth because of her friendship with some of the other research participants – Miranda who I have already discussed, and also Lois.

**Lois**: aged 50 +; Lois had two children (now adults) and she owned her own home on the outskirts of a council estate in the North of England. Lois worked as a nurse/carer. Lois' husband was a vulnerable prisoner who was serving a six year sentence. This was their first sentence.

**Helen**: aged 30-40; Helen had two children and lived in a council house; she was on welfare benefits. Helen's partner was a vulnerable prisoner serving a five year sentence at a High Security establishment. This was Helen's first sentence. She did not say whether her partner had been to prison before.

Except for Meena and Beth, whose interviews took place in the Visitors' Centre, all of the interviews took place in the informants' own home. The interviews involved the use of what has been described as 'unstructured' and 'interactive' interviews and it is to a discussion of these techniques that I will now turn.

The technique of unstructured interviewing is described by Denscome (1998: 113) as one where 'the researchers role is to be as unobtrusive as possible', and in which a

topic or theme is introduced which enables the interviewee to 'develop his or her ideas'. On the other hand, Collins (1998) emphasizes how unstructured interviews are actually 'structured in a number of sometimes subtle ways' and as such 'they cannot be seen simply as repositories of "objective facts" but should also be understood as mutually constructed social events with an existential quality sui generis'. Drawing on the work of Oakley, Collins suggests that 'interviews are social interactions in which meaning is necessarily negotiated between a number of selves (and in which power may be *more or less* shared). The interviewer need be neither 'objective' nor 'detached', but should rather be 'engaged'. Engagement implies a willingness on the part of the interviewer to understand the interviewee's response to a question or prompt in the wider context of the interview(s) as a whole' (Collins 1998: 1.6).

Further to this, Oakley (1981: 44) also suggests that 'in most cases, the goal of finding out about people through interviewing is best achieved when the relationship of interviewer and interviewee is non-hierarchical and when the interviewer is prepared to invest his or her own personal identity in the relationship'. Holmes (2002) explains how this type of 'interactive interviewing' was particularly effective in her study of 'the gendered management of distance relationships'. Because of the emotive nature of the topic and the suspicions often held by the families of prisoners about those conducting research I felt that achieving this type of reciprocal non-hierarchical relationship was an extremely important feature of this research.

**The Structure Of Interviews And Themes Used**

The first interview undertaken with participants was used as a method of getting to know them and for establishing rapport. The benefits of this were that it enabled me to answer any questions they had about the research, to sign the consent forms and to tell my research participants a little bit about my own background in order to build a context in which my research participants felt comfortable enough to talk. The themes which I used to inform the interviews which followed were: maintaining relationship through contact and visiting; gift giving and special events, the impact of incarceration on the families' well-being and social networks and support groups. In practice there was a great deal of overlap during the interviews between these themes; primarily because they were interlinked and therefore inseparable in the

stories that women told me about their experiences. Research participants were also often inclined to deviate from the theme by telling me about the latest problem or situation which had arisen such as difficulties with the prison, or their most recent health problem to have arisen. Instead of seeing this as unproductive however I would liken this to what Bryman (1988: 47) refers to as 'rambling', a positive way of revealing 'the interviewees concerns'. Many of my research participants' 'ramblings' generated important pieces of data, as well as serving to indicate to me that they were comfortable in speaking to me; which I suggest stems from my willingness to 'engage' with what my research participants were talking about, and the 'unstructured' style of interviewing.

Despite the benefits of using unstructured interviews there were also limitations. For instance, I found it particularly difficult to follow up on key themes that were broached with women during the course of our interview conversations. In hindsight, perhaps using a combination of techniques would have been more effective. For example, unstructured interviewing to initiate a hierarchical type relationship, followed by a more structured style of interviewing later on in the research, as a means of facilitating a more consistent collection of data.

In addition to the limitations that I have just described, the process of conducting interviews with the wives and partners of prisoners was not without its problems. In particular, I would often arrange a time and a date for the interview to take place, only to turn up and find that the woman was not at home. The frequency of these occurrences was both time consuming and costly. In most of these cases the women did apologize and provide an explanation for missing the interview, and in these instances the interviews were subsequently rearranged. However, there were two occasions when this occurred and the initial interview had not taken place. On these occasions I took this as a sign that the women might have changed their minds about taking part, so I posted a leaflet though the door and decided not to pursue them any further. I took this course of action because I believed that it would be in breach of 'avoiding undue intrusion' which was one of the criteria which I took into consideration when I was devising my ethical code (I will review my ethical code shortly).

There were also a couple of other instances where I turned up to conduct the interviews only to find that the research participants were having building work done or their homes redecorated and carpets fitted. On these occasions the participants did not want to rearrange the interview schedule so I conducted the interviews regardless. However this subsequently had an effect on the quality of some the tape recordings, in which some of the data was difficult to decipher. Women would also often interrupt the interviews by taking phone calls from their husbands/ partners or friends; the importance of the interview was, in such instances, overshadowed by the continuous daily grind. In some ways this can be related to Malcolm Young's (1990: 14) account of 'Hunter-gathering time in N.E. England', in which he highlights the way in which the concept of time held by criminals, prisoners and their families is distinctly different from the highly ordered and structured concept of time and time tabling which is used as a guiding principle in Western society; and evoked by the police and the courts as 'a condensed symbol of the wider notions of correct behaviour and preferred social order'. In particular, he argues that the cultural disparities which exist in the notion of time stems from the way that the present and the future have little relevance to criminals and their families, where times and dates are meaningless because they are primarily focused on surviving in their immediate environment rather than focusing on 'self gain and personal achievement' (ibid: 15). I would further argue that these cultural disparities cannot really be understood, without taking into account the extra pressures that these women live with on a daily basis, which I will briefly examine following this next section on ethical considerations, and in the chapters that follow on from this.

**Ethical Considerations**

Given the sensitivities surrounding this topic, the ethics guiding the research was a prominent theme from the outset. The code of ethics that I followed while I was conducting the fieldwork adheres to that set out by the Association of Social Anthropologists (1999). In adopting this code of ethics, the well-being of individuals taking part in the research was considered to be of paramount importance. This precept is especially important when conducting fieldwork with the families of prisoners because, as some research suggests, they often suffer from problems relating to health care and emotional difficulties (Lowenstein 1984; Murray 2005; Richards et al 1994; Shaw et al 1992). In conducting further research in this area I

therefore felt that it was particularly important to take these issues into consideration in order to limit any further anxiety which could impact on their well-being. In order to do this therefore I gave each of the women who took part in the interviews a comprehensive description of the research with regards to the aims and objectives. Informed consent was also obtained and regularly updated in order to take account of the ASA (1999: 3) guidelines, which suggest that gaining consent 'is not a one off event' but should be updated on a regular basis. All of my interviewees were told that their anonymity and confidentiality would be protected, and as a result of this some of the identifying features from the case study data that I collected have been changed. I have also been deliberately vague about the specific location of the prison and the particular area of the North in which I conducted the research, which I have done in order to try and further disguise the identity of my participants.

At the outset of the research a decision was taken not to interview children. This decision was made because of the ethical issues surrounding their vulnerability and the emotional difficulties that children often experience – and which I described in some of the other chapters in this thesis. Any references to the experiences of children in this study therefore should be recognised as being based on the perceptions of the child's mother, rather than the views of the child.

On each occasion I sought permission from my research participants to tape-record the interviews; and in most cases women gave me their permission. In cases where interviews were taped I agreed to remove any identifying features from the transcripts, before destroying the tapes once the research has been completed. There were, however, a couple of cases where permission to tape was refused. The reasons given by the interviewee was fear of media involvement. In cases such as this, I made notes during the interviews and wrote them up later. One interesting observation that I made from this which perhaps deserves noting is that I became a lot more involved in the lives of these women, and one in particular. Which I would argue could be an indication of benefit of taking notes rather than using recording equipment, particularly with prisoners' families who, as I have already acknowledged, can be profoundly suspicious of researchers (Murray 2005) and other official bodies.

However, my quest to gain informed consent during participant observation was still more complicated; in particular, because as Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) point out, it can be difficult trying to inform everyone. I found that this was the case at the Visitors' Centre where a great number of people congregate over a short period of time. Visitors come and go quite frequently, especially at the local male security establishment where inmates are regularly 'shipped' out to other prisons. Of course there are those who are visiting repeat offenders who come back regularly, but then there are also those who disappear to prisons elsewhere never to be seen again. In order to compensate for this I used leaflets in which I described who I was and the research that I was conducting. I introduced myself to visitors and I always told them about the research before getting into conversations. I also provided contact details to encourage families to come forward and talk to me about their experiences; and in addition to this I sought and obtained permission from the charitable organization running the Visitors' Centres at each of the prisons where the observations took place.

The methods that I used were the same at the High Security prison. However, informing people about the research was much less of a problem at this establishment; there is more continuity to visiting and because of their length of sentence the family tend to come back week in, week out, year after year. People in this environment are therefore more likely to build up relationships with other visitors, in particular those who are visiting vulnerable prisoners who often experience difficulties in maintaining their social ties and networks (as I discuss further in chapters five and seven).

Finally, in addition to my ethical code there was also an assessment of risk both to myself and my research participants which was made prior to the commencement of research. With regards to the research participants, the measured amount of risk was deemed to be minimal, providing that the ethical guidelines were followed. With regards to my own well-being, two potential risks were identified. These were assault and lone working. The risk of assault and lone working were potential problems because of my intention to conduct the interviews in the home of each research participant, which meant that I would be visiting neighbourhoods in the north of which I had no prior knowledge. In order to overcome these difficulties I

made enquiries within my circle of associates concerning the type of area that I might be visiting beforehand, and when necessary I took a chaperone (usually one of my associates) with me. At all other times I kept in regular contact with one or more of my friends, giving them the details of my location and likely movements during the research. In addition to visiting my research participants in their own home, I also moved to a location which was nearer to both of the prisons where the research was conducted. In the following section I will set the scene by describing and contextualising some of these neighbourhoods in the North of England.

**Setting The Scene: Understanding Deprived Neighbourhoods In The North Of England**

In most cases the areas that my research participants were living in were those with a high degree of poverty and disadvantage. A number of these were small terraced houses, often council or ex-council housing where spatial distribution of people is much closer together. The area in which I took up residence for the purpose of the research was in many ways similar to the areas in which my research participants were living and in which a number of the interviews took place. The location was a small 'pit village' on the outskirts of a northern city. Before I moved to the village I took one of my friends with me. She told me that she was going to check out the location and see if it passed what she referred to as 'the half brick in the street test'. This is a layman's version of Julius Wilson's 'broken windows theory' in which signs of petty vandalism such as graffiti, broken windows, or half bricks in the street are seen as indicative of problem neighbourhoods (See Wilson and Kelling 1982: 253; Bratton 1998: 3; also see chapter three for more information on the 'broken windows' theory). Although, on the surface, the location appeared to be relatively free from problems, the fact that there were no broken windows or half bricks in the street on that particular day was in some ways deceptive. The location was not quiet and peaceful. But instead, like a number of the small pit villages and industrial towns in this particular area of the north, and in which many of my research participants were living, the decline in local industry meant that the location was marred by its share of problems. For instance, male unemployment and poverty and vandalism (see Campbell 1993). Evidence of these disadvantages could be seen by the increasing number of boarded up houses and the closure of commercial establishments, which I began to take notice of following my move to the area:



**Figure 1**: above, one of the streets in the 'pit village' in north of England, taken during the time of research.



**Figure 2**: depicting the closure of public houses and commercial establishments




**Figure 3**: the house next door to my research participant Miranda; this graffiti is indicative of the tensions and problems which exist in some of the more impoverished areas, in the North of England.

The village that I moved to was one that had a reputation which extended beyond its geographical boundary; as I was told by one of my associates who lived in one of the neighbouring villages ' I don't know why you moved there, there aren't no real people, the criminals are all scallys'.[7] The poor reputation of the village was not only confined to those with a criminal record. My cousin who also lived in one of the neighbouring villages told me 'it's a bit rough there, you'll have to be careful'. In contrast to this, however, just before I moved in I also spoke to my new next door neighbours, Ron and Eva, who told me that it was only certain areas which were 'rough', and that they had lived in the village for a long time and never experienced any problems. Following this they then went on to name a number of the surrounding villages such as that in which my associate and my cousin were living, which they described as having a worse reputation and being 'a lot rougher' than the village that I had chosen to live in. In Givens' ethnographic study of a poor housing estate in the North East of England he highlights how tenants frequently exchanged horror stories about other tenants and problem families as a way of managing identity and displaying ones own respectability (Givens 1998: 177). This, I would argue, is similar to what was happening here in that those who live in deprived and stigmatised areas are more likely to project their negative views onto those who live in other areas or in other parts of the village or neighbourhood.

Although this may be the case, there were a number of incidents which occurred while I was living in the village, most involving local youths and residents and/or the police. These incidents were also representative of both media and government concerns about the problems with youth crime and anti-social behaviour. With the Telegraph labelling the year 2005 as '[t]he year of the Asbo' and reporting that 66,000 'anti-social acts' are 'committed every day'.[8] One such case (in the village) was reported in the in the local paper. The article describes the case of a mother who

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[7] In this context the term scally (derived from scallywag, meaning rogue or rascal) usually refers to a less sophisticated criminal – a petty thief, usually either those with drug addictions who put little forethought into their crime because it is committed to feed their habit; or vandals who commit crime for pleasure or boredom – to denigrate an area, or intimidate people. Scallys are usually differentiated from 'grafters' who are a lot more organised, and who usually commit acquisitive crimes for financial gain.

[8] http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/main.jhtml?xml=/news/2005/12/18/nasbo18.xml

claimed that she became a target for what the paper referred to as 'teenage thugs'. The woman is reported as saying that:

> She had bricks thrown at her windows, dog faeces through the letterbox and the words "Die Bitch" painted on her door. She said: 'They have threatened to bomb the place with petrol. My car has been written off and I haven't been out of the house for nine months'. She was further reported as saying 'I was told by neighbours that I am on my own and they won't help me speak out, I think they are scared by what happens here even though they wont admit it. The police have told me I'm too 'nice' to the perpetrators because I tell them to stop. I have been told I should tell them to f*** off but I wont lower myself to the yobs level[9]

This article represents some of the problems which people sometimes experience in these neighbourhoods. Events such as these also account for the reasons why certain areas and the people who live there become stigmatised. What is most interesting about this article, however, is that it clearly displays some of the 'cultural disparities' which occur between certain groups of people living in the same geographical area. These cultural disparities are similar to those which Young (1990) draws on in the article that I mentioned earlier. The account also relates well to Goffman's idea of performance and the way in which sign activities, such as the use of certain gestures, behaviours and expressions serve as cues which are used to convey meaning (Goffman 1959:14). With this in mind, my interpretation of what is happening in this account is that the signs and expressions which are conveyed by the woman single her out as an 'outsider', with limited knowledge of the rules of the neighbourhood in which she was living. This is demonstrated by her response to the problems that she was experiencing, in that she told them to stop what they were doing rather than taking the advice of her friend. The approach that she adopts is indicative of what is often considered to be a 'respectable working class' position. Drawing this distinction between the 'respectable working classes' and the criminal or 'underclass' population, however, is in some ways misleading, because as the work of Becker highlights, deviance exists within all sectors of society (Becker 1966: 12-13). It is the rules and the labelling of deviant acts which are applied differently that give rise to different kinds of outcomes (Becker 1966: 12-13). Indeed, similar

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[9] Reference withheld because of the need to disguise the area, for the sake of my research participant's anonymity.

sentiments apply to the values and practices attributed to different sectors of the population which can not be pinned down to any particular group, because in reality these practices and values often overlap.

It is the case, however, that in certain disadvantaged neighbourhoods, in which many of the occupants have a criminal record, the police are not necessarily the first port of call when dealing with issues such as this. Instead the first port of call would be one's family or associates; encapsulated in the well known phrase 'sending the lads round to sort it out'. The response of the police and this woman's friends, when they tell the woman she is too nice, serve to emphasise these cultural disparities, revealing that the woman was working with a different frame of reference, and living by a different set of rules which do not accord with the ways of some of the other inhabitants the village. Therefore, what this woman interprets as lowering herself to the yobs' level actually relates to a different context, which belongs to a different cultural milieu. In this environment, informing the police is interpreted by those causing the disturbances and abuse as a sign of weakness, revealing a lack of associations and status, which is, in turn, interpreted as vulnerability and powerlessness. Situations such as this are not too uncommon. As one report suggests, for instance, in areas such as this the arrival of outsiders is often perceived 'as a pivotal element in the decline of the area and connected with the idea of community lost'; victimised residents tend to be outsiders, and residents often feel discriminated against and stigmatised because they live in estates with a bad reputation.[10] What is less commonly acknowledged, however, is that in areas such as this where there is already a high degree of poverty and disadvantage, there will always be a minority of families who operate outside of a legal framework. Drawing on my own experiences in areas like these, I would argue that some residents operate an informal system of protection, vengeance and retribution, dealing with internal problems themselves, rather than asking the law to deal with their problems for them. The reason for this, I would suggest, is that they feel themselves to have already been excluded from formal channels of justice in which most of society operates. This is most often (but obviously not always) the case with those who have a criminal record and the families who are associated with them.

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[10] http://www.jrf.org.uk/knowledge/findings/housing/469.asp

Although 'outsiders' are the ones who most frequently suffer this fate, however, it is important to note that not all outsiders deal with these issues in the same way. My research participant Miranda, for instance, was also an 'outsider' in that she was not native to the area, and she did not have any associations or family ties in the North of England (I examine Miranda's network in Chapter Seven). Her accent wasn't local so this further singled her out as 'different'. Miranda also lived in a street which had a reputation amongst the local village population as being one of the 'roughest' streets to live in. The derelict garages situated directly opposite Miranda's house provided a muster point where local youths would often 'hang out'. At one stage during the fieldwork they found an old settee which they placed on top of the garage roofs so that they had a place to sit. They frequently shouted verbal abuse at Miranda, and those who visited her – including myself. Most often this was in the form of swearing and sexually loaded comments. Miranda told me that she believed that the group behaved in this way because she was vulnerable because they could see that she did not have a 'man around the house'. Miranda's way of dealing with this, however, was to adopt a similar approach to the advice given to the woman in the article that I mentioned earlier. Miranda did not tell them to stop – but instead she levelled abuse back. As a result the abuse did not escalate or turn into a more physical or aggressive situation. Instead, it became what would be regarded in certain areas in the North of England as a form of 'cheeky banter', as the verbal abuse ricocheted backwards and forwards between them.

The situation was by no means pleasant for Miranda but she did manage to deal with it effectively. In terms of Goffman's (1959) ideas, she created a performance in which her gestures, behaviour and expressions were ones through which she used conveyed meanings which the youths could understand. By not calling the police and dealing with it herself what she was doing was speaking the same language; and not a language that displays a lack of associations and therefore vulnerability or powerlessness. Of course there is no guarantee that this approach would be effective under all circumstances. But because Miranda already had what is commonly referred to as knowledge of the street or being 'street wise', she had the ability to read the situation successfully. Outsiders may, therefore, be the ones who are most frequently victimized, but essentially it is often a case of how the outsider handles the situation

and whether they understand and know how to speak the language that is most important in circumstances such as this.

In the village where I lived those classed as 'outsiders', however, did not only consist of those referred to as the underclass or working class populations, but also those who consider themselves to be 'professional' people such as teachers and businessmen/women. In some cases, those considering themselves to be 'professional' tended to occupy some of the private estates in the village. These were often situated around the periphery rather than near the centre where the houses were predominantly council and ex-council housing. As a result, they usually managed to avoid any problems by limiting their contact with those who they would deem to be unsuitable. Contact with these 'prig' families, living in their 'claggy matt houses' (Young 1990) was to be avoided as much as possible. I observed this process at first hand, in my contact with one family who considered themselves to be 'professional people'. This couple refused to send their children to the local primary school for fear that they might come into contact with children from some of the poorer families, who they perceived as having 'lower standards and values'. This case serves to demonstrate how difficult (and therefore how rare) the integration of different socio-economic sections of a community can be.

The local corner shop and some of the takeaway food outlets were run by larger Asian families, adding a further dimension to the mosaic of cultural mores occupying a common space within the village. These families appeared to be particularly vulnerable to the rowdy behaviour of some of the local youths, who would often create problems that resulted in the shopkeeper having to call the police. Indeed, local shops seemed to act as magnets for youths with nowhere else to go because of their limited financial means. There were also a small number of travelling families who were commonly referred to by some of the local population as 'pikies'. These families were also often singled out by some of the local population as being deviant and untrustworthy – as one woman said 'if it ain't screwed down they'll nick (steal) it'.

At one point during my fieldwork I also noted that a curfew order was placed on the village, requiring all children to be kept indoors after nine o'clock. I was informed of

this by my daughter, and this was also confirmed by some of the local teenagers. Some, but not all, suggested that they felt aggrieved by this situation. They felt as though they were being unfairly punished for events that they were not part of.

Indeed, in some respects it was due the fact that both of my children made friends with the local children and teenagers in the village that we were able to integrate relatively successfully. Within the first few days of moving to the village I was being introduced to the parents of some of the friends that my children had made. This helped facilitate our integration, in that by listening to the stories of some of the local adults and children, I was able to build up a picture which enabled me to navigate my way through village life. However, it should be acknowledged that these issues were perhaps less of a problem for me in that I was a native of the north of England, and although I was not strictly local (I had moved from another area), my ties with family and friends in some of the surrounding villages helped establish me as a local woman.

In trying to understand the problems which often accompany living on estates, or in what may considered to be a deprived area such as this, Bourdieu's ideas about the appropriation of social space and physical space are relevant. Bourdieu suggests that social space is integrally related to physical space, and the capital possessed by those who occupy it:

> [s]ocial space translates into physical space, but the translation is always more or less *blurred*: the power over space that comes from possessing various kinds of capital takes the form of an appropriated physical space of a certain relation between the spatial structure of the distribution of agents and the spatial structure of the distribution of goods and services, private or public. An agent's position in social space is expressed in the site of physical space where that agent is situated (which means that anyone 'without home or hearth' or 'homeless' is virtually without social existence), and by the relative position that their temporary localizations (for example, honorific places, seating regulated by protocol) and especially the permanent ones (home address and business address) occupy in relation to the localizations of other agents (Bourdieu 1999: 124).

These ideas are even more interesting when viewed in relation to ideas about kinship and in particular Edwards and Strathern's ideas about belonging. They suggest that

> English-speakers know what is claimed as one's own may encompass as much a claim to identity, adduced in ways of 'belonging' to a place or a family, as it does to rights of possession. [...] There is a moral propriety to the indigenous English concept of 'ownership' which suggests that it is natural to (want to) possess things, as part of one's own self-definition, as it is to be part of a community or to belong to a family (Edwards and Strathern 2000: 149).

In neighbourhoods such as these, characterised by a high degree of disadvantage, this notion of belonging serves to establish a sense of identity, but is threatened by the appropriation of physical and therefore social space by 'outsiders'. Because some of the local people who live in these neighbourhoods possess very limited access to capital, particularly in relation to some of the 'outsiders' who move into the community the ramifications of this manifest in a reduction in feelings of power, and insecurity which simultaneously makes people feel more vulnerable. In this context, the approach of some of the local youths towards 'outsiders' could therefore be viewed as an attempt to reclaim their social space and regain the power, and the identity which they perceive as being under threat. As Bourdieu further points out:

> ...those who are deprived of capital are either physically or symbolically held at a distance from goods that are the rarest socially; they are forced to stick with the most undesirable and the least rare persons or goods. The lack of capital intensifies the experience of finitude: it chains one to a place (Bourdieu 1999: 127).

However, when a person is chained to a place (so to speak) family and social ties are in some cases stronger. As Firth et al (1969) point out, the strength and extent of kinship sentiments in working class neighbourhoods is often greater because the lack of economic and political assets means that kinship often provides a valuable system of mutual aid and support. This is often because extended family members live closer together. For example consider the brief example of the Smith family who lived nearby where I was staying in the village.

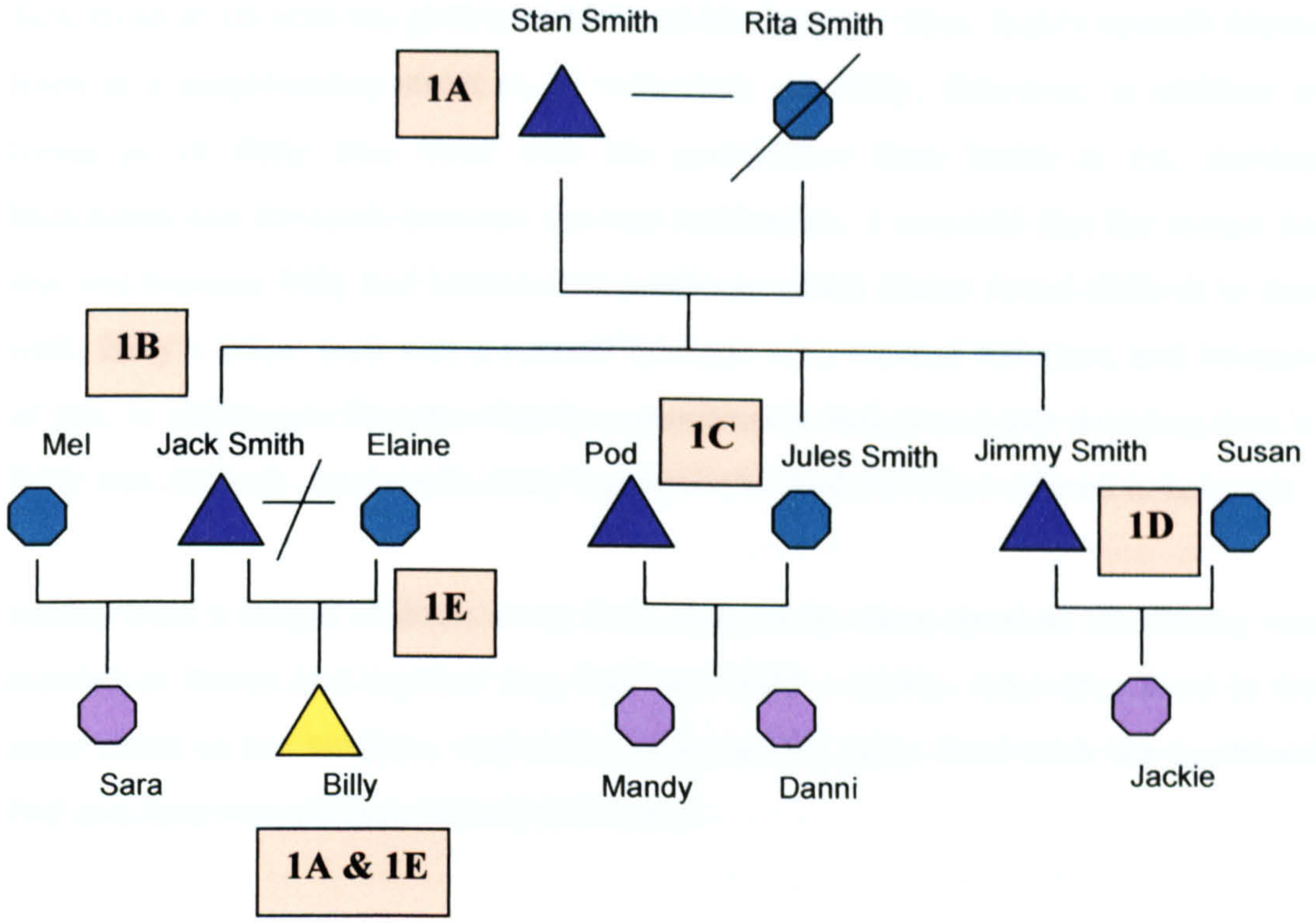



**Figure 4 Smith Family Kinship Diagram.**

**Female Adult**

**Male Adult**

**Female Child**

**Male Child**

**Location of residence (see figure 5 below: p47)**

The oldest living member of the Smith family was Stan Smith. Stan's wife Rita was deceased. Stan was born and raised in the village, and he lived at location 1A (see figure 6: 45). Stan had two sons Jack and Jimmy and one daughter Jules. Jack, Jimmy and Jules also lived in the same village.

Jack lived at 1B with his girlfriend Mel and his daughter Sara. Jack's ex-wife Elaine lived in a neighbouring street at 1E with their son Billy. However, in addition to living at 1E Billy also lived with his grandfather Stan Smith at 1A, moving backwards and forwards between the two residencies. I was told that the reason for this was because Billy had behavioural problems which Elaine found difficult to deal with. Billy's father Jack was a manual labourer who worked full time, and because of this, in addition to his other family commitments Jack found that devoting time to Billy was difficult. As a result, Billy's grandfather had therefore offered to help out.

Jimmy lived a couple of doors away from Jack, in the same street at 1D. Jimmy was married to Susan and together they had one child – Jackie. Jules also lived in the same street as her brothers, Jack and Jimmy, at 1C. Jules lived with her boyfriend Pod and their two children Mandy and Danni.

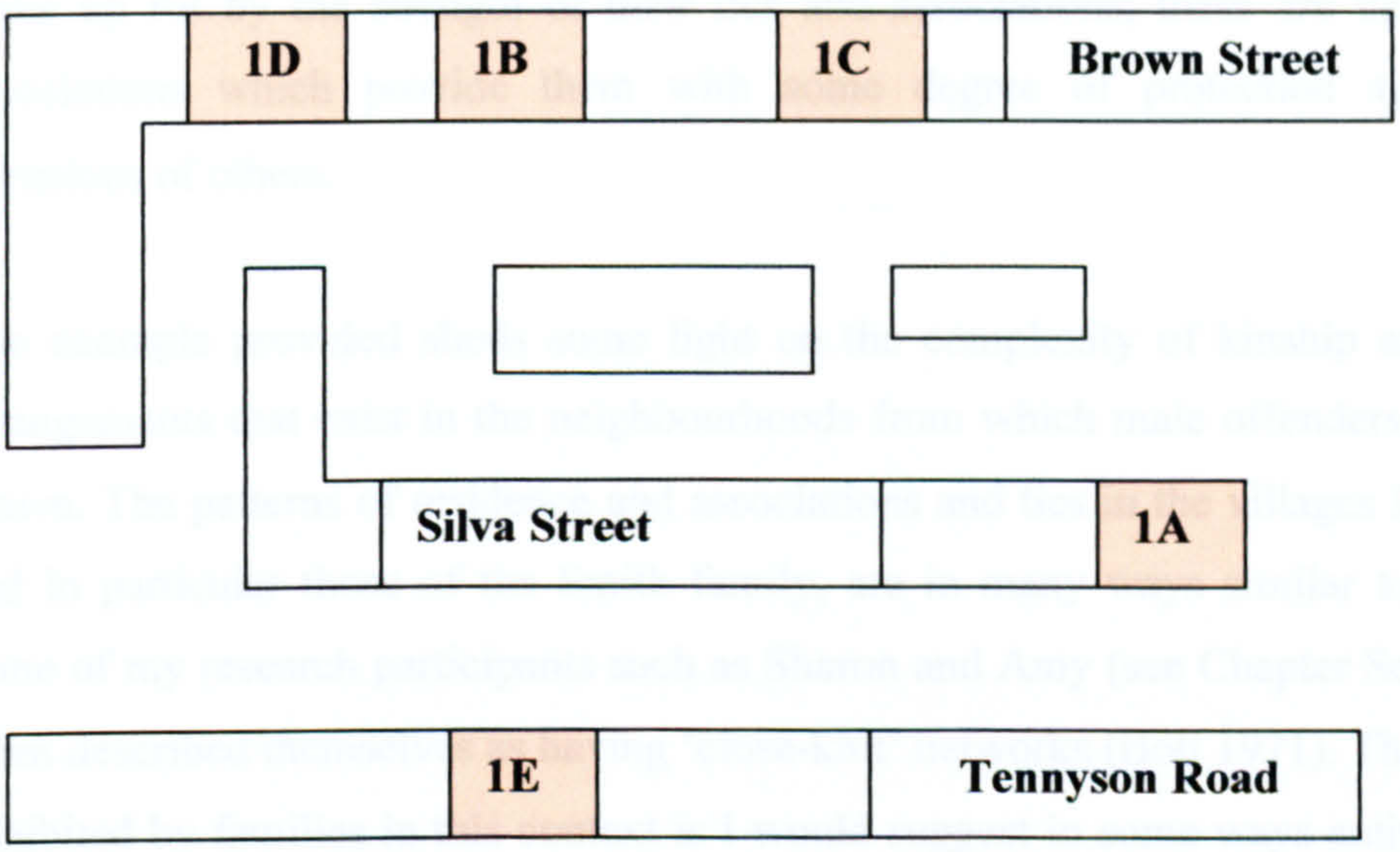



**Figure 5 above: Location of residence (not to scale)**

**Figure 5** provides an indication of the way in which a number of members from the Smith family all lived in close proximity to each other. If we also take into account the fact that Mel, Susan, Pod and Elaine were also local and had other family members living in the village then this provides some indication of the extent of the ties and associations that can develop in this sort of environment. Furthermore,

although I have not gone into much detail about support that went on between the different members of the Smith family, the fact that Stan Smith took on the role of looking after his grandson provides some indication of how complex these sorts of extended family arrangements and patterns of residence and support can be.

Indeed, it is the strength of these networks and ties that provide further indication as to why 'outsiders' to the area often have problems settling in, because when levels of exclusion are high and families are chained to a place, this in turn often means that they are more likely to 'stick together'. From an outsiders point of view this often means that trouble with one family member or person from the village often leads to difficulties with others; while from the native's point of view trouble with outsiders means that they can call on their friends and family for support. In this context, locals and outsiders are just as likely to have a criminal record. In terms of the local residents however, what they lack in terms of economic and political capital they make up for by the strength of their ties and associations; these are the ties and associations which provide them with some degree of protection against the intrusions of others.

The example provided sheds some light on the complexity of kinship and family arrangements that exist in the neighbourhoods from which male offenders are often drawn. The patterns of residence and associations and ties in the villages I describe, and in particular those of the Smith family, are in many ways similar to those of some of my research participants such as Sharon and Amy (see Chapter Seven) who often described themselves as having 'close-knit' networks (Bott 1971). The strength exhibited by families in this context is I would suggest in some ways antithetical to the 'underclass' image. Although there may be some who are responsible for social disorder, it is the idea that social disorder is endemic which often obscures the strength of their family ties and associations.

At the same time, these patterns of residence and 'close-knit' family ties were significantly different to some of the other women who took part in this research, such as Miranda, and Helen, whose residential patterns and social ties were much less stable. For women such as this, living in communities where other families are

'close-knit' may be a factor which further increases the sense of isolation and exclusion that they experience.

As such, this exercise serves to provide more of a context in which the reader can situate the research. The assumption of social disorder typically fits with an outsiders view, but gives little consideration to help understand the situation, and the possibilities that exist from the point of view of the 'native'. It is the native's point of view that I adopt in this thesis, with the intention of providing a comprehensive account of the impact that incarceration has on families, and in particular mothers and their perception of the impact that incarceration has on their children. Before I move on to do this, in the next chapter I will first examine the relationship between the family and the prison.

# CHAPTER THREE

## The Family and the Prison

**Fletcher:**
Oh come on, Mr Mackay, all screws, beg your pardon, all prison officers have problems in that area. I mean matrimonially you and me are very similar. Cos while we're in here we can't be too sure what our old ladies are getting up to, can we? No difference.

**Mackay:**
There is a major difference, Fletcher. Your wives are criminals' wives. They belong to the criminal classes with all their inherent traits of slovenliness and promiscuity. Our wives are the wives of uniformed men, used to a life of service and duty, decency and moral fibre. My house reflects my wife. **(Porridge: series one, episode six: see Webber, Clement and Frenais 2002: 126).**

### The Issue

The impact that incarceration has on the prisoner's family cannot be divorced from the more immediate problems that underpin the system of imprisonment in contemporary Britain. It is frequently suggested that the prison system is in crisis. The number of people in prison is a regular source of anxiety. In the media, for example, reports of imminent catastrophe are common. In 2003 BBC News reported: 'Prison population hits new high' suggesting that the 'number of inmates now exceeds 74,000' (11/07/2003). By 2006, BBC News were reporting that inmates were being placed in police cells under what was referred to as 'operation safeguard', in order to ease the 'overcrowding crisis', as the prison population had reached 79,714 (21/10/2006). In June 2007 the BBC News then drew attention to the government's proposal for an early release scheme in which prisoners would be freed up to 18 days early in order to ease the overcrowding crisis (29/06/2007). As the scheme was put into effect, the tabloids described these as 'controversial' measures as 'a fiasco' and 'reckless', reporting that 'jails across the country will open the door for burglars, drug dealers and other crooks' (Whitehead 29/06/2007). Statistics by the Prison Reform Trust also indicate the scale of the problem:

> The number of prisoners in England and Wales has increased by over 25,000 in the last ten years. In 1995, the average prison population was 50,962. When Labour came to power in May 1997, the prison population was 60,131. Previously it took nearly four decades (1958-1995) for the prison population to rise by 25,000 (PRT 2006: 4).

These figures attest to the fact that although the problem is often presented as a sudden crisis, it is not new but a situation that has been developing over a significant period of time. The Prison Reform Trust further suggests that 'England and Wales has the highest imprisonment rate in western Europe at 143 per 100,000 of the population' (PRT 2006: 4). While 'France has an imprisonment rate of 88 per 100,000 and Germany has a rate of 97 per 100,000' (PRT 2006). The increase, however, is not due to 'catching more criminals' or because of 'more people being found guilty of serious crime' (PRT 2006: 3); for the PRT it is the manifestation of a crisis which is rooted elsewhere.

**A Penal System In Crisis?**

There have been numerous attempts to characterise and explain the development and extent of the over-crowding crisis in Britain's prison system (For example see: Bottoms 1980; Cavadino et al 2002; Fitzgerald and Sim 1982; Liebling 2004). The main factors of which appear to be the introduction of managerialism, privatisation and a shift in political ideology concerning the values regarding the purpose of imprisonment (Cavadino et al 2002).

Managerialism has been described as 'a distinct set of ideologies and practices', and a 'technologically supported approach to the management of organizations which emphasizes strategic planning, 'service delivery', efficiency and value for money...and it has a built in tendency towards instrumentalism and quantification' (Liebling 2004: 377). The approach 'is characterised by strong central direction but also devolution within-parameters to local managers' (Leibling 2004:377). Managerialism describes a process of transformation which began with the conservative government in the early 1980s and 'continued under New Labour' (Liebling 2004: 23). The approach became more firmly established, however, in the early 1990s alongside the introduction of privatisation (Liebling 2004: 23-24).

The trend towards privatisation of prisons refers not only to prisons which are run and funded by the private sector but also to the contracting out of services to private companies. This type of system was introduced into the UK in 1992 building on policies already in existence in the USA and Australia (Leech 2006: 335). The introduction of managerialism and privatisation has been criticised by many because both ideologies are orientated towards making a profit, and therefore have 'a vested interest in a higher prison population' (Flynn 1998: 65 also see Leech 2006). It is the use of strategies such as these that has led to a shift in the perceived purpose of imprisonment, and the reason behind why prisons are now being thought of as 'late-modern'.

**An Ideological Shift?**

The shift to a more neo-liberal ideology in the function and management of prisons has been linked to the collapse of what is referred to as the 'rehabilitative ideal', which was prevalent throughout the 60s an 70s. This ideal was based on the idea that the behaviour of criminals could be rehabilitated and reformed (Cavadino 2002: 333-337). Cavadino goes on to suggest that the ideal collapsed during the Thatcher administration when an emphasis on law and order linked to stronger regimes of punishment and a move in the direction of retribution and away from rehabilitation (Cavadino 2002: 333-337). Regimes of hard discipline, such as the 'short sharp shock' were introduced for young offenders and imprisonment was meant to have a more deterrent effect (Cavadino 2002: 24-5 & 35). During this time, penal practices were still aimed at keeping the prison population down and this remained the case throughout the 1980s and early 1990s when the 'law and order ideology' was 'toned down' (Cavadino 2002: 333-335) and an ideology of 'just deserts was introduced' (Cavadino 1997: 5).[1]

The next major changes in penal policies and practice took place between 1990 and 1993. These changes were instigated by Lord Justice Woolf's enquiry into the problems and conditions of the UK prison system. The report was aimed at determining the factors which led to a series of major disturbances, in particular the

[1] The 'law and order ideology' was designed to be harsh on offenders; whereas 'just deserts' ideology was orientated towards punishing in the community in order to keep the prison population down, and punishing offender in proportion with the crime (see Cavadino 1997: 5).

prison riots at Strangeways Prison in Manchester. In the process of preparing his report, Lord Justice Woolf exposed a number of problems, such as poor prison maintenance, staff shortages and overcrowding, resulting from 'a moral crisis in the penal system' and 'a lack of clarity about purpose' (Liebling 2004: 10-12). Recommendations were subsequently made 'for the wholesale reform of the prison system' (Flynn 1998: 38) which included 'improved conditions', 'better overall standards of justice', and 'that prisoners should be treated with humanity and fairness' (Liebling 2004: 11). The 1991 white paper 'Custody, Care and Justice' supported Woolf's recommendations, suggesting that there should be limits placed on the extent of imprisonment, describing it as 'an expensive way of making bad people worse' (Liebling 2004: 11-12). The result was a decline in the prison population 'for the first time since the second world war' (Flynn 1998: 42).

Woolf's recommendations were, however, relatively short lived as attempts to implement them alongside managerialist strategies and prison privatisation resulted in a lax standard of security, provoking more prison riots (Liebling 2004: 14-17). In turn, this provided the ideal environment for the tide to change again, in the direction of a more punitive approach (Liebling 2004: 18 - 21). This was the approach adopted by Michael Howard when he took over the post of Home Secretary in 1993 (Liebling 2004: 18; Flynn 1998: 43).

Howard's approach is encapsulated in his well known suggestions that 'prison works' and that 'prison regimes should be decent but austere' because prisoners were, he suggested, 'lacking in discipline' (Liebling 2004: 18-20). Shorter sentences were subsequently renounced and strategies such as 'two strikes and your out' (the two strikes rule refers to the imposition of a life sentence after being convicted of a second serious offence) were introduced (Cavadino 2002: 106). From this point onwards the prison population began to increase significantly.

In 1997 when the New Labour came to power, an ideology of 'punitive managerialism' was adopted (Cavadino 2002: 339). This approach emphasised 'zero tolerance' and professed to be 'tough on crime, tough on the causes of crime'

(Mooney 2003: 106).[2] According to Mooney, the adage 'tough on crime, tough on the causes of crime' refers to 'punishment and the maintenance of a large scale prison system', whilst locating 'the causes of crime within the family and poor parenting' (Mooney 2003: 106). This thinking was reflected in the 2003 paper 'Respect and Responsibility – Taking a Stand Against Anti-social Behaviour' which emphasised the role that the family should play in fostering a climate of respect and responsibility in children, in order to prevent the high levels of crime and anti-social behaviour which manifest in the community (Home Office 2003; Mooney 2003: 106). Mooney (2003) was not alone in arguing that Britain was heading towards a system of mass imprisonment.

Sudbury (2005) has also argued that the increasing prison population is part of a conscious move towards mass imprisonment consistent with a global movement towards U.S. military style dominance and economic restructuring.[3] What emerges from this process has been referred to as the 'prison industrial complex' (Sudbury 2005: xvii & 168 & 178-181; Richie 2005: 71; Smith 2005: 105; Evans 2005: 225). Prisons in this context 'serve a dual function of warehousing those surplus to the global economy and creating profits for private prison operators and companies serving prisons' (Sudbury 2005: xvii).

The government's response to these problems does not, I would argue, contradict this line of reasoning. As the prison population in Britain was reaching critical levels in 2006, the government proposed to increase the number of prison places by 8,000. At the same time, proposals were also made to take 'tougher new action' on certain crimes. These measures included: increasing penalties, imposing tougher conditions on persistent offenders, giving unlimited sentences for serious offences , using new targets for seizing the assets of criminals and granting new powers to deduct fines 'directly from income benefits' (Home Office July 2006). The aim of these proposals can be deduced from the title of the document: 'Rebalancing the criminal justice system in favour of the law-abiding majority' (Home Office, July 2006). By

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[2] 'Zero tolerance' is a preventative strategy that stems from the theory called 'Broken Windows' which proposes that crime can be prevented from escalating if it is 'nip [ped] in the bud' during its earliest stages (Bratton et al 1998: 3).

[3] This is a feminist text which deals primarily with the imprisonment of women rather than men. However, I have chosen to cite it hear because many of the discussions and issues raised are more generalized and apply to both to the male and female prison population.

December 2007, the government were again making further proposals to tackle the emerging overcrowding crisis by building three 'supersize', 'titan' prisons. These prisons would replace some of the older prisons which would be closed or reassigned to deal with female prisoners or Juvenile offenders (Dyer 2007).

**Tough On Crime: Tough On The Families Of Offenders?**

As the lengths of sentences and measures to deal with the assets of criminals has become tougher and more punitive however, the one question that should be asked but appears to be notably absent, is what impact these new tougher measures and increased sentences will have on the family of the offender? For example, at the simplest level what are the implications of these policies with regards to families' prison visiting, since the issue of the distance that families have to travel is already a contentious issue (and one which I will review further in chapter five and six). What is more, the question of the impact that incarceration has on the families of offenders seems even more relevant given the current statistics which suggest that 'just over half of male prisoners describe themselves as living with a partner before imprisonment', that '[d]uring their sentence 45% of people lose contact with their families and many separate from their partners', and also that '59% of men in prison have dependant children under 18' (PRT 2008: 17-18).

Since the government have made a 'commitment' to 'strengthening family life', emphasising their belief that 'family life is the foundation on which our communities, our society and our country are built' (Home office 1998: forward by Straw) then this raises the question of which issue they consider to be a priority – sending people to prison or strengthening the family? – In reality can the two be achieved together, or is it, as the words of Mr McKay, cited at the outset of this chapter maintain, that there are simply two worlds and one policy and these will always be in conflict with each other. This question is one of fundamental importance for social policy. Put quite simply, as the prison population increases, the number of families affected by imprisonment will increase accordingly.

The issue which is of primary concern for this thesis is that it has been repeatedly stated that families in which there is a member in prison are given very little official or public consideration or recognition (Mathews 1989; Smith 1989; SEU 2002;

Murray 2005). This neglect is demonstrated by the way in which they have been referred to as 'forgotten victims' (Mathews 1989; Smith 1989) or 'invisible victims' (Brink 2003: 393) and the way in which their children have been referred to as the 'Orphans of Justice' (Shaw 1992: 192). Prison rules, however, do acknowledge the prisoners' right to a family life, and the importance of maintaining these relations (Leech 2006: 376). Whilst others have gone so far as to imply that prisoners' families are an 'under-utilised resource'.[4]

**The Under-Utilised Resource**

Shortly before I began the research for this thesis, the government had commissioned the Social Exclusion Unit to produce the report 'Reducing re-offending by ex-prisoners' (SEU 2002). The report described the benefits of maintaining family ties, implying that the prisoner's family is the under-utilised resource in the war against re-offending and crime. Despite the benefits to rates of re-offending, however, the report went on to suggest that there are no statutory bodies responsible for supporting prisoners' families, and 'no one has day to day responsibility... for ensuring that the links between prisoners and their families are maintained; before further highlighting that one problem in particular is 'the lack of information' which restricts family involvement in prisoners' welfare (SEU 2002: 112). At that time, I assumed that the report was important, in that it seemed to be progressive in its acknowledgement of the difficulties that families face. This judgment was based on my knowledge of the fact that before this time the families of prisoners rarely featured in official reports, and, indeed, I had already experienced the minimal levels of support and help available from my own experience as a prisoner's wife.

On examining the situation in more depth however, I began to question whether reports such as this are actually progressive or whether they are reiterating a position that has been around for some time, and in which the families of prisoners are only ever brought to the fore in relation to certain issues; such as the prisoner's visiting privileges, the benefits that maintaining ties has for the inmate and the role that the family play in the prevention of re-offending, in particular because this is the approach which seems to be most frequently adopted. For instance, the Gladstone

[4] My own interpretation of the approach adopted towards prisoners' families.

Report of 1895 was one of the first to propose that the relationships of the prisoner were important and that 'visiting entitlements for prisoners should be extended' (Flynn1998: 32). Similarly, 'Prison Disturbances April 1990' prepared by Lord Justice Woolf, which has been described as 'the most impressive analysis of the English penal system since the Gladstone Report of 1895' (Liebling 2004: 10) also emphasised the importance of prison visits, as well as seeking to establish the fact that prisoners who maintain strong family ties are less likely to re-offend after their release than those who do not (Woolf et al 1991). Quoting the prison services response the report states:

> The disruption of the inmate's position within the family unit represents one of the most distressing aspects of imprisonment, and it is often compounded by a sense of guilt of having let the family down and fear of losing them altogether. Enabling inmates, so far as possible, to stay in close and meaningful contact with the family is therefore an essential part of humane treatment. In these terms alone the improvement of family ties must be a priority for the Prison Service. In addition, though, relationships with the family can contribute very positively on several levels towards the achievement of successful reintegration into society following release from prison. There is every reason to believe that the nature of a prisoners relationships with his or her family will be an important factor in determining whether he or she will succeed in leading a useful and law abiding life on return to the community...All this must tend to reduce the likelihood of re-offending (Woolf et al 1991: 401, col 14.223).

The introduction of telephones and better visiting privileges were also among some of the changes to arise from Woolf's suggestions (Liebling 2004: 13). A change to the status of visitors was also described to me by a member of the Welfare Organisation:

> [...] after the Woolf report which took Visitors' centres very seriously there was a kind of golden age .... For visitors' centres and for visitors- they were to be respected. It was pointed out that visitors....actually....were, were colleagues of the prison in some sense because they contributed to the working, the visits were seemingly important [...] and they were treated with respect and so on but after that there was errm a break out in an east Anglian prison [...] and after the Learmont Report you got people saying well...there were three priorities in prison, security, security and security [...]. And visitors were regarded as the enemy [...]

This observation highlights the way that the status of the prisoner's family and friends shifted from being part of the solution, as implicit in the Woolf Report, to being part of the problem following the publication of the Learmont Report. The results of this shift culminated in further constraints being place on the 'amount and quality of family contact' (Brooks-Gordon 2003: 314) As already argued, this shift also coincided with the change from an ideology of 'liberal penal justice' and a climate of 'decarceration' which rests on the idea that prisoners can be reformed, to that of 'punitive managerialism' and the 'mass warehousing' of surplus populations. Yet, although during this time a prisoner's access to the outside world and their visiting privileges may have changed, re-offending was still the main focus of government concern. In short, the family was not considered in terms of its own welfare but in relation to its usefulness and how it could support the prisoner and maintain the aims of the prison.

Indeed, this idea of utilising the family is so deeply embedded within the system that even some of those who suggest they want to help them still adopt this approach. For example, an article written anonymously by a prison visitors' centre worker, captured the sentiment: 'Harness prisoners' families to fight re-offending, don't spurn them' in (The Guardian, Society: 23/07/2003). The relationship between the family and the prison is, I would maintain, so deeply ingrained within the system, that the way in which the focus revolves around the prisoner's welfare and often at the expense of the family is rarely ever questioned. The prisoner is typically the main issue, while the family and their welfare are always subsidiary. In order to gain a clearer understanding of how and why this should be the case, I will attempt to understand just where the prisoner's family features in the history and development of the modern penal system, and in particular, where it features in relation to surveillance and discipline. To do this I have chosen to focus on arguments which explore the birth of the modern penal system[5] as a mechanism of social control, and, moreover one which is central to my exploration of subordinate kinship.

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[5] Although I use the term modern penal system, I use it as an all encompassing term which refers to the state of imprisonment throughout its development and up to the present day; it should perhaps be noted however that because of some of the changes that have taken place with regards to imprisonment some scholars have chosen to use the term 'late modern' to describe

There are a number of competing and alternative histories of the development of the penal system, with varying explanations as to when, how and why the main changes which characterise the birth of the modern penal system developed (In particular see: Cohen 1979 & 1983; Cohen and Scull 1985; Foucault 1977; Garland 1985 & 1990; Ignatieff 1978 & 1983; Mathesien 1983; Muncie 2001; Scull 1983). However, I begin with Foucault's seminal ideas (1977) regarding the birth of the prison and the emergence of techniques of surveillance and discipline. I also draw on the work of Ignatieff (1978) who has focused on the development of imprisonment in Britain. My justification for selecting these two writers is that many of the differences which characterise their theories are of lesser importance than the practices which they see as characterising imprisonment. In actuality, although these sources differ in their explanations, they still tend to draw on issues of surveillance and discipline as being central characteristics of the penal system. On this basis, I would argue that the history of the prison and how this relates to ideas about the family are fundamentally important in determining how the practices and objectives which accompany the ideology of imprisonment serve to define the relationship between the family and the prison.

In order to help me define this relationship further I will therefore use Foucault's ideas concerning the main techniques of surveillance and discipline, which include hierarchical observation, the normalisation of judgement and the examination. In elaborating these concepts I will also draw on the work of Goffman (1961) and his ideas concerning the effects of total institutions as well as Donzelot (1979) who put forward the idea of a 'social realm' in relation to incarceration. These notions are brought together around Foucault's idea of the continuous carceral network and the

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imprisonment in its present day form – some of these changes are reviewed in this chapter under the section which deals with prison ideology – and in particular the ideological shift which has occurred and the introduction of privatisation and managerialism (see Liebling 2004: 3-4). I would argue that my choice in not to discriminate between modern and late modern prisons despite these changes is justified by the fact that I am dealing with the experiences of imprisonment and as Liebling so rightly points out 'In most prisons still, the landing is still the same landing; time and place matter; and the essential prison experience remains fully recognisable by those who have always been there' (ibid: 4); and as Garland (1985: 5) also suggests 'many of the sanctions, institutions and practices which had existed within the Victorian system still survive and play an important role in the modern complex'.

way in which techniques of surveillance and discipline extend beyond the boundaries of the prison into the support and help that families are given.

**The Family As An Extension Of Surveillance And Discipline**

According to Foucault (1977), discipline and surveillance were the two central features of the modern system of imprisonment, becoming increasingly important during the mid to late eighteenth century. This development served to mark a radical departure from the bloody and horrific forms of torture and other punishments that were popular prior to this time and which were aimed at creating spectacle by inflicting physical pain on the body of the individual (Foucault 1977: 8-10). A departure such as this was necessary because these types of physical punishment were becoming increasingly unacceptable to public sensibilities. Imprisonment on the other hand was a more subtle form of punishment in which the power wielded by the authorities was largely invisible. Rather than inflicting physical pain it targeted the offender's soul (Foucault 1977: 16 - 19; Garland 1990; Smart 2002: 87).

In accordance with this shift, the character of justice also changed from one which focused on the particulars of the offence to one preoccupied with knowing and transforming the individual (Garland 1990: 136). Prisons, in turn, came to be characterized as 'complete and austere institutions', designed to be 'omni-disciplinary' by assuming responsibility for all aspects of the individual, controlling his time, space and taking monopoly on his 'physical training, his aptitude for work, his everyday conduct, his moral attitude [and] his state of mind' (Foucault 1977: 235-236). Indeed, there were three main mechanisms through which this system of discipline was orchestrated; the 'hierarchical observation', 'normalising judgment' and the 'examination' (Rabinow 1984: 189; Smart 2002: 85), and I will deal with each of these mechanisms in turn.

**The Hierarchical Observation**

The first mechanism identified by Foucault was the 'hierarchical observation' which made it possible to 'induce' the effects of power through techniques of surveillance

(Foucault 1977: 205). Bentham's panopticon[6] was one of the central features of this notion, in that it served as an architectural form designed to demonstrate and sustain power relations (Foucault 1977: 200-201). For Foucault, the idea of the panopticon represented the epitome of the relationship between power and knowledge because it facilitated the continuous surveillance of the offender through a system of visibility which was one sided, and which rested on the principle that although the offenders movements were always visible and he was aware of this, he would never know when he was being watched (Garland 1990: 146). The uncertainty inherent in not knowing meant that the offender would regulate his own behaviour to fit in with the proscribed discipline rather than discipline having to be enforced (Foucault 1977: 200-201). The term Foucault used to describe this was 'capillary power'; a power which feeds back on itself and 'returns to the very grain of individuals, touches their bodies and comes to insert itself into their gestures and attitudes, their discourses, apprentices and daily lives' (Brochier 1977: 10). The aim of this regime was to encourage conformity by 'mastering the body and rendering it both obedient and useful', and creating in turn what Foucault referred to as 'docile bodies' (Foucault 1977: 136-138; Garland 1990: 144).

One of the underlying principles in play here was the inmate's isolation from the outside world. Isolation made it possible to individualise the prisoner and therefore graduate the punishment in accordance with the severity of the crime (Foucault 1977: 244). Isolation also served as a method of separating prisoners from what were seen to be the harmful consequences of their associations outside the prison (Foucault 1977: 236-237). According to Ignatieff, this was largely to do with the endeavour of reformists who perceived associations between different categories of prisoner 'as a

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[6] Bentham's panopticon – 'an architectural figure', 'an annular building; at the centre a tower; this tower is pierced with wide windows that open onto the inner side of the ring; the peripheric building is divided into cells, each of which extends the whole width of the building; they have two windows, one on the inside corresponding to the windows of the tower; the other, on the outside, allows the light to cross the cell from one end to the other. All that is needed, then, is to place a supervisor in a central tower and to shut up in each cell a madman, a patient, a condemned man, a worker or a school boy. By the effect of backlighting, one can observe from the tower, standing out precisely against the light, the captive shadows in the cells of the periphery. They are like so many cages, so many theatres, in which each actor is alone, perfectly individualized and constantly visible. The panoptic mechanism arranges spatial unities that make it possible to see constantly and to recognize immediately. In short, it reverses the principle of the Dungeon; or rather its three functions – to enclose, to deprive of light and to hide – it preserves only the first and eliminates the other two. Full lighting and the eye of a supervisor capture better than darkness which, ultimately protected. Visibility is a trap' (Foucault 1977: 200).

major obstacle to the imposition of rigorous discipline' (Ignatieff 1978: 31). Prior to this time he suggests that inmate subcultures were rife, discipline was lax and often imposed by the inmates themselves. It was difficult to impose restrictions on visiting because the state's obligation to provide food and clothing was limited. It was often left to friends and family to provide these necessities, and as a result of this they often had free run of the prison (Ignatieff 1978; 1985: 80-82). By the 1840s, however, strict routines of silence and solitude were being introduced in various institutions around the country (see: Ignatieff 1978; 1985; Forsythe 1991); creating a much greater social distance between the prisoner and the outside world (Ignatieff 1985: 81 – 82). According to Ignatieff, high walls and constant searches and patrols put an end to the free access that visitors had previously been afforded, and the prisoner's contact with friends and family came to be regulated through forms of contact such as visiting privileges (Ignatieff 1985: 81-82). In this respect the family of the prisoner have never been an **under**-utilised resource in that they are, and always have been an essential feature of the system of imprisonment, embedded in the disciplinary mechanisms which are used to transform the inmate.

Similar sentiments are reflected in Goffman's description of the 'total institutions', which he suggests will:

> ...create and sustain a particular kind of tension between the home world and the institution world and use this persistent tension as strategic leverage in the management of men (Goffman 1961: 24)

The purpose of this leverage, he goes on, is that it serves as part of the process for transforming the identity of the inmate. This transformation occurs when he enters the world of the institution and proceeds through a 'series of abasements, degradations, humiliations, and profanations' in which his 'territories of self are violated' (Goffman 1961: 11). The beliefs he holds about 'himself and significant others' are subsequently mortified, as he experiences a shift in his 'moral career' (Goffman 1961: 11). The admission and search procedures, the use of numbers instead of names, the 'personal defacement of his [or her] appearance' are all measures which are designed to strip the inmate of his or her identity, and which form part of the mortification process which Goffman refers to as 'contaminative exposure', whereby the inmates 'personal/private reserve is penetrated' (Goffman

1961: 24-38). Subsequently, the roles that the inmate held outside the institution are 'lost by virtue of the barrier that separates him from the outside world' (Goffman 1961: 25; Harvey 2005: 233), his personal mail is censored and the ties he holds to the outside world become channelled through 'the enforced public character' of visiting (Goffman 1961: 24-30). In this context, he argues, separation from the outside world is akin to 'civil death' since the inmate no longer possesses the freedom to act as an autonomous agent (Goffman 1961: 24-38). The penetration of the personal/private reserve, through constant surveillance highlights how a prisoners' separation from the outside world begin to define a very specific sort of relationship between the family and the prison. This relationship manifests in a particular type of tension that stems from the loss of roles, privacy and a growing sense of mortification as the sentence progresses. In this respect the family is, and always has been, an essential feature of the present day prison system, which is far from an underutilised resource which requires further harnessing.

Furthermore, the operation of this leverage can also be seen if we turn to look at ideas of family and kinship. Here, from both an ideological and a structural point of view it becomes apparent that the values and practices of imprisonment, and in particular those of separation and isolation, strongly clash with those usually attributed to 'normal' family relationships. The notion that 'the family' is a unit or a group of people that live together, sharing a household for instance, is one that has held a fairly prominent position in many understandings of the family. This is evidenced by the way in which many discussions frequently use the two terms 'family and 'household' synonymously (Holy 1996; Ribbens 1994; Schneider 1980; Simpson 1998). Yet, the idea of co-residence becomes somewhat redundant when one of the family's members is in prison. This should not be taken to imply that 'the prisoners' family' is anomalous however.

As Gittens (1985), Chandler (1991) and, more recently, Holmes (2002) have pointed out, there are a variety of scenarios in which women live separate to their partners or husbands and yet still consider themselves to be a family. For instance, in cases where men work away from home or those who work in the fishing industry. What is more, the work of Holmes (2002) also demonstrates that there is growing recognition of a new form of distance relationship referred to as LATs or 'living apart together'.

However, these forms of relationship still differ in many respects from those endured by the prisoner's family, in that relationships such as LATs are more often than not voluntary arrangements which are entered into because of work commitments and there are therefore financial or practical incentives to be gained through this type of living together apart. As Davis (1992) also highlights, many of the women who are the partners of prisoners come from the poorer end of the social spectrum and are often reliant on state benefits as their main means of financial support. In this way, the absence of shared residence, combined with the lack of financial independence or security serves to align the defining features of the prisoners' family more with that of the single parent family, rather than with the type of relationships where one of the partners works away or the new type of relationship known as LATs.

When these ideas are examined in relation to Bourdieu's claim, that the family acts as a 'collective subject' rather than a 'simple aggregate of individuals' which is 'obliged to assert itself in order to exist and persist' (Bourdieu 1998: 68-70) a number of problems arise. Fundamentally, this view raises the question of how families can act and function as collectivities when one of their key members has been separated from them by the processes of imprisonment? It also raises the question of how the practical exchanges and transactions that are key to the symbolic aspects of family and kinship, and which generate what he refers to as 'family feeling', can be achieved in this context? Indeed, Bourdieu's work raises another issue too. In particular, with regards to the welfare of children, and how these tensions become inculcated into the 'systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures, predisposed to function as structuring structures' which Bourdieu refers to as 'habitus'?(Bourdieu 1977: 72).

These types of tensions can also be seen if we look further into the deeply ingrained expectations that exist among those who think of themselves as being in a kinship relationship. For instance, in the case of the prisoner, the elements of choice, flexibility, and the suggestion that kinship is affective (Finch 2003) are directly negated by the loss of liberty, and the prisoner's separation from the outside world. In this respect, the prisoner is no longer free to define his own relationships because the fact that the prison takes overall responsibility for all aspects of the prisoner's life essentially means that they are confined to relationships which are approved by the

prison. In the case of English kinship, where the focus is typically on 'persons not positions' (Finch 2003; Strathern 1992; Firth et al 1969) the implications of this are that the prison directly reverses this relationship. The prisoner is, by definition, no longer a person but a position, and, as Finch (2003) highlights, 'to treat individuals as positions – not persons [is] the opposite of the way in which relationships work in practice'. The implications of this fundamental reversal is that the responsibilities which often accompany family relationships such as financial support, caring and looking after the welfare of other family members, participation in domestic arrangements, child rearing and leisure activities are negated (Finch 1989; Silva and Smart 1999; Morgan 1999). In other words, prisoners lose access to many of the roles that they would have expected to play in the outside world (Goffman 1961) As a consequence, a situation arises in which these roles and responsibilities transfer to other members of the family, and notably the prisoner's wife. Viewed in relation to ideas about the role of the family in 'fostering a climate of respect and responsibility' (Home Office 2003), this situation seems paradoxical. In the process of trying to transform the criminal, the system does not reinforce the fact that as a key family member the prisoner should undertake these obligations and responsibilities towards his family but instead the system constrains and negates it. Thus, some of the main principles of the contemporary ideology of imprisonment, such as isolation and separation, are seriously at odds with familial values and kinship ties and practices and the policies which seek to support these.

Yet, some authors have argued that prisons are no longer the total institutions that they once were (Farrington 1992; Pereira da Cunha 2005: 161). They argue that the boundaries which separate the prison and the outside world have become more permeable. Prisoners now have more access to the outside world and receive greater visiting entitlements than was previously the case (Farrington 1992). However, the extent to which prison regimes have changed and how a prisoners' separation from the outside world influences the family's relationships is a key question. In chapters four and five of this thesis I explore how different types of contact and communication that prisoners are permitted, and the rules and regulations which govern that contact serve to impinge on the way in which prisoners and their families practice kinship.

Although 'hierarchical observation' and the process of separation was one of the most important features of the system of imprisonment, this was not the only mechanism of discipline that influenced the prisoner's family. The second feature of the penal system which Foucault identified was referred to as 'normalising judgment'.

**Normalising Judgement**

Normalising Judgment is a term which refers to the way in which the techniques of discipline used by the prison came to be viewed as 'normal' in the sense that they were already dispersed throughout other institutions such as the army, factories and schools, monasteries and a wide range of other institutions (Foucault 1977: 136-138; O'Brian and Penna 1998: 116; Smart 2002: 86). The techniques were also ascribed to and reinforced by a range of professional practitioners such as health visitors, scientists and social workers (Rodger 1996: 19). This is neatly summed up by O'Brian and Penna who suggest that:

> Foucault's objective in *Discipline and Punish* is not merely to describe the punishment of offenders and delinquents, but to account for the diffusion of disciplinary techniques throughout the social body, their 'penetration' deeper into the spheres of everyday life, their extension over a wider range of social and institutional contexts and ultimately the adoption of self disciplining techniques by individuals (1998: 116)

Foucault referred to this extension of discipline as a continuous carceral network which extends beyond the boundary of the penal institution and throughout the social body, serving to both 'normalise' discipline whilst at the same time supporting the judicial apparatus and its enthusiasm for imprisonment (Foucault 1977: 296 - 297). The power of the penal system is seen to work through a dispersed system of discipline which exerts 'pressure on people to conform to social norms'. These norms are already evident in the operation of other institutions such as schools, welfare agencies and the 'medicalisation of social problems' (Rodger 1996: 19).

In Donzelot's (1979) work on 'policing families', the extension of these disciplinary mechanisms are seen as being wielded through the sector comprised of institutions and 'qualified personnel'. These Donzelot refers to as 'the social' realm and he suggests this shift came about in the late eighteenth, early nineteenth century (see

foreword by Deleuze 1979: xi – xvii). According to Donzelot, the 'social' extends 'the field of judicial action' by 'reacting on other sectors [and] inducing new relationships between the private and the public' (Deleuze 1979 :x). Philanthropists, charitable bodies, the juvenile court, the school and in particular the field of psychiatry and medicine all form part of 'the social' realm that intersect with the family, bringing it under scrutiny by laying the foundations for a 'social code' which serves to emphasize a certain model of normality. In this way 'the family was both the subject and object of government' (Donzelot 1979: 48); premised on a system of bourgeoisie morals which impacted very differently on the poor and rich sectors of society (Deleuze 1979: xi):

> With respect to the poor, what is denounced is a bad public economy that leads them to abandon their own children, to desert the rural areas and burden the state with unwanted responsibilities. As to the rich, it is a bad private economy or hygiene that prompts them to entrust house servants with the education of the child confined to narrow rooms (Deleuze 1979: xi-xii)

Moreover, it was through the creation of 'the social' realm and the moralisation of the family that the correct social order came to be reproduced and established (Donzelot 1979: 24-25). A social order in which the responsibility of the man as the head of the household acquired 'discretionary power over its individual members' while being given the protection and recognition of the state in exchange for guaranteeing the 'faithfulness to public order of its members' (Donzelot 1979: 49). Furthermore, he suggests that

> the lack of a socio-political guarantor, posed a problem for public order. This was the category of people without ties, without a hearth or home... being in no way connected to the social machinery, acted as disturbers in this system of protections and obligations. There was no one to supply their needs, but neither was there anyone to hold them within the bounds of order (Donzelot 1979: 49)

In this context therefore, the family are equally implicated in the dispersal of discipline, in that they are essential to the ideology which focuses on the maintenance of public order and discipline.

Similar sentiments can also be seen in the work of Lasch who examined the way in which bourgeoisie ideas about the family came to be established during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In particular, he suggests:

> The family found ideological support and justification in the conception of domestic life as an emotional refuge in a cold and competitive society. The concept of the family as a haven in a heartless world took for granted a radical separation between work and leisure and between public and private life. The emergence of the nuclear family as the principle form of family life reflected the high value modern society attached to privacy and the glorification of privacy in turn reflected the devaluation of work (Lasch 1977: 6-7)

The transmission of ideas regarding the 'domestication of women', 'child centred households', 'companionate marriage and the 'structural isolation of the family from the kinship system' (Lasch 1977: 6-7) was central to this. At the same time, the ideas of social reformers and educators gave rise to an increase in family intervention and an insistence that a number of the functions which the family provided should be dealt with by external agencies. This stance was largely premised on their fear that the family was in crisis. Indeed, this was particularly the case with regards to children, with the socialising functions of the family being passed on to other agencies through what he refers to as the 'proletarianization of parenthood' (Lasch 1977: 12-13). This form of intervention was deemed to be necessary because of the negative influence of the family which was perceived by reformers to be an 'obstacle to social progress', and as a result of this schools, social workers, and juvenile courts became a more central feature of family life (Lasch 1977: 12-16). Indeed, although in its contemporary context it is generally accepted that patterns of kinship and family vary, the regulation of family life through state intervention is still a prominent issue (see Finch 2003). It is through the process of giving preference to certain models family models that the theoretical links between crime and the family have become firmly established. As a consequence, those who do not appear to fit the normative ideology of family life are often relegated to the realm of an 'underclass'

The 'underclass family' was a notion proposed by Charles Murray (1996) and developed by Dennis and Erdos (1992) who argued that crime, poverty and welfare dependency were linked to the problem of single parenthood and childhood

illegitimacy. As such the 'underclass' is often considered by professional practitioners and policy makers as a highly deviant group and as a result often becomes subject to further surveillance and state intervention (Rodger 1996: 133-135). What is more, since the prisoner's family can no longer fit the normative ideology it is this model of family that they become associated with, and I would argue that it is in this context that certain kinds of kinship practices become subordinated. In addition to normalising judgement there was also the examination.

**The Examination**

The third characteristic of the new penal system was what is referred to as the 'examination' (Rabinow 1984: 188). This is the 'biographical investigation' of the criminal consisting of an inquiry into '[t]he story of his life', and his 'social position and upbringing'. This procedure was a particularly important part of this process that helped to establish 'the 'criminal' as existing before the crime and even outside it'. The aim of the examination, rather like the doctor's case history, was to determine the cause of the crime and the correct treatment to apply (Rabinow 1984: 252). The biographical investigation is the final link in the chain of connections which serves to bring the family into focus within the penal system. The family thus provides cues which help to establish the foundation of knowledge and the discourses, which the prison then uses to control and manipulate the inmate. However, it was not only the prison which collected this type of biographical information, but also the charitable organisations, welfare agencies, philanthropic societies and also social scientists. As Donzelot argued 'the social' realm, begins to assist in the extension of surveillance and mechanisms of discipline (Donzelot 1979). I would argue that this was not only the case in the eighteenth and early nineteenth century, but it is still the case today. The main area of support for the families' and friends' of prisoners comes from the charitable organisations and voluntary sector support groups (see SEU 2002: 117). The 'social' thus continues to be an important context for research focus which helps to understand the nature of contemporary incarceration and its consequences; and as such this is a central focus of this thesis.

The composition of the 'social' however is prone to change. For instance the probation services provide an example of this. In that, up until relatively recently the probation service was part of the normalising sector, not only ensuring the prisoners

aftercare and their continued reform (Garland 1985: 238), but they also played a role in working with the families of prisoners. As Codd points out, however, in more recent years 'government priorities have led to an increased focus on offenders, entailing a corresponding move away from probation work with "uncoerced clients"' (Codd 2002: 336). As a result of this much of the help that the family of the offender would have received is extremely limited. The topic of probation was thus infrequently raised by my research participants, and therefore the space devoted to this topic in this thesis is negligible.

In the contemporary context of imprisonment, one of the main areas of 'the social' realm is the prison Visitors' Centre, the site at which the family and the prison meet.

**The Birth Of The Visitors' Centre**

> The crucial role for Visitors Centres at the frontline of any provision seems incontrovertible. They provide a neutral setting where issues relating to both families and prisoners can be addressed at the very interface between inside and outside (Baroness Linklater of Butterstone, Col 599, 25/7/2002).

According to Lloyd (1992) the first prison visitors' centre was created in Birmingham in 1969 with the help of the probation service. From this period up until the publication of Lloyds own work in 1992, she suggested that some twenty prison Visitors' Centres had been established in the UK. A more recent report by Loucks (2001) entitled 'Just Visiting, A review of the role of Prison Visitors' Centres' suggested there were about 80 visitors centres across the UK including Scotland and Northern Ireland. These figures would suggest a gradual increase in Visitors' Centres since their initial development in the late 1960s. A contributing factor towards the increase in the number of centres is the pressure placed on government and policy makers by prisoners' families' welfare organisations such as "Action for Prisoners' Families" who herald the importance of Visitors Centres in some of their campaigns that seek to actively increase their numbers (see APF 2003).

The purported role of Prison Visitors' Centres is to help prisoners maintain 'meaningful relationships with family and friends' by 'improving the visit experience

and increasing the support available to prisoners' families who are often described as the 'forgotten victims' (Loucks 2001:1). In this way, the main undertaking of the Visitors' Centres is to provide support and to help the prison to process families when they arrive at the prison for a visit. The act of 'processing visitors' consists of the different steps that family members must go through before they are permitted entry into the prison. Most of the centres also try to make visitors feel welcome and give them a place to relax after their journey by providing refreshments, pamphlets and leaflets of information on the prisons regime with regards to prison visiting, as well as collecting donations of clothes, shoes and sometimes books and toys (Loucks 2001:3). However, not all visitors centres adopt such a supportive role, as those which are run by the prisons themselves tend to adopt a more utilitarian attitude. For example, one visitors' centre described their own particular role as: 'to provide a muster point for visitors to assemble, in the hope that visitors can be processed in a quick and efficient manner' and 'to process visitors through for visits with the minimum time delay; to provide information to visitors if needed' (Loucks 2001: 4). Statements such as this, which emphasise the Visitors' Centre role in terms of efficiency, are often governed by a prison's felt need to maintain a high standard of security. As was suggested earlier, security forms one of the major features to influence prison visits and gestures towards welfare are clearly used as a lever for efficient management.

On this basis, statements such as those by Baroness Linklater of Butterstone (2002) which I reviewed at the beginning of this section are called into question. In order to provide a neutral setting, the balance of power between the family and the prison would have to be equally weighted. However, the emphasis on security would suggest that the balance of power is unevenly distributed. The manifestation of this imbalance in practice is explored in more detail in chapter five of this thesis which deals with the performance and culture of prison visiting, focusing in particular on the visitor's experiences.

Another area of support provided by charities and welfare organisations is in the form of advice and information. This support can be obtained through telephone services such as the prisoners' families' helpline, or leaflets which cover issues such as

visiting, prison categorisation, remand, healthcare, drugs and travel costs[7], living with separation and keeping in touch (APF 2003). Some of the larger organisations such as Action for Prisoners' Families, North Eastern Prisons Aftercare Society (NEPACS), and Partners Of Prisoners (POPs), also provide a limited amount of emotional support; which is either given at drop-in centres, or in the visitor's centres, where families can speak to one of the voluntary workers in confidence or ask questions while they are waiting to get into the prison. In some cases, the prisons themselves employ a family liaison officer, or family link workers from the voluntary organisations (see APF 2004).

In addition to these initiatives, in 2004 and then again in 2006 the charity 'Action for Prisoners' Families' also held what they referred to as a 'family friendly challenge', where they encouraged prisons to run family friendly events. The events included workshops and 'children's activity days' which according to the prison service was aimed at promoting 'the importance of prisoners' maintaining quality contact with their families'[8] A number of prisons have also undertaken to take part in initiatives such as parent craft courses and similar schemes such as 'family man' and 'fathers inside'. A number of schemes such as this are funded by the DFES in order to help prisoners improve their own reading ability while simultaneously supporting their own child's reading development (see email by Mendiratta 2005 in appendix B).[9] Schemes such as the 'family man' course also include an element of role play in order to help prisoners improve their communication skills by exploring how prisoners behave in family situations, teaching them how to empathise with their partners and think about how they may do things differently in the future (Neustatter 2003: 13). Other services which some prisons also offer are 'Time for families', which is a programme that also focuses on building relationship and parenting skills.[10] Arguably, however, if the penal system made kinship and the family more of a priority, initiatives around relationship and parenting skills, and events which pursue the notion of 'quality time' would not be necessary.

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[7] http://www.prisonersfamilieshelpline.org.uk/php/bin/readarticle.php?articlecode=9241

[8] http://www.hmprisonservice.gov.uk/news/index.asp

[9] In 2007 the department referred to as DFES was changed to DCSF

[10] http://timeforfamilies.org.uk/servicesoffered.html

What seems interesting about these initiatives therefore is that in their effort to support the prisoner's family and help them to maintain their relationships, the main focus still seems to revolve around the idea of transformation and imposing a system of moral values and discipline. This aspiration features strongly strategies for education and the teaching of relationship 'skills'. In this respect, it would appear that there has been little change in the orientation of 'the social' in that it still 'does to,' rather than 'doing for' and it is this practice of 'doing to' the family, through the extensions of surveillance and discipline which I would argue makes certain kinds of kinship ties and practices subordinate to others.

**Summary**

Whereas in the last chapter I explored the methodology that I used to guide the research for this thesis, in this chapter my aim has been to contextualise the place of the family in relation to the prison; through an exploration of some of the current socio-political issues, as well as some of the theoretical and practical aspects that serve to shape this relationship. The current socio-political issues to which I have referred were those which featured as prominent themes in the media and in government policy proposals during the period of time in which research and writing up were taking place. I also examined the issue of Britain's increasing prison population; as well as ideas concerning the ideological shift in penal strategies and political values which are often cited as one of the instigating factors behind this increase. In addition to this I examined the potential implications of this for the families of prisoners; as well as where they feature in relation to official reports, and how their status has changed in accordance with the shift in penal ideology and ideas about reform. In particular, I suggested that the prisoner's family is not an under-utilised resource as some reports would suggest, but instead they have been embedded in the system of imprisonment from the very beginning, as an extension of the two central features of the system of imprisonment – those of surveillance and discipline. These features are in turn orchestrated through three key mechanisms: hierarchical observation, normalising judgement and the examination. I also considered how these ideas fit in with different conceptions of the family and kinship, and how the tension between these two ideological positions begins to define a very specific sort of relationship between the family and the prison. This relationship is one which extends beyond the establishment and through the social realm. In looking

at these issues my intention was to provide a backdrop to the position of prisoners' families and the ways that the wives' and partners' of prisoners come to practice a subordinated kinship. In the chapters, which follow I provide a more detailed account of how in practice this subordination is manifest.

# CHAPTER FOUR.

## Tensions between Justice and Welfare: The impact of incarceration on mothers and their perception of the impact on their children.

### Experiences Of Arrest And Separation

There are a number of contexts in which children may experience the process of separation from a key parental figure. In some cases, the separation may be only temporary as when a parent works away. Separation in these circumstances however, may be negated by the fact that there is often some form of financial and material gain and the separation is likely to be short. In the case of divorce, the experience of separation might be different again. In this context, separation is more often than not the result of a build up of some form of conflict between the parents, which leads to the eventual termination or dissolution of the marital relationship. The process of separation here is frequently fraught with conflict between the child's parents over issues such as parenting, financial concerns and residential arrangements, which serve to bring the welfare of the child to the forefront of any subsequent arrangements (Simpson 1998: 53). However, assuming that prior to incarceration the couple or family in question were in a relatively stable relationship (admittedly this is not always going to be the case – see Shaw 1992: 47) then, unlike the case of divorce, there may be little if any emotional disjunction between the parents which would serve to forewarn the child that the event is likely to occur. Instead, conflicts that arise are likely to be between the family and those who enforce the rules of the judicial system, and may be accompanied by a series of events, beginning with that of arrest. Arrest has been described as one of the first crisis periods of imprisonment (Fishman 1981; Weintraub 1976), and the point at which most families first come into contact with the criminal justice system:

> The arrest is usually the first family contact with the criminal justice system and the circumstances in which this takes place often influence how they cope with what is happening to their relative...How well they handled it seemed to depend less on whether they had any previous experience with the police and more

> on the actions of the police themselves...home arrests involved two or more of the following features: the arrest was accomplished by policemen who were either armed or accompanied by Alsatian dogs; the house was ransacked; partners were taken into custody; and threatened with having their children taken into care (McDermott and King 1992: 53-54)

It is not just how well families cope with these events that is at issue however, but as Bernstein (2005: 12) argues in her study on prisoners' children in the USA, '[t]he trauma children experience when a parent is arrested may set the tone for their subsequent relationship with the criminal justice system'. The difficulties that can be caused by experiences such as this were also described to me by one of my research participants, Paula, who told me about her husband's arrest, and the impact that this had on her children:

> **P:** he got arrested six months after it happened
> **V:** was there a raid?
> **P:** No they got him outside, and then the *** raided after that
> **V:** Do you wana tell me about that?
> **P:** it was stressful for the baim like cos the baim doesn't errm like coppas [police] any more...I mean when she was little she didn't really know who they were or anything, and they'd [the police] come outa the door and there was like, him and the baim, cos she wasn't at school errm and there was like police vans and police dogs just everywhere errm... it was in the town centre errm and she got knocked over and everything ya know, like the coppas had knocked her over like that[1] and she was git screamin and like they grabbed him and arrested him and all the rest of it and then ever since then shes like *'I HATE THEM, I HATE THEM'* [2•]
> **P:** she's like that and I think well its like *THEY'VE* done that, they shoulda been getting him somewhere else – not where the bairn was... I mean they could have got him at any point, even in the house
> **V:** that does sound stressful, and you said there was a raid afterwards?
> **P:** Aye, the lads [three sons] just laughed about it cos its like exciting for them; but me daughter was like *AHHRR DAD-GEROFF* , ya know like that kinda thing, but the lads were alright with it, they

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[1] Paula puts her hand out to show me that her husband was holding his daughters hand and then gestures a shoving motion to one side with her arms and hands together when she talks about how the police knocked her daughter over
[2] Paula scrunches her face and uses an aggressive tone

• The use of upper case or capital letters signifies a change in the pitch of the woman's voice to a deeper but higher level (i.e. almost shouting) as she places emphasis on certain words.

> just like take it in their stride them, but it affected the little un quite a bit; she used to cry all the time and stuff like that for him, over the things what's happened and she used to tell everyone that the police hate her dad and things like that. She used to go into *** Prison and she used to be like '*you better get me da outa here NOW*', she's dead protective over him.

As Paula's description shows, separation in this case was not an extended process that her child experienced as emotional and traumatic because of the conflict which accompanies a relationship breakdown, as may be the case in other situations such as divorce. As McDermott and King highlight, the impact comes from the manner in which the arrest occurred, and because of the way in which the situation involved physical intervention, as the father was 'grabbed' and the small child was 'shoved' to one side. As the mother suggested, the issue was exacerbated at this stage because her daughter did not really know who the police were. If the fact that this is a legally sanctioned arrest is removed from the picture, it may well be that the daughter experienced this episode in a similar way to witnessing her father being the victim a violent crime such as being mugged, attacked or kidnapped. What is more, since the 'psychological harm' which victims of criminal offences experience tends to be similar in nature but vary in intensity depending on the severity of the crime (Markesteyn: 1992), children's stress reactions such as continual crying, are hardly surprising. In this case, however, the upset and trauma the child experienced was not the result of an illegal or criminal act *per se* but of one that was legally sanctioned by the state.

Further insight into the impact of arrest was evident from a conversation which I noted in my fieldwork diary. A woman waiting to see her husband at the prison Visitors' Centre told me that her three year old daughter was unable to accompany her on ordinary prison visits because, as she said: 'she wees and poos herself for days afterwards'. When I asked her why she thought that this was the case she told me:

> The first time I thought she had eaten something bad, but then I realised that it was the visits that were doin it, she associates prison officers with police because they look similar and because the police handcuffed him in front of her.

What this reveals is that the mother clearly felt that her husband's arrest was the primary cause of the problems which her daughter was experiencing. Both this and the first example that I highlighted are consistent with the findings from a 1995 study by Kampfner, who revealed that children who witnessed their mother's arrest, displayed many of the symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Syndrome such as flashbacks, poor concentration, and sleep problems (cited in Bernstein 2005). In a more recent British study, it has also been suggested that '[c]hildren who have a parent in prison may exhibit fear, anxiety, anger, sadness, guilt, loneliness, low self-esteem, depression, emotional withdrawal, antisocial behaviour and reduced academic performance' (see Laing and McCarthy 2005: 4). In this case, the reasons given relate more generally to the issue of imprisonment and the stigma attached rather than the event of arrest (ibid). Nevertheless, because the event of arrest usually predates the event of incarceration (although I acknowledge that this situation may not apply in the case of repeat offenders), the impact that parental arrest has on children is an issue that warrants much greater attention.

Closer attention to this issue, however, is not solely because of the emotional impact on children with regards to their health and wellbeing, but because of the way in which events such as arrest also seem to engender patterns of behaviour that could be considered to be anti-authoritarian. This was an issue that was also apparent in Paula's narrative about the impact of her husband's arrest which I initially reviewed at the beginning of this section. For instance, when the mother spoke about the way in which her daughter used to tell everyone that the police hate her father and how she tells the prison staff to let her father out when she is visiting the prison - a situation in which the mother describes how her daughter is being 'protective over him'. The same mother also described the reaction of her three sons who were aged between six and eleven at the time; she describes how the house was searched 'the lads just laughed about it cos it's like exiting for them', and further, that 'they were alright with it, they just take it in their stride'. During my fieldwork there were also other situations where I observed other children acting in what could be interpreted as a protective but somewhat antagonistic manner. When I was working in the prison crèche for example, a small boy age six entered, proudly displaying his new T-shirt with a rather vicious looking dinosaur picture emblazoned on the front. As he

approached I commented that it was a great looking T-shirt he was wearing, to which he replied

> Yeah, I just got it, I is wearin it to scare the police so I can help me daa break out and escape.

As he said this, the little boy bared his teeth and bent his arms, placing one hand to each side of his head as though they were claws. On another occasion, Miranda, one of my research participants rang me in a state of panic, asking me for advice because her youngest son had just written a letter to his father which he was eagerly waiting to post. Miranda's panic was caused by the fact that at the bottom of the letter her son had written something to the effect of

> Don't worry about the nasty police men dad; you'll be home soon cos I'm planning to help you break out.[3]

By acting in an antagonistic manner towards police and prison staff, and displaying their support for their criminal parent, these children simultaneously oppose themselves to authority; which in some cases may be perceived by outsiders to be demonstrative of a lack of respect and seen to be offensive.

The format required from mothers under these circumstances would perhaps be seen as one where they should try to dissuade their children from continuing to harbour a distinct hatred of the police, and curb behaviours which stand them in opposition. In cases like the one just reviewed, however, the mother is unlikely to do this because the blame is placed firmly at the feet of those who caused it. As Paula says: 'she's like that and I think well its like THEY'VE done that'. It is therefore not just the influence that the event has on the children which needs to be considered; the lack of respect that is shown towards the prisoner's family as a whole can mean that the mother is left with little sympathy for authority either. As Bernstein argues arrest may set the tone for the child's 'subsequent relationship with the criminal justice system' (Bernstein 2005:15). The issue that this raises is what sort of example is this approach

[3] The mother could see that the potential consequences of the child's action could be that the prison would see this as a potential threat to security in which case the most likely cause of action that they would take would be to ship the father to a prison in another area of the country. For more information on this see Leech (2006: 381) on rules about writing letters.

to family life setting and to what extent does this type of direct physical intervention serve to perpetuate the very same cycle of problems that the judicial system is supposed to be dealing with?

Direct family intervention such as this, however, was not only apparent during the processes of arrest, but also evident from my research participant's narratives concerning events such as police raids and house searches. In the next section I will focus on this issue in more depth, by looking at how some of these events and practices infringe on notions of family and kinship.

**Police Raids And House Searches**

House searches, or 'raids', as they are more commonly called, often accompany the process of arrest. For the police, the event may be seen purely in terms of a search for evidence, a necessary component of the way in which they solve a crime. For the family, on the other hand, having their house searched or rather 'raided' by the police, is, I would argue, one of the most personally intrusive and invasive aspects of the incarceration process. Drawing on my own experience of having had my house searched, the most unpleasant aspect was the way in which my family's privacy was totally disregarded; our clothes drawers were searched, our letters and diaries were read, and personal photographs were scrutinised. Similarly, one of my research participants, Amy, described the way that the police treated her when they searched her house as 'distressing', because they 'zoned' the house off and took pictures of everything she and her husband owned. After this they restricted Amy's access to the rest of the house and confined her and her daughter to one particular room while they searched the property:

> The day... was traumatic, it was terrible, and I never once was cheeky to the police, I've never been brought up to be cheeky, I've always been brought up to respect policemen right, you know, you don't talk down to them, they are the law and you abide by them right! And that's how I was brought up as a child, and when they entered me house that's what I give em – respect, BUT... they give me nothing but abuse, like they would fire a question at us and when I answer they go 'uhu-errerr'. I felt like saying... you know what am I on – a quiz show! ...I don't deserve to be treated like that, I haven't done anything wrong. I could understand right if the police came in here and I was like, get out of my fucking house ya black

> bastards[4]. If ya give them abuse like that... but when you're in your own home and they come to you with a warrant and you let them in and you're sitting and doing as you're told – what's the problem! Why can't they treat you with respect...I mean I didn't raise my voice to them and they were backing us into a corner asking us about this and that... anybody who knows me woulda knew that I never woulda been involved with anything like that... It was ridiculous really because considering the extent of the crime I think there was about three raid vans outside...for just me, the dog and one child, you know what I mean. I mean I know they've got a job to do and I know that a lot of people don't like the police but I could understand if I was a right errm, hard faced, had a criminal record when they come in here but... I have never been cheeky, I have never been insulting, I've always been good and to that extent I thought 'oh come on', I mean its something that they would do in the West end when they are driving into a, not like I'm labelling people from the West end, but people like that, they are hardened criminals with guns and... but for little old me in me house its just pathetic.

The main issue here seems to be the way in which Amy and her family are disempowered during the event of arrest. In this context, government is not working 'through family' (Donzelot 1979: 48-49) but working directly on it and within it. Government can be seen to be employing some of the main instruments of penality, such as the techniques of 'discipline and surveillance' (Foucault 1977; Garland 1990: 131; Smart 2002) as a method of collecting evidence in order to determine the guilt or innocence of the offender. In so doing, the event has consequences beyond the individual, infringing on the house and home as the primary sphere in which relations of family and kinship are given meaning.

As many anthropological studies of kinship have shown, houses often hold a particularly important place in the lives of those who inhabit them. They evoke powerful memories and associations which are inextricably linked to notions of gender and identity, as well as being representative of important social relations (Carsten 2004). As Carsten suggests: 'for many people, kinship is made in and through houses, and houses are the social relations of those who inhabit them' (Carsten 2004: 37). Personal material possessions have also been found to be

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[4] The use of the word 'black bastards' is a local slang term for policemen derived from the colour of their uniform and their attitude and therefore not to be confused with racial abuse.

mediators of kinship relations, in particular because they are often invested with ideas concerning identity and the notion of 'belonging' (Carsten 2000: 153). As well as this, the home also engenders notions of privacy; and as some authors suggest, this is 'crucial to notions of family' in establishing the boundaries of the home, which 'demarcate the family unit clearly from 'the outside world', and establish the family as having its own authority' (Ribbens 1994: 60). In the cases I have reviewed so far, however, it is clear to see that the issues of house searches, and arrest, impinge on many of these ideas simultaneously.

Amy then went on to tell me:

> ...this might look lovely to you...but to me it's just...it feels dirty, I can't relax in this room cos this is where they held me in here.

In this account, the idea of dirt is a notion that is employed by Amy in order to help her make sense out of her experiences, and reconcile the anxiety that she feels (see Douglas 1966). In Amy's case, the presence of police in her home, their approach towards her and her description of her feeling 'dirty' and an inability to relax are linked to the way in which her cherished memories and feelings of privacy, security and family stability and the families 'own authority' have been compromised by their approach. The meanings and practices of kinship have become subordinate to the rules and regulations which accompany the processes of imprisonment. Even then, however, this does not mark an end to the situation; families still have to contend with the trial and court procedures which usually accompany events such as this.

**Court Procedures: Trial, Conviction And The Confiscation Order**

Amy went on to describe the effects of the long and drawn out process of her husband's trial at court and how, following her husband's conviction, a number of her everyday household items had become subject to a confiscation order. An explanation of confiscation orders from part 4 of the Proceeds of Crime Act states that:

> The purpose of confiscation proceedings is to recover the financial benefit that the offender has obtained from his criminal conduct. The court calculates the value of that benefit and orders the offender to pay an equivalent sum. Proceedings are conducted according to the civil standard of proof, i.e. on the balance of probabilities. In

> certain circumstances the court is empowered to assume that the defendant's assets, and income and expenditure during the period of six years before proceedings were brought, have been derived from criminal conduct and to calculate the confiscation order accordingly.

As a result of the confiscation order, Amy and a number of other family members had to go to court to prove to the police where most of her household items such as her television, fridge freezer, fireplace and cooker had come from. Many of the items, which were in this case mostly domestic, had been given to Amy and her husband as wedding gifts. However, in order to prove this, Amy and other members of her family had to attend a number of interviews at the police station and make frequent court appearances:

> I've got to drag everybody ...through the whole ordeal [...] which they have already been through which is heart breakin for them, it affects your whole family [...] its an ordeal to anybody anyway, but to the rest of the family it is really bad and... it affects them in a way ...just as bad as the way I feel'.

The length of time that the confiscation order took to complete from start to finish was just under two years. During this time Amy told me that she felt like the whole process was:

> dragging on ... I mean Jesus Christ, it was 2003 when it happened and we're in 2005 now and its still goin on. I don't think courts take into account the pressure that they are putting on family relationships. When they arrest somebody fair enough they can see Mathew as doing something wrong... he's been found guilty- he's been caught doing something wrong fair enough... But they should take into consideration when they are preparing all this court trials and all, that this man has got two children and he's got a wife who hasn't been arrested, she's not part of it so lets get everything wrapped up and done and dusted within a certain time frame, so people can get back to their normal day to day living... the law stinks, I've got no faith in the law anymore, I think it absolutely stinks.

Thus, the judicial processes which accompany the trial and conviction of criminals, do not only affect the person who has been convicted of the crime, but, as Amy's account reveals, the broader impact is the effect that the situation has on the family, who, although they have not been accused or found guilty of any wrong doing

themselves, are still required to go to court and attend interviews. These events affect their lives to such an extent that they might also feel they are being punished for the partner's crime.

The way in which incarceration influences the family, however, is not new, but can be traced back to the very beginnings of imprisonment. For instance, Foucault suggests that by removing the liberty of the prisoner and quantifying the punishment in accordance with 'the variable of time', the use of imprisonment as a form of punishment came to be accepted. It appeared to the outside world to be 'egalitarian' and to have 'the same value for all' (Foucault 1977: 232). Conversely, from the very earliest stages of its development, the use of imprisonment and, in particular, the incarceration of a husband and father, had a large impact on the welfare of mothers and their children. Foucault demonstrates the ramification of this impact by drawing on the work of reformers such as Lucas during the eighteenth century, who described the way in which 'the prison indirectly produces delinquents by throwing the inmates family into destitution. The same order that sends the head of the family to prison reduces each day the mother to destitution, the children to abandonment, the whole family to vagabondage and begging. It is in this way that crime can take root' (Foucault 1977: 268). Thus, the use of imprisonment is not, and has never been an egalitarian form of punishment, in that it punishes beyond the individual by serving to directly infringe on the normal routines, relationships, intimate and personal exchanges between family members and in particular on their time, as well as their material and financial wellbeing. In this respect, a prison sentence is a composite form of punishment in that it punishes over and above a simple prison sentence by impacting on the lives of those who have not been charged with any crime. As a result, a high proportion of the women who are married to, or are the partners of prisoners suffer from health problems. It is to a discussion of these problems that I will now turn.

**Situations That Impact On Mother's Health Problems**

There are numerous studies which describe the increased risk of physical and psychological difficulties which accompany divorce and separation and the long term impact that this has on the health and well-being of adults and/or their children (see: Amato 2000 & 2003; Cohen 2002; Coltrane and Adams 2003; Douglas et al 2004;

Finley and Schwartz 2007; Kelly and Emery 2003; Mechanic and Hansell 1989; Richards et al 1997; Simpson 1998; Wallerstein and Kelly 1980; Williams and Dunne-Bryant 2006). The health problems, and in particular the emotional and psychological consequences which women experience such as depression and mental health problems, have also been described in other research studies which focus on the families of prisoners (see Braman 2004; Codd 1998 & 2002; Davis 1992; Fishman 1981; Laing and McCarthy 2005; Lowenstein 1984; Morris 1965; Murray 2005; Smith et al 2007; Weintraub 1976). Many of the women who were involved in my research also described the health problems which they were suffering from. The problems described varied but a common denominator in every explanation was the way in which the problem was connected to their husband's incarceration. In some cases, it was the way in which their family had been treated by the police during the processes of arrest, as I have already discussed. In other instances, the problems were attributed to the difficulties of travelling and/ or prison visits (see chapter Five, in particular the section on the journey to the prison). The loss of kin and social network was perhaps one of the most influential aspects, particularly in the case of the wives and partners of sex offenders. (see chapter Seven on Relationships and Social Networks). On one of the occasions I visited Miranda, one of my research participants, whose kinship ties and social network had deteriorated and I asked her if she was feeling any better. This was her reply:

> no I'm feelin like shit, I'm not doin any better really... I've been feelin suicidal.

The issue of depression and psychological problems therefore frequently arose during my fieldwork. In a significant number of these cases, the women I spoke to had at some stage been on some form of anti-depressant medication and, in most cases, they still were. Among my research participants there were only two exceptions to this. The first example was Sharon who had a particularly strong social network (see case study of Sharon in chapter seven). The second case, Miranda, had been prescribed anti-depressants but had decided not to take them. In this case, there was no evidence to suggest that her life was any easier or that she was coping better than the other women I spoke to. It is perhaps notable that after several months of visiting Miranda

she told me that she had been back to the doctor and asked him to re-prescribe anti-depressants.

In Amy's case, she was also on medication, but this was not just because of the problems such as house searches and frequent court appearances that she had experienced. Instead, a catalogue of factors that occurred over a period of time contributed towards the deterioration in her health. In the first place, when I visited her she told me that she had had to give up her job with the NHS because of her husband's arrest. On another occasion, she was worried because her husband had found a lump in his testicle, and the prison service had told him that it would be at least three months before he would receive a referral to a specialist.

During the course of the research, Amy was also offered fertility treatment because she had previously experienced difficulty in conceiving. In this instance, her anguish was caused by the fact that she had had her name on the waiting list for a long time and she didn't want to turn the opportunity down, but she also felt that if she tried to pursue this through the prison, she would be unlikely to succeed. As she told me, '*things like that just don't happen*'. The issue of the difficulties that the wives' and partners' of prisoners can face in trying to gain access to artificial insemination facilities is discussed by Codd (2006) in her recent article entitled 'Policing Procreation'. In particular she examines two cases 'in which prisoners and their partners have sought to utilise the European convention of Human Rights to challenge the refusal by the Prison Service to provide access to facilities for artificial insemination' (2006: 110). According to Codd a significant factor used in each case to support the refusal was that both of the women had married serving prisoners, and therefore their relationships had not existed outside the prison context. Thus serving to imply that 'the situation would be different if the marriage had existed prior to the period of incarceration' (Codd 2006: 113; see also Appendix C email by Dalton Grant 2007; and article E.L.H. and P.B. H v/the United Kingdom for more detail on the current situation regarding IVF and conjugal visits). Although this maybe the case however, because women such as Amy are already struggling to deal with a number of problems at the same time, I would suggest that challenging the prison over their right to procreate would more than likely be an extra burden which would only serve to further impact on their health and wellbeing.

In addition to these problems, Amy was also trying her best to look after her two step-children while their father was in prison. The situation was complicated by the fact that she had been forced to go to court to fight for their custody after their alcoholic mother had abandoned them and because her husband's criminal record meant that his parental rights were no longer recognised. As a result of these problems, she told me that she was 'clinically depressed', and during the course of the research I could see her physical and mental well-being gradually deteriorate. During one of the visits she told me:

> if ya had come yesterday I probably would have broke me heart to you... well you know yourself Viki... but most of the time now I'm fine, I take me tablets as routine... but its hard because when I'm so low like that I have to be perky even though I'm not feeling that way, and I could probably just go to bed and lie in me pit for a week because I am that low... but I have the kids and I have a fear that if I hit rock bottom and have a nervous breakdown then the kids are gonna suffer and I might lose them.

In this way, Amy was struggling to maintain a sense of emotional and psychological equilibrium. As she emphasises, her mental state was, particularly important because of the consequences that any deterioration might have for her custody of the children. I asked Amy whether she felt the deterioration in her health was affecting the children and whether she felt that this was influencing her ability to parent them, to which she replied:

> it does, because when you're getting pressure like that and you're coming home and you're pickin the kids up from school and bringing them home and you're doin the tea... and when I get nervous I like to clean, people have said I have got a phobia but I don't think I have, I just clean because then the problems seem to disappear when I'm cleaning; but the kids are seeing me just cleaning and not doing normal relaxing things like watching telly or watching a DVD, and they seem to just know and they shut themselves in their room; so I do think it stops me from being a normal parent because I'm not doing normal things with my kids anymore – I'm not going to the park, I'm not taking them out and being able to have a laugh with them because I'm so worried in meself and I'm so uptight with worrying about what's gonna happen to Mathew, and of what's gonna happen to things in here... it does put an extreme amount of pressure on you as a parent, and then you do become distant from ya kids and ya kids don't want to know you, and that's what's happening here... its come between the bond

> between us, and now I'm trying to rebuild it but it has just totally and utterly crushed it...I've never relaxed for two years and it's taken its toll on my health, now I've got blood problems, I've got high cholesterol, me depressions worsened so now I'm seeing a psychiatrist as well as a counsellor... and its all because of this.

In a study dealing with the impact of divorce on children it was demonstrated that '[t]he parenting capacity of both mothers and fathers was related to their psychological intactness and stability as individuals (Wallerstein and Kelly 1980: 222). Similarly, parents who suffered from depression were more likely to experience 'disrupted or diminished parenting' (Wallerstein and Kelly 1980: 309). In Amy's case, however, it is not just depression caused by loss and separation that leads to a diminished ability to parent her children. This is undoubtedly a significant factor, but the catalogue of problems occurring over an extended period of time also impacted on her daily routine, personal life and intimate relationships to the extent that 'doing normal things' became extremely difficult to maintain. Amy subsequently told me that the effect of this on the children meant that they now rarely spoke to her and when they came home from school they would often avoid her and hide themselves away in their bedroom. Her daughter had also started to wet the bed and her son had become withdrawn. Children in this situation not only have to deal with the loss of one key parental figure but two (or three in this case if the birth mother is included). Not only has the father been removed but the stress caused by the situation impacts on the mother to such an extent that she also becomes incapacitated. In the next section, I will explore the question of how children deal with these issues by examining how the children of prisoners deal with their mother's health problems.

**How Children Deal With Mother's Health Problems**

The way in which situations of divorce and separation can undermine parental health and well-being and the effect that this then has on their children is an issue that frequently arises in divorce studies. Some researchers suggest that there are negative ramifications for children in particular; these include long term behaviour and emotional problems (Ayoub, Deutsch, and Maraganore 1999; Emery 1999; Guidubaldi and Cleminshaw 1985; Sun 2001; Sun and Li 2002; Tschann et al 1989; Wallerstein and Kelly 1980). Other studies have emphasised that the impact on children tends to differ depending on the circumstances, and, whereas, for some

children divorce and separation increases their vulnerability, in other cases they often overcome these difficulties by displaying an increased resilience (see Amato 2000 & 2003; Coltrane and Adams 2003; Douglas et al 2004; Heatherington and Stanley-Hagan 1999; Kelly and Emery 2003; Leon 2003; Pedro-Carrol 2005; Rodgers and Pryor 1998; Strohschein 2005; Walker 2003). An example of the way in which children respond to the impact that incarceration has on their mother's health was described to me by Karen:

> The children are really feelin it [...] I've just had to go for medication for me sixteen year old because of all the stress that we've been under... ya know when he got took away and that. The kids were really affected; it affected me but they were bad for me so it affected them more, so I'm finding it a bit of a...you think you've gotta just... whereas the children, you know at first it was so horrendous for me when he got took away from whar that the children held back with the tears... but now its boiled up so I'm trying to pick the pieces for them too.

I asked Karen whether she ever spoke to the children about the situation, to which she replied:

> We talk about Eddie, not a day goes by ya know... I'll say I'll tell ya dad...but errm, talkin about other things, like the upsettin part... I'm not strong enough yet to sit with them and talk to them in that way.

As these examples show, some children are not only dealing with separation from their father and the events which accompany his incarceration, but they also have to deal with the impact that the situation has on the mother who is very often in a state of emotional distress or suffering from depression. In the example above, the response was one where the children tried to suppress their own emotions in order to lessen the burden on their mother which further served to aggravate their own health problems. This dynamic is similar to the 'overburdened child syndrome' identified in some studies of divorce (Wallerstein 1985 cited in Simpson 1998: 78). Here children often carry 'the emotional and practical stresses and strains which their parents, disabled by their own anger and grief, are unable to deal with' (Simpson 1998: 78). Moreover, this situation is often made worse because children in circumstances such as this often have no one to talk to about their experiences (Douglas et al 2004). In

this way, incarceration does not only impact on the physical and psychological health and wellbeing of the mother, but also on her children. The result is a situation in which children feel the need to play a supporting role 'despite feeling the need for support themselves' (Laing and McCarthy 2005: 5). In circumstances such as these, there is a sense in which the child has lost both parents and in which the child/ parent roles have been reversed. The situation no longer accords with a more normatively constructed account of children as practical and economic 'dependants' (see Jones 2003) but instead directly infringes on the socially constructed ideas of childhood. The extent to which the mother's reliance on her children was perceived to be a problem, however, did tend to differ according to particular circumstances.

The eldest daughter of one of my research participants, Paula, for instance, had taken on extra responsibility for looking after her younger siblings by picking them up from school and looking after them. In this case, however, Paula did not suggest that the extra responsibility of this had any adverse effect on either her or the children. In another case, however, Silvia told me that her eldest daughter had taken on the extra responsibility of helping to look after her disabled sister because the situation was such that Silvia herself was unable to do any lifting and carrying:

> Nicola has got all the lifting and carrying to do; I can lift Maria in to her wheelchair but... its difficult caring for her. I have to rely on Nicola sort of a hundred percent of the time to be with me...she's not EVEN able to go out to sleepovers at her friends and I mean you know she is on occasions but we have to make sure that I haven't got Maria so that she is able to go...her life has TOTALLY been put on hold, she's got no hobbies, she can't have her friends round the house because she has to help me... its... its not fair on her...[...] she has matured a lot in the last year and a half... and she has had to because, just for the reasons that I have needed her...

Here, the mother's difficulty in looking after her youngest daughter appears to be due to the fact that the child was disabled and the mother had physical difficulties in lifting and carrying her rather than the mother being incapacitated because of the emotional stress caused by the situation. However, Silvia's narrative does indicate that she was unhappy with the situation because it did not accord with her own expectations of 'the way things should be'. She felt that her increased reliance on her daughter was in some ways unjust. Other studies have suggested that in

circumstances such as this, parents sometimes feel humiliated by their increased dependence on their children (Wallerstein and Kelly 1980: 115). It has also been suggested that in circumstances where a child is given too much responsibility this can impede the child's own development, sometimes resulting in 'impaired educational performance', behavioural and 'relationship problems', which can also affect them later on in life (Wallerstein and Kelly 1980, Simpson 1998: 78).

In contrast to this, however, some studies of divorce and separation have argued that although the effects are real, the extent of the impact that this situation has on the child and the long term consequences have to a certain extent been exaggerated (Coltrane and Adams 2003; Rodgers and Pryor 1998; Walker 2003). When viewed in this context it is therefore interesting that although Silvia has concerns about her daughter missing out, there appeared to be little to suggest that her daughter was suffering any emotional or educational difficulties at this stage because of the increased responsibility.[5] This is not to say that having to put her life on hold does not constitute a great burden on the child but it could be the case that the role that the child is playing conflicts with this mother's notions of childhood. As other studies have shown, there are a variety of other social and cultural contexts in which children may be called upon to make a financial or practical contribution towards a family's livelihood or wellbeing (for example, see Jones 2003: 191; and Simpson 1998: 79). Similarly, '[i]n pre-industrial times children were valued for their economic contribution' to 'the household' 'rather than their emotional worth' (Coltrane and Adams 2003). In many of the working class neighbourhoods in the North of England where I have been living for most of my adult life, and also in the neighbourhoods in which much of the research was conducted it is not unusual for older children to be looking after and caring for younger siblings and making a practical contribution towards the running of the household, particularly in cases where mothers have to work. However, although this may be the case, the extra burden that is being placed on children in this context is a significant factor, especially in light of the way in which the extra responsibility is only one of a number of different aspects of imprisonment which impacts on the health and well-being of children.

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[5] This statement is based on Silvia's narrative and my own observations of Silvia's family situation, rather than on any direct evidence obtained through data collection with regards to interviewing the child herself or the child's school.

On the other hand, if the responsibility placed on children is not too debilitating, and incarceration is not experienced as a crisis then the mother may feel that there has been relatively little effect on the child's health or well-being; and the extra responsibility may be viewed as more of a positive contribution towards the organisation and running of the household. Further evidence of this is provided by Sharon who told me about some of the ways in which her son had not only taken it upon himself to keep her company while his father was absent, but he had also taken over the role of checking the security of the household before he and his mother went to sleep in the evening:

> S: Paul has been sleeping with me since Richard's been away... cos I went to say eeee you shouldn't be coming in here, and he goes **ahh this is my bed now, its nice and comfy this** and I mean he's got a lovely bedroom of his own, and I says right ya can stay in here till it starts to get light again, but then I says after Christmas then you're out cos I don't think he should be coming in here...I mean I think its more for like... he thinks he's keeping me company, because he's all like 'Ill do me routine check on a night time' so when I've locked the doors he goes round and checks the doors and even the two spare bedrooms upstairs, and he goes and he closes the blinds just so that anybody watchin'll think that there's people in here
> V: so did Paul used to do that sort of thing before Richard went away?
> S: no.. well well his daa [dad] was here so he didn't need to go and check the back door or the front door (laughs).

In Sharon's account, she does not describe her son as experiencing any psychological problems or as being overburdened by the extra responsibility, and unlike a number of the other women that I interviewed, she did not seem in the least concerned that the situation might have a negative impact on her son's health or well-being.[6] This was consistent with the fact that in Sharon's case there was also a distinct absence of the type of emotional crisis that was present in most of my other case studies. This could be the result of the fact that she had a very strong support network, a feature which has been found to be important in a family's ability to adapt to stressful situations and health status (see Unger and Powel 1980; Kana'Iaupuni et al 2005). However, it was also the case that this was her husband's second sentence; and as has

[6] This example is based on Sharon's perspective, and not that of her son who was not interviewed during this study.

been shown in other studies, it is predominantly the wives of first offenders that experience the crisis which accompanies incarceration (Morris 1965; Murray 2005: 444). Thus, although the increased responsibility that children take on may have a negative effect when the situation is experienced by the mother as a crisis, recognition must be given to the fact that this is not always the case and as has been demonstrated in cases of divorce, the impact on the child will vary depending on the circumstances.

So far in this chapter, I have explored the way in which judicial procedures that accompany the process of incarceration and the prisoner's removal from the outside world moves beyond the point of punishing the individual to become a composite form of punishment in that it also impacts on the family members that they leave behind. In the process of doing so I have also looked at the way in which events such as arrest, house searches/raids, trial and confiscation orders strike at the heart of some of the most intimate aspects of the family's relationship. In this context the rule of law is placed above the welfare of the family, with the result that families must operate in the shadow of the law, practising what I have identified as a subordinated kinship.

It is not just the mother and her children who need to be considered, because for the prisoner, the situation that imprisonment imposes means that the experience of being a father in prison is also equally difficult. One example of a study undertaken in the USA suggests that in recent years the issue of fatherhood has become one which is seen to be of increasing importance, and fathers are now more likely to be practically and emotionally involved in the lives of their children (Eggebeen and Knoster, 2001: 381). 'Paternal identity' is also integrally linked to maternal influences and the way in which the mother perceives the father's parenting role; a situation which is referred to as 'maternal gate keeping' (McBride et al 2005). As my research participants' accounts show, however, during the initial stages of incarceration mothers are often struggling to cope with their own role as parent, as well as trying to compensate for the role that has been lost as a result of the father's removal from the family home. For the prisoner, on the other hand, the loss of liberty means that his role as a father,

in providing for his family, and ensuring the well-being of other family members is constrained and negated by the situation of imprisonment.[7]

**Fathers In Prison**

The issue of fatherhood and imprisonment is one that has begun to receive increasing recognition in recent research studies (see for instance Arditti et al 2005; Boswell and Wedge 2002; Clarke *et al* 2005; Day et al 2005; Katz 2002; Meek 2007; Hairston 2002). A study by Clarke *et al* (2005) in particular highlights how fathers often experience difficulties in fulfilling the role of a 'responsible' parent, in addition to emphasising how mothers are central figures when it comes to facilitating father-child contact and visiting arrangements. Boswell and Wedge (2002: 38) have described how some of the prisoners they interviewed for their own research reported feelings of 'guilt', 'helplessness' and anger about not being there for their families and children. Similar feelings were also expressed in a letter written by the partner of one of my research participants, in response to my request for him to write about the practicalities of maintaining contact from a father's point of view:

> My biggest worry is Miranda's health, and at times her state of mind. Guilt is a massive thing that you have to deal with daily. The guilt I have for the hideous things I've done and put people through. Guilt for not being there for Miranda when she needs me most, not being there for the boys, to take them to football, fishing, bike rides, helping them through school, not being able to protect my family from what is fast becoming a very dangerous society.
>
> Every time Miranda sends me money I feel like a parasite because I can't give nothing at all back. To my boys I'm their hero, although they both know I'm in prison they don't know why, and I live with the fear and guilt that one day I am going to have to tell them and break their hearts...
>
> Then there's the fear of losing that contact with your family. I've seen men rip their arms wide open when that happens. If it were to happen to me I don't know how I'd handle it, but I think I know in my heart of hearts my family have to do what's best for them, but I would try to hang on with all my strength. Thankfully my family love me very much and would not hurt me on purpose.

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[7] Although this is the case it should be acknowledged that some fathers may not have had a strong involvement with their families prior to incarceration.

Simpson *et al* have pointed out that 'the role of the father is integrally linked with power, authority and masculinity', and that it is also 'associated with the maintenance and order and structure within the family' (Simpson *et al* 1995: 56). Whilst a study by Warin *et al* found that a father's capacity to perform the tasks associated with his role as a provider was associated with self esteem, and that 'men who were less able to be in control of material goods, for example younger fathers or those who are not employed for any reason, experienced lower self esteem and saw themselves as less competent parents' (Warin *et al* 1999 – cited in Barrett 2004: 93). Since incarceration infringes on notions of power, authority, masculinity and the ability to provide for the family this can be seen to be at odds with the way in which the father's role is conceptualised. What this means in terms of my research participant's account is that he is no longer able to make any sort of meaningful financial contribution towards the family as a unit or household, hence his sense of guilt and feelings of being like a 'parasite'. He is also excluded from exercising his sense of responsibility by taking care of his partner and children and ensuring their security.

Furthermore, by excluding the father from the 'minutiae of daily commerce and interaction', which accompany the 'mutual familiarity and predictability', of family routines', there is a danger that the kinds of intimacy which develop through taking part in those activities also become severely strained, curtailed or limited (see Simpson, McCarthy and Walker 1995: 59). Finally, in the context of divorce the father's position may be precarious, and the situation may increase the dangers of fathers becoming marginalised, but it is still often possible for him to re-establish his role, albeit in an altered form (see Simpson, McCarthy and Walker 1995). However, since the father's parental role is so severely restricted in the context of imprisonment this also deprives him of the opportunities, such as making a financial contribution or 'being there' for his children when they need him, which means that re-establishing his role in this context is particularly difficult, if not impossible. Imprisonment thus represents an extraordinarily high level 'social control' which is quite antithetical to the flexibility and creativity of kinship.

There are, however, parenting courses and father-child visits (discussed in chapter six – see also Boswell and Wedge 2002), which are designed to increase the amount of physical contact and quality time which fathers spend with their children (See letter

by Dalton Grant in appendix C). On the other hand, I would argue that these are no substitute for the routine interactions and prolonged periods of face to face contact that most families want and require and, in any case, father-child visits and schemes similar to this were not an option for any of my research participants at the High Security establishment.

Father-child visits are also of little compensation to the mother, who is then left to take on the fathers' responsibilities, renegotiating the situation and re-adjusting the way they practice kinship to compensate for a relationship that is either fractured or missing (I will review the benefits of father-child visits in chapter six: 'Doing time by doing kinship). What is more, it may be even more important for some of these families to be able to establish a sense of stability and 'normality', primarily because of the complex nature of many prisoners' family relationships:

> I've never had support; I brought three children up by meself until Eddie came along and then he was dad to them. It was hard at first, ya know, the children adapting to having a dad you know but Eddie kept at it [...] my children weren't used to a family life so when Eddie came along it was a family life [...]. Eddie was the one who kept everything in order, the children in order... I have a laddie who... he's always been in bother you know from being four and a half I would say I've had bother with him. I've had psychologists and everything for him...but he's never had a dad about so when Eddie came into whar lives [...] he became the one who sorted all the children out, kept them in line cos I'm the soft one. Whereas I usually give into them Eddie would ...they get away with a lot more since Eddies been inside and they shouldn't [...] they'll go to him and speak to him and... he would always sort everything out for them. I don't seem to keep them as sturdy as what Eddie did [bursts into tears]. Ya know, me teenagers, any problems they've got they'll go to discuss them with Eddie [...] so he does keep his parental role, or try to. Its difficult now with only two hours every fortnight, but he does still reprimand the children, and I think they take a lot of notice... they always did... it was so different for my children before that... they didn't know what a family was. They had a mam but they didn't know what a dad entailed.[8]

What comes across in Karen's narrative, for example, are the difficulties she experiences with disciplining her children, because, as she points out, it was her husband's role to keep 'everything in order'. It also demonstrates how she has been

[8] [...] indicates that a number of words have been taken out of the transcription.

left to renegotiate and implement a role for which she feels ill equipped, and would rather not deal with. In situations such as this, it can be difficult trying to combine different styles of parenting because, as Barrett highlights, there is often a difference between the role of the mother and the role of the father, with the former often taking on a more 'expressive role' and the latter an 'instrumental' one (see Barrett 2004: 88). And, as Karen's account suggests, trying to combine these roles may be extremely difficult if it does not fit in with their perceived role as parent. In some cases this can lead to problems with discipline and establishing a sense of order at home. What is more, if the idea of 'good parenting' is based on the notion of 'setting the right levels of intervention, direction, discipline, freedom, control and indulgence' (Simpson 1998: 53) then it is possible to see how difficult it is to achieve under these circumstances Yet, the avoidance of any conflict over roles and instability, is, as I have suggested, of paramount importance. As Karen also highlights, the relationship that she has with her current partner is also the first time that she has ever had any help and support with her children.

In some respects what this also emphasises is the complex nature of many prisoners' family relationships; this was also the case with one of my other research participants, Paula:

> Lucy sees her dad, that's like the oldest one, cos she just goes herself. The three lads don't really bother with their dad, they do now and again if they want money for their birthday or something like that. They might go down a couple of weeks before, and then go down regularly until their birthday and then they'll stop. They don't errm, they don't take any notice of him or anything like that, they're not really interested in him really [...] and then there's Sophie... she's his [referring to husband in prison]. [...] They class Billy [husband] more as their dad, cos he's got more to do with them, takes time out for them and stuff like that [...] he's the one who tells them off like if they're naughty or something like that [...] they respect him more than what they do me cos they take more notice of him.

It is interesting that in both this example and in that of Karen, it appears to be the prisoner (the woman's current partner) who takes over the main role as 'dad' to the children. This is a role which was also articulated in both cases in terms of discipline and spending time with the children. In these cases, the women's previous

relationships had often broken down because of abuse (see case study for Miranda in chapter seven), or as Karen said to me:

> their dad was on drugs and stuff... he was very immature...they don't see him no more.

As I discussed briefly in chapter three, the families I engaged with are already at a disadvantage in that the absence of a father figure in the home is often perceived to be at odds with the 'normative family ideology'. They are then cast off into the stigmatised realm of the 'the underclass' or 'problem family'; the section of the population who are responsible for the breakdown of the family and the increasing rates of crime and disorder. They are often characterised by mothers with low moral values and fathers who are lacking in responsibility (Dennis and Erdos 1992; Murray 1996; Popenoe 1997). I would suggest, however, that the way in which my research participants conceptualised the idea of family relationships indicates that their preference still accords with the more 'normative' ideology of a two parent family unit, and the fact that some of the mothers in my sample had children to different biological fathers was more to do with the difficulties that they had experienced in their previous relationships rather than low moral standards *per se*. The fact that the mother's present husband or partner had taken over the fatherhood role, and was being as supportive as possible given the circumstances was therefore much more important in ensuring a stable environment for children. However, achieving a sense of stability may be a particularly difficult goal to accomplish when the family are living 'a subordinate kinship'.

Moreover, I would argue that the above issue is especially important given the increasing focus on prisoners' children, and in particular, accounts which directly link parental arrest and incarceration with future predictions of delinquent behaviour. Such accounts also tend to propose further surveillance and interventions by tracking and monitoring prisoners' children as a solution (see for example Farrington 2001; Murray and Farrington 2006 and Murray 2007). Yet, as some scholars have highlighted '[t]he identification and monitoring of risk in populations' may lead to a 'self-fulfilling prophecy in which children that are labelled as potential offenders do become offenders due to the way they are subsequently treated' (Laing and McCarthy 2005: 21).

Furthermore, it could also be suggested that by placing emphasis on children in this way, there is a risk that this only further serves to disguise the difficulties, lack of support and marginality that some mothers may experience. An alternative, but perhaps a more appropriate approach, might be to provide the mother with the support and help that she needs, in order to limit the devastating effects that incarceration has on her own health and well-being. In turn, this would act as a means of empowering her to deal with any problems and difficulties that her children experience. It could be argued that adopting an approach which is inclusive of the mother would also be more facilitative of her role as a 'maternal gatekeeper', and the main facilitator of the father-child relationship (McBride 2005; Clarke et al 2005). Perhaps this would also provide the opportunity for some of the wives' and partners' of prisoners to re-establish the notion that their family are a 'collective subject' rather than a 'simple aggregate of individuals' (Bourdieu 1998: 68-70).

**Conclusion**

Separation in the context of incarceration displays both similarities and differences when compared with separation and divorce. The main similarities are that separation in both contexts is often a traumatic experience in that it severely impacts on the health and well-being of other family members, with children in particular sometimes taking on the extra burdens of caring and domestic responsibilities in order to ease the pressures and strains that accompany their mother's physical and emotional deterioration; which can in turn serves to compound the negative effects that the situation has on the their own health and well-being.

The differences are that the tensions which arise are very much the product of the way in which mothers and children experience the events which accompany incarceration, denigrating their sense of privacy and respect and often compromising their ability to accomplish a sense of family and resulting in a subordinated kinship. What is more, although the structure of the family has to undergo a dramatic change in which roles need to be re-allocated and practices rearranged, this is not, as in cases of divorce, because the parents no longer wish to live together, but because the separation is enforced. The manner in which it is enforced can result in conflict between the family and the official bodies who uphold the law and its accompanying

practices, such as the police, the prison and the courts. In this way, the use of imprisonment is a composite form of punishment because it not only punishes the individual who committed the crime, but it also impacts on other innocent, legally free family members, and in particular mothers' and their children.

For the prisoners' family, the processes I have described in this chapter usually mark the beginning of their experiences of incarceration. The journey does not end here, however, but continues as families who wish to maintain contact are subsequently required to submit to the culture and performance which accompanies prison visiting.

# CHAPTER FIVE

## Prison Visiting: Culture and Performance

### Introduction

The occasion of prison visiting represents the point at which the institution and the family meet. Both share a mutual interest in the prisoner, but the aims of each party differ. For the family, the purpose of their visit is to 'do kinship' with their relative; while the aim of the prison is to control and shape the behaviour of the visitor, so that they do not compromise the aims of the establishment. It is these differences and the tensions which this situation creates, that play out in the culture and performance which surround the act of prison visiting. In order to examine this situation further, I will explore the approach of the institution, and how the various rules and procedures which I would liken to what Goffman (1959) refers to as a 'social front', are used to convey information to the family and friends of prisoners about the correct way to behave while they are inside the establishment; and how in turn this serves to shape the way in which families interpret their experiences during the act of prison visiting.

In doing so I will also examine Comfort's (2003: 101) suggestion that the waiting area of the prison acts as a 'liminal space' where ceremonies take place that serve to subject women to 'secondary prisonization'. 'Prisonization' was a notion developed by Clemmer who suggested that an individual's criminal identity and patterns of behaviour develop in relation to the person's conceptualisation of relationships (Brodsky 1975: pp10-11). When an inmate becomes closer and starts to develop a certain intimacy with other prisoners he gradually begins to detach himself from the people outside. As this occurs, the prisoner's 'frame of reference', his identity, who he feels he is, and the values that he holds gradually change as he 'move[s] nearer to the prison sub culture' (ibid). According to Comfort therefore, women who visit prisons become subject to a similar fate in that they are subjected to rituals and ceremonies that result in a 'deprivation of autonomy'.

However, although Comfort suggests that the waiting area 'is a *liminal space*, the boundary between 'outside' and 'inside', where visitors convert from legally free

people into imprisoned bodies for the duration of their stay in the facility' (Comfort 2003: 86), the meaning of a liminal space in this context is different in some respects from the ideas of liminality that Turner (1969) and Van Gennep (1960) describe. Van Gennep's theory for instance, which focused on the rites of passage that accompany transitional events such as funeral or marriage ceremonies, argues that there are three different stages that can be used to distinguish a rite of passage: 'separation', 'transition', and 'aggregation' (1960: vii). Drawing on this, Turner suggested that it is the in-between or transitional stage that a person may go from one relatively fixed 'state' of being to another which he called a liminal stage ( 1969: 94-96). This is a stage which employs a high degree of ritual, symbolism and ceremony to mark the shedding of an old identity and the adoption of a new one (ibid: 95-96). However, the main difference between Comfort's (2003) ideas of liminality and those of Turner (1969) and Van Gennep (1960) is that in the case of the latter these sorts of performances usually involve a transition from a lower to a higher status, in which the position of the individual is elevated (see Turner 1969: 166). Whereas, in the context of incarceration, the idea of 'secondary prisonization' implies that the transition involves one in which the person is moving downwards, from being legally free, to that of 'quasi inmate' (Comfort 2003). In order to provide a more theoretical account of the culture and performance that prevails around the act of prison visiting I will therefore use Comfort's ideas in conjunction with those of Turner and Van Gennep.

In exploring these ideas further, the structure of the chapter follows the order in which the different stages that accompany the act of visiting occur, using the data that I gathered from detailed participant observation at the High Security Estate prison, and conversations with women who were visiting; in addition to drawing on data obtained during the in-depth interviews with the wives and partners of prisoners. Preparations for visiting, the journey to the prison and the setting and location of the establishment form part of the initial stage in the visiting process which I will initially describe. After this I will move on to discuss the arrival procedure, followed by the rituals of dressing up, and the conversations that take place, how this influences social relations and generates conflict between the different categories of prisoner that families are visiting – in particular between those considered to be vulnerable and normal location prisoners. The issue of time and the act of waiting to get into the

prison will be the topic that I consider next, before moving on to the final phase of the chapter exploring the repetition of the arrival procedure, prison dogs and the increase in security and surveillance which families experience inside the visits room. Before I explore these issues however, I will initially begin by exploring the preparations that are made for prison visiting.

**Preparations For Visiting**

The performance of prison visiting usually begins when the families first come into contact with the prison. This is the point at which the prison first seeks to create an impression on the visitor, by employing what Goffman (1959: 36) refers to as a 'social front', through which it conveys information about the rules and procedures of imprisonment. At the High Security establishment this process usually starts prior to the visit, when the prisoner sends a visiting order (VO) to his family or friends, requesting that they visit him in prison. The VO is a small A5 piece of paper with the name of the prisoner, his unique prison identification number, prison category, wing location and the names of each of the visitors and the relationship of the prisoner to each visitor printed on it.[1] A VO is part of the process of identification, and it is also used 'to monitor the number of visitors each prisoner receives' (Flynn 1998: 90). If a visitor is unable to produce a VO when they arrive for their visit, they will then be turned away and entry into the prison is not usually permitted (Leech 2006: 380). For the families of prisoners that I spoke to during the fieldwork, the VO holds particular importance, in that, to them, it represents in material form their rights and entitlement to a visit. In the case of the prison however, it is the prisoner's application for a VO which is initially important. This is the first stage in the collection and documentation of a source of information about the prisoners' family, such as the age of the visitor, their date of birth, address and their relationship to the prisoner. By collecting this information, this serves to extend the reach of the techniques of surveillance and mechanisms of discipline beyond the remit of individual prisoner, as part of the continuous carceral network (Foucault 1977: 303).

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[1] Prison categories range from A to D; a category A prisoner would be someone who is considered to present a high risk to public safety if they were to escape; category D prisoners are those who are deemed by the authorities to serve their sentence in open conditions (see Cheney 2002: 283). Wing location refers to the particular area (or wing) of the prison in which the prisoner is living.

The first stages in this process also form part of the tactics and manoeuvres used by the institution through which their regime of power is exercised (Smart: 2002) over inmates and their families. Evidence for this can be seen by examining the difficulty that families often experience when they try to book their visit. For instance, research already suggests that booking a visit is often a source of major 'frustration', because prison telephone lines are often engaged (Laing and McCarthy 2005: 12). Families frequently spoke about the difficulties experienced because the booking lines are only open during working hours, highlighting the way in which even before the process of visiting starts families are already strictly limited by the regime of the establishment. It is only when this stage in the visiting process has finally been accomplished, that the next phase in the visiting process can begin. The next phase is the family's journey to the prison.

**The Journey To The Prison**

> **Norma:**
> Couldn't be much farther this place could it?
> **Ingrid:**
> I've had to come from London. Had to be at Euston by eight. And there was no buffet on the train.
> **Norma:**
> Never is, is there? Or if there is, it's only yesterday's sausage rolls.
> **Elaine:**
> I've only come from Bolton. But it's taken me all morning to get here. Change at Manchester. Change at Carlisle. Least when he was in Strangeways I only had a bus ride.
> **Norma:**
> It's us that suffers chuck. Us that has to cope with no money and a family to run, and no man around the house.
>
> (Porridge: Webber, Clement and Franais 2002: 128).

The above quote is taken from the British TV comedy 'Porridge', which I have highlighted here because of the similarly that that this fictional performance has with reality of the situation experienced by women visiting their husbands and partners in prison. For instance, reports suggest that on average, prisoners are usually held at least '53 miles away from home' and many face 'a round trip of at least five hours' (SEU 2002: 112). A number of the women I spoke to at the Visitors' Centre suggested that their journeys were much longer than this, and that when the period of time spent during the visit was taken into account this meant that they often had to

allocate a full day out of their week for visiting. For instance one of the visitors told me that she got up *'five in the morning'* in order to catch the train and was unlikely to get home until *'at least nine o'clock'* that evening. Whilst another visitor told me:

> ...he's so far away, and the time I have to set off on a morning-the visits don't start until quarter to two and I am getting a train at half past nine in the morning

One of my research participants Meena told me that she slept on the train so that she could fit her day visiting in between her night shifts. On the other hand, Beth, another of my research participants told me that she did not mind travelling because it helped her to conceal her husband's whereabouts from neighbours and friends. Thus although travelling a long distance may be problematic for some families, in some cases it may be preferable because of the particular circumstances involved. In Beth's case her husband was a VP or vulnerable prisoner, a category which I will show later carries a high degree of stigma (also refer to chapter seven on social networks); thus accounting for the reason why she preferred to travel the long distance to the prison.

However, women with children were the ones who seemed to experience the most difficulties. In particular, children were sometimes left at home with friends or relatives because of the length of time involved in travelling, as I was told by Karen:

> I never take all of the children together [...] the travellings just too much. Kate and Stephen would just start arguing ya know what I mean, three teenagers together and the teenagers get sick of the baby crying...

Karen also described the travelling as *'horrendous'* and *'tiring'* for the children, telling me that *'the baby is just screamin'*. She also told me about how her teenage daughter was affected by the journey:

> me sixteen year olds got problems with her temper at the minute which... she's been bad, she's very ya know when we get there she's sort of very-the way she talks-everything's obnoxious, an I says to her is it the travelin and she says aye, its too far... ya know what I mean. They're not good travellers my children

Laing and McCarthy (2005: 12) have highlighted the way in which parents are sometimes hesitant about taking their children visiting because they get bored or 'behave badly during visits'. However as my informants' narratives also demonstrate the problems which families experience with children may begin before they even reach the prison. Thus although the experiences of booking visits and travelling to the prison therefore differ according to circumstances, for many of the women, particularly those with children, the time it takes and the disruption in routines, means that the process of visiting can be problematic, tiring and stressful. It is in this way that the preparations for visiting are a method of extending the reach of the prison beyond punishing the prisoner, by impinging on the lives and in particular the welfare of the families and friends of prisoners. Following their long and arduous journeys, visitors are initially greeted by the sight of the prison.

**The Prison Setting And Location**

The setting and location of the prison form part of the 'scenic aspects' of 'front' (Goffman 1959: 33), in which prison signs and the structure and layout of the establishment are used to convey information to the visitor about the expected form of behaviour. Initially, this is evidenced by the way in which the prison is situated in a semi rural location; separated from its surrounds by a large grey stone perimeter wall which borders on to trees and fields. A small estate of houses aligns the sides of the narrow back road leading up to the main gate, where visitors, staff and those passing by are greeted by the large blue and white sign displaying the words: HMP Northern Prison.

The Visitors' Centre building is situated towards the front of the establishment sandwiched between the car park and the main gate leading up to the prison; it is a small square brick built building which looks somewhat uninviting and characterless in its appearance; defined only by the numerous prison signs which serve to emphasise the building's official nature and its utilitarian purpose.

Inside the Centre the layout and the internal appearance also serve to emphasise the official purpose; evidenced by the way in which the families and friends of prisoners are initially greeted by the sight of the large blue and white signs, which adorn the walls of the room, serving to warn them about the procedures, rules, regulations

which govern prison visiting and the possible sanctions which can be imposed on them if there is an infraction. Spain has argued that 'prisons are the clearest example of space being used to reinforce a hierarchy and to assert power' (Cited in Comfort 2003: 86). In this way, the authoritarian air of the building leaves the visitor in no doubt, that first and foremost they are in prison, and that visiting is a privilege which can be revoked and sanctions imposed if their behaviour deviates from the rules of the system.

On the walls towards the rear of the room, there are racks containing leaflets giving information and advice. The leaflets feature details about prisoners' families help lines and support groups, information on drug addiction and welfare benefits. The topics reflect some of the more prominent issues which the families of prisoners are often struggling to cope with. The charitable organisation which runs the Visitors' Centre provide the leaflets; indicating their interest in the welfare of the visitor. A representative of the organisation told me that their aims and practices are guided by their ethos: 'Building bridges for prisoners' families'; which, I was told, reflects their role at liaising with the 'prison' and the 'prison authorities', in trying to 'get visits improved' and provide help for 'prisoners' and their families'. Most of the families that I spoke to about the staff and volunteers, who they came into contact with from the organisation, had nothing but praise for the role that they undertake. In many cases regular visitors and volunteers were on first name terms and as the wife of one prisoner told me 'ya can't fault the volunteers'. The provision of information and advice and the organisation's awareness of the problems that pervade the families of prisoners, thus serve to temper the air of authority, by making the Visitors' Centre seem a little friendlier and welcoming and therefore less austere. In this respect the position that the organisation occupies is one which is on the threshold between the world of the prison and the world outside; thereby displaying some of the qualities of liminality that Turner (1969) and Van Gennep (1960) describe.

In addition to providing information the organisation is responsible for opening the centre so that visitors have somewhere to wait and buy refreshments after their journey, while they proceed through the initial stages of the arrival procedure. This is a process which marks the first stages of documenting the personal details of the visitor when they arrive at the prison.

**Arrival Procedure At The High Security Prison**

The visiting process usually begins at about eleven o'clock when either the Visitors' Centre co-ordinator or a volunteer arrives to unlock the front doors of the building. She sets up the display of drinks and sweets, taking them out of a locker and arranging them neatly on the counter so that when the visitors arrive they can see them. Refreshments are usually sold at a price that is significantly lower than any similar items bought in the shops. A member of the charitable organisation that runs the centre suggested that this was because they are more interested in the welfare of families than in making a profit. The interactions which take place between the organisation and the friends and families of prisoners, and the message that these interactions convey are of a different ilk to that which takes place between the family and the institution; with the former expressing a more caring role and the latter expressing the importance of conformity, and the need to adhere to the prison's rules, through the imposition of discipline and authority.

Two separate lists containing the names of the visitors are placed on the counter, facing towards the volunteer but away from the visitor. The lists correspond to the different categories of prisoner, one containing the name of the families and friends visiting VPs, and the other containing the names of those who are visiting normal location prisoners. The process marks the beginning of the rituals and ceremonies which form part of the 'depersonalisation' process (Comfort 2003: 80) in which the information that the prison collects about the individual visitor, is then used by the institution as a tool for collectivising and allocating them into a category which accords to the status of the prisoner they are visiting. Alongside the lists is a small glass containing ball-point pens and different coloured highlighters, ready to mark the visitors off when they arrive at the prison. As visitors arrive they approach the counter and hand over their VO. The volunteer marks the top of the VO with the date and time their arrival; their names are then crossed off the respective list with one of the coloured highlighters. The VO is then placed on the counter to one side of the lists laid out in front of her; in exchange the visitor is given a small laminated piece of paper with a number corresponding to the order of their arrival. The arrival procedure forms the next phase in the accumulation and documentation of a 'body of knowledge' about the family of the prisoner (Foucault 1977). Extending the

'normalising gaze' of the prison through which the power of the institution is initially exercised (Smart 2002: 86-87) over the families and friends of prisoners.

After receiving their numbers some of the visitors remain in the centre, biding their time by drinking tea and coffee, reading magazines and talking to family or friends who have accompanied them on their journey; whilst others trek off in search of the nearest takeaway or fast food outlet, or they go into the toilet to change their clothes, before the start of visiting.

**The Clothes Worn For Prison Visiting**

Some of the women who are visiting their husbands and partners change into evening dress, or clothes that are very revealing. Children who are going to visit their fathers are also often dressed up in fancy clothes. Not all of the women who are visiting wear evening dress or fancy clothes, but as one of the volunteers remarked:

> a lot of them stand out don't they, because they have their own culture...their own dress and things

In her study of the visitors waiting area of San Quentin Prison Comfort (2003: 80) suggests that 'personally stylized appearance and comportment' displayed by women is one of the ways in which visitors attempt to import the 'outside world' into the prison; as a means of resisting the processes of 'depersonalization' and the 'deprivation of autonomy' which accompanies their contact with the establishment. However, more often than not the women I spoke to explained that the reason for changing their clothes was because visiting was important and they wanted 'to look nice', while in some cases they just wanted to feel 'clean', since they were 'hot and sweaty' from the travelling. Fear of becoming contaminated by drugs through travelling on public transport was also an issue because of the potential of preventing them from gaining entry to the prison (For more in depth discussion of contamination see the section on prison dogs: 121). In this case therefore wearing nice or fancy clothes may less to do with transporting the outside world into the prison and resisting the processes of depersonalization, and more to do with the importance that women place on maintaining their relationship, and looking nice for their partner during visiting. After changing their clothes women once again take their seats in the

centre; spending the rest of their time talking to some of the other wives and visitors while they wait.

**Conversations At The Visitors' Centre**

Talking can be seen to be a particularly important social activity. For instance, according to Dunbar (1996), talking and gossiping serves as a means of creating alliances between groups of people. Abrahams (1970: 290) suggests that 'Gossip, like joking, takes place between individuals who stand in a special relationship to each other', before further suggesting that '[w]e can [...] discern a good deal of the formal and informal social structure of a community by noting those categories of people who joke or gossip with each other' (ibid). In this respect gossip often serves as a form of 'impression management' (Handelman 1973: 210); which is often used in a negative way to talk about other people, and which is often triggered by feelings of 'powerlessness' and 'perceptions of injustice or feelings of jealousy, envy, and resentment' (Wert and Salovey 2004: 122).

During my fieldwork I recorded a variety of conversations at the Visitors' Centre in which certain topics seemed to arise regularly. Women would often talk about the latest bargains they procured, at the 'pound shop' in the local town while they were waiting for the bus to the prison. Including tea towels, plastic flowers, cheap wallpaper, and gifts to give to children and grandchildren. These purchases were often shown around at the Visitors' Centre. In this respect the women's conversations were often orientated towards their families at home and activities such as showing gifts that they had bought for their families was a way to emphasize their caring role. Women would also sit and discuss illnesses, revealing parts of their body such as their arms or legs, comparing who was in the most pain and who suffered the most swelling. On other occasions, the women used their time to gossip and talk disparagingly about some of the other visitors; either about what they were wearing, how well they were able to control their children during the visits, or whether they were faithful to their partners. They would also spend their time trying to determine the crimes that they thought other women's partners had committed, and whether they were in prison for sex offences and crimes against children. On some occasions they would swap phone numbers and arrange to meet each other outside the setting of the visitors' centre. Those who took part in these conversations were predominantly

the wives and partners of vulnerable prisoners, who would often arrive earlier and spend a lot more time in the Visitors' Centre. In general they were also a lot less suspicious than the wives of normal location prisoners who were generally more inclined to keep themselves to themselves and who tended to sit and talk only with their immediate friends and other members of their family. The reason for this, I would argue, is largely due to the stigmatized nature of the category to which those visiting vulnerable prisoners are allocated. Their conversations and their more sociable approach to visiting is an attempt to create alliances and lessen the negative connotations that others frequently attach to the types of offences their partners had committed. I will move on to examine this issue in more detail shortly. On the other hand, the approach of the normal location visitor was one which serves to emphasise their more business-like approach to the act of visiting, which, I would argue stems from the enclosed nature of their 'close-knit' social networks which they inhabit beyond the prison (see chapter seven).

It was not uncommon for problems to arise between the different categories of visitor. The following letter was written by Lois, the wife of a vulnerable prisoner and recalls an incident which occurred and which I also witnessed during the fieldwork:

**Visitors name,**
**Address.**
**Date December 2004.**

**The Governor,**
**HMP ****** Prison.**
*************

**Dear Sir,**

**Today I unfortunately put in a complaint to an SO in the visits room with several other people. About an incident that happened in the visits waiting room. I am not one for complaining, but I felt threatened and this upsets me. This incident has been waiting to happen for a while. I visit my husband in the VPs room. A visitor knows which room you go into visit. Some like to make you feel vulnerable with their nasty comments. A few months back we asked a solicitor advice about the nasty comments that we were receiving. The following week we saw that the prison had put a notice on the VPs door, me I thank you for that.**

**However, some visitors are still contemptuous towards us. Like today's incident. That upset others and me. A woman and a man visit a prisoner in the normal section. I believe their surname is ***** today they were down as visit 8. Each week they go out for a smoke and leave the door open, they also look down on us. The weather is getting colder so we go and close the door.**

**Today for some reason when we went to close the door the woman went mad, stating we had closed the door on a child. The child was no where near the door. The woman gave us verbal abuse; I commented it was draughty on the back with the door open. The man then got out of his chair and said something nasty. In retaliation I said it was draughty on the back and was selfish to leave the door open. He stated that this was too bad, this is what you get for visiting men who fiddle with children in the nonce's room. I told him that the room was for all crimes, and that I had heard that they had sex offenders on the normal side. At this stage I believed he would have hit me if the woman had not distracted him. I stood my ground but was very frightened and upset. The whole visits room witnessed this and Nina from **** went out and had a word with them. There was no need for all this bad feeling. All we did was close the door. We come for one reason, to see our loved ones without incidents.**

**When the man and woman came back into the room they stared at us all with contempt and tried to listen to every word we spoke. I felt very vulnerable and upset.**
**Today I felt victimized with these two people. Sir I would appreciate it if you addressed this problem so that others and I can come to visit our loved ones without feeling victimized from other visitors.**

**Yours sincerely**

****** ********

The letter is a copy of the one which Lois sent to the prison governor, depicting an account of the incident.[2] However, I was also sometimes told about other incidents which occurred in the visits room of the prison. For instance as Miranda told me:

> ...they walk past our room in the visits area they are really threatening. They peer at us and pull threatening faces through the glass. They always look down on you, you know, and you can hear them whispering in that other room. If VPs and normal location were mixed it would just cause a big riot – all those wana be gangsters – have you seen the way they walk – they think they're [...] it....I felt like writing a letter to the Governor about the way that those women from the other room treat us but I wouldn't know what to write. There are the visitors from our room [VP room].... The old ladies that I sit with and then there are the others from the other room who give you dirty [...] looks all the time... they are always pointing the finger at you..... But we aint no different, just that they think they are better than us cos you know the room I go in, people assume that the person your visitin is in there for well you know** And it aint always the case but you can [...] see them tryin

[2] The content of this participant's letter accords with the description of the incident that I witnessed and recorded in my field notes. However, it should be noted that I did not witness where the child was standing in relation to the door when Lois closed it, and because of the commotion and animosity during the incident I did not get the opportunity to speak to the other couple involved about the incident. It should therefore be acknowledged that the other couple involved will most likely have had a very different view of the incident that occurred.

> to peer through the glass to see into the room when they walk past looking through the glass [...] talking about you and laughin.....it does my [...] head in. The women from the other room was all sittin in the Visitors' Centre before and we could hear them talking about us you know, sayin why we were in there...Betty said 'if I wasn't number one I would ram my fist down their [...] throats' (laughs).

In his account of performances Goffman (1959: 45) suggests that:

> ...when the individual presents himself before others, his performance will tend to incorporate and exemplify the officially accredited values of the society, more so, in fact than does his behavior as a whole. To the degree that a performance highlights the common official values of the society in which it occurs, we may look upon it, in the manner of Durkheim and Radcliffe-Brown, as a ceremony – as an expressive rejuvenation and reaffirmation of the moral values of the community.

In this way, therefore, I would argue that these types of performances and interactions which take place between the different categories of visitor are a way for normal location visitors to express what they perceive to be the moral values of their group, by actively differentiating themselves from what they believe to be a more highly stigmatized category. In this respect, the threatening gestures and comments which Miranda attributes to normal location visitors are what Goffman (1959: 13-14) refers to as 'sign vehicles', in that they are the expressions 'given off' which are used to convey information and reaffirm their own identity. It is an aspect of 'front' which the visitors of normal location prisoners employ in order to define their relationship with those visiting vulnerable prisoners.

Nevertheless, as Cohen (1985a:17) points out:

> Behaviour does not 'contain' meaning intrinsically; rather, it is found to be meaningful by an act of interpretation: we 'make sense' of what we observe. The sense we make is 'ours', and may or may not coincide with that intended by those whose behaviour it was.

In this respect I would draw on my own experiences of visiting this establishment in order to provide an alternative interpretation from the point of view of the normal location visitor. In particular, I would argue that the behaviours and gestures such as those that Miranda describes and interprets as threatening are not necessarily

intentional and do not occur as frequently as her description suggests; but instead the fact that the different categories of visitors are separated into different rooms, means that the visitors of vulnerable prisoners become somewhat of a curiosity to the normal location group; and that behaviours such as peering through the glass in the door is often nothing more than the response of normal location visitors who are curious to see into the room which they are excluded from. Despite this, however, and as Lois's letter makes clear, these tensions do exist and do sometimes manifest in the performances that are played out in the Visitors' Centre. To a certain extent they are a reflection of the wider tensions which manifest in the interactions between the prisoners whom they are visiting; a topic which I will now explore in more detail.

**Vulnerable Prisoners And Normal Location Prisoners**

The Prison is organized so that it separates prisoners who are considered to be Vulnerable, from 'ordinary' prisoners who are housed on the Normal Location wing. Sex offenders, prisoners who become police/prison informants (grasses) and those who owe debts to other prisoners, often for supplying them with drugs, describe the types of prisoner that are allocated to the category of VP (Cheney 2002). The reason for classifying the prisoners differently is that as Thomas (2000) suggests, 'ordinary' offenders see it as normal to harass and bully the sex offender'. Prisoners such as these are therefore classified and separated in this way because of the need to protect 'vulnerable prisoners' from prisoners on normal location who are deemed to be a threat (Sparks et al 1996: 204).

One ex-prisoner with whom I spoke during my fieldwork told me about the way he perceived these differences:

> well, we're different. Nonces[3], sex offenders and grasses are worse than decent honest criminals – the differentiation in the prison system is only a prerequisite of the differentiation that exists in society at large

When I asked him what he meant by 'decent honest criminal' he told me:

[3] I was told by one of my associates that the term Nonce refers to Not of Normal Criminal Element.

> I mean people who break the law for financial gain - acquisitive crime. There is a hierarchy that exists among decent honest criminals so that some crimes command more respect than others. At the end of the day it's just a job like any other – but you can't say that about sex offenders and other nonce types of crime

Two interrelated themes run concurrently in this narrative. Firstly, the way that society in general perceives different types of criminal conduct. In particular certain types of offences not only offend the 'general sentiments' and moral values of society (Durkheim 1984), but sex offences in particular, occupy a specific niche in that they are considered to be 'inherently different' from other forms of crime (Thomas 2000). Evidence for this is seen in tabloid newspapers and other forms of popular media where the discourse created around sexual offences describe these offenders as 'monsters', 'beasts' and 'sex fiends' (ibid). There are numerous newspaper articles to corroborate this, for instance, a recent article in a northern newspaper reads 'WOMANS MARRIAGE TO SEX OFFENDER IN JAIL', before going on to describe how a woman married a man in prison who they describe as 'a convicted sex fiend' (Willis 15/4/06). The *News of the World* provides another example of this on their internet site by referring to sex offenders as 'perverts' in an article that poses the question 'Does a monster live near you?'.[4] Such headlines serve to support the sentiments that 'Sexual offenders occupy a special place in contemporary society's secular demonology' (Thomas 2000), as well as highlighting the way in which there is great stigma and derogatory connotations attached to these types of offences (Sparks et al: 1996).

The second theme that is present in my informants' narratives is the way that the normal location prisoner creates a hierarchy which is used to structure relationships, based on ideas which enable them to construct a separation between what they consider to be acquisitive and morally deviant types of crime. In order to understand why this should be the case it may be helpful to consider Goffman's (1961: 24-40) ideas about the way that the prison infringes on issues of identity. In particular his ideas about the way in which the processes that accompany imprisonment comprise a shift in the inmate's identity which comes about as a result of the inmate's physical

[4] (http://www.abny.demon.co.uk/acal/NewsOfTheWorldStory24.7.00.htm)

separation from the outside world, and the way in which they are stripped of all material possessions in which their sense of self is invested. The conception of self which the inmate held before they entered the establishment, and which serves to comprise their social identity is subsequently mortified. As a result of this, the inmate embarks on a shift in his 'moral career'. A moral career is 'a career composed of the progressive changes that occur in the beliefs that he has concerning himself and significant others' (Goffman 1961: 24). However, as Goffman further points out 'an attribute which stigmatizes one type of individual can usually confirm the usualness of another' (Goffman 1963: 3). The process of condemning the vulnerable prisoner could therefore be seen as a mechanism which is used by normal location prisoners to limit the stigma imposed by elevating their own status above that of the vulnerable prisoner. This is what Goffman (1959: 45) refers to as a process of 'idealization of the higher strata', in which in which the individuals performance is orientated towards incorporating and exemplifying 'the officially credited values' which mirror those already present in what would be considered to be 'normal' society.

Furthermore, Comfort's (2003) idea of prisonization is also relevant here, in that the divisions which accompany imprisonment can be seen to reflect ideas about the way in which imprisonment shapes patterns of behaviour and a person's conceptualization of relationships. Since these divisions also permeate the relationships within prisoners' families this can be seen as indicative of the type of 'secondary prisonization' which Comfort (2003) describes, where the values that visitors hold tend to move closer to those in the same prison category. Similar sentiments are also expressed by Cohen (1985a: 115) in his analysis of the 'symbolic construction of community' in which he points out that 'the sense of social self at the levels of both individuality and collectivity are informed by implicit or explicit contrast' and in which 'Individuals are said to define themselves by reference to a significant other'. It is important to note, however, that the categories into which prisoners are divided are not of their own making but were first and foremost created and imposed by the prison system. As Barth (2000) suggests 'Modern nation states, in their bureaucratic institutional structure, seem deeply wedded to boundaries and to objectivist definitions', and indeed 'the cognitive image of a social boundary is also deployed to limit the kinds of social relations that are allowed to form between members of the groups that are thus distinguished' (Barth 2000: 29-30).

In this respect, the animosity which exists between the different categories of prisoner, and the way in which this manifests in the social relationships of their families and friends at the Visitors' Centre, can be traced back to the creation of these divisions, which were initially imposed by the prison as a means of imposing a 'rigorous discipline' on prisoners (Ignatieff 1978: 33). The categorization of prisoners stems from the recommendations of prison reformers, who asserted that order could only be achieved by separating and limiting the associations of criminals (ibid). As I have already shown however, in creating these divisions the situation is such that it also permeates the relationships of prisoners' families and friends, and although in the contemporary context the use of categories is often justified from the standpoint of the prisoners' protection (Sparks et al 1996); protective measures do not exist in the world beyond the boundaries of the prison. Under these circumstances, creating alliances and adopting a more sociable approach to the act of visiting may therefore in this case serve as a way for the families of VPs to protect themselves against the stigma which accompanies the category to which they have been allocated. Categorization is not the only issue which influences the families of prisoners during visiting; the issue of time is also particularly important.

**Time And The Process Of Waiting**

According to Foucault, incarceration proliferated as the main form of punishment because of an increase in moral values (Foucault 1977: 232). Incarceration was 'more moral' because it deprived a person of liberty of which 'its loss therefore has the same value for all (ibid). An important aspect of this was the way that punishment could be quantified in terms of time. Foucault states that '[b]y levying on the time of the prisoner, the prison seems to express in concrete terms the idea that the offence has injured, beyond the victim, society as a whole...Hence the expression so frequently heard... that one is in prison in order to 'pay one's debt' (ibid). Other studies support the theory that time is an important aspect of social control. In a study of policing in Britain, Young explains how every aspect of the police force is obsessively driven by the structuring of time and 'time tabling' (Young 1990: 14). Indeed, he suggests that '[t]his concern is not just a cultural curiosity, it is evoked by the requirement of the courts' (ibid). Time is a 'symbol of the wider notions of correct behavior and preferred social order' (ibid). Some of the situations that occur

within the Visitors' Centre do demonstrate that the prison is not just levying a 'time penalty' on the prisoner but also on the prisoners' family.

The amount of time that families spent with the prisoner that they were visiting was particularly important. For instance, being 'number one' in the queue for visiting was a priority for some visitors because as one woman suggested, 'you get longer in the visits'. On average, time spent in the visiting room is about two hours, although thirty minutes is the legal entitlement for visits to convicted prisoners (Cheney 2002: 315). Unless visitors are on closed visits, in most cases prisons do allow more time for visiting than the period stipulated in the legal requirements. In most cases however, the two hours that the family gets to spend with the prisoner is still felt to be not enough. As a result of this strong feeling, the women often suggested that it was important to maximize the time that they are allowed to spend with their husband or partner.

Consequently, families frequently got upset and angry if the officers did not adhere to their correct order of arrival, by sending somebody over to the visiting room that had actually arrived after them. On some occasions staff shortages meant that there was a delay in finding someone to supervise visits, resulting in a delay in sending visitors from the centre over to the visits room inside the prison. On these occasions I recorded how delays could often last anywhere between fifteen minutes to an hour and prompting visitors to get angry and begin complaining about how far they had travelled and the shorter duration of time that they would have to spend with their relative. Complaints from the visitors were often ignored by the officers, who would point out that they already receive more than the legal entitlement. In this respect some of the features of visiting do correspond to Comfort's (2003) arguments about the way in which contact with the correctional establishment devalues women's time. The fact that the start of a visit is commonly delayed only serves to emphasize to the family that the time spent with the prisoner is not their own, but rather the gift of the prison which retains power and control. However, delays to visiting are not usually apparent until officers enter the Visitors' Centre building to begin processing the visitors by repeating the arrival procedure; this is the next phase in the documentation of the visitor, which adds to the body of knowledge which is kept by the prison.

**The Procedural Repetition Of Arrival**

At one o'clock an officer comes through from the rear of the Visitors' Centre building, to repeat the initial stage of the visiting procedure. The officer takes up his post at the desk opposite the volunteers' station, and begins to shout out the numbers given to visitors on their arrival. The numbers are usually shouted out in sequential order; the officer checks each VO and then proceeds to mark them off the list of those who are visiting. This stage of the processing procedure repeats the part of the process that the volunteer initially carried out on the visitor's arrival. The coordinator of the Visitors' Centre told me that this part of the procedure carried out by the officer is largely obsolete. He explained that it continues not only as a hangover from when the building was run by prison staff, and as a response to the upset displayed by officers fearing they may lose their jobs, but also as a strategy used by the prison in order to retain control of their establishment. The repetitive nature of these procedures can once again be related to the idea of 'social front' (Goffman 1959: 37) and the type of message which the establishment is trying to convey; in that these procedures form part of the 'collective representations' of the prison, which serve to indicate to the visitor the type of behaviour that is expected, that is, conformity to the rules and regulations of the penal establishment. The objective of repeating these procedures therefore, is to 'sustain the definition of the situation that its performance fosters', and subsequently stave off possible disruptions (ibid: 141) that the more relaxed approach of the charitable organization and its volunteers may impart to their visitors.

Following this phase of the procedure, the officer then takes the VOs that have been handed in, over to the officers in a room towards the back of the building and calls the name of the visitor in the order they were given. As visitors are called they filter through gradually into the room where the officers are stationed. This part of the procedure is primarily devoted to checking and verifying the identity of the visitor. Visitors who have not been before are required to produce some of the various forms of official documentation, such as their benefit books, passport, or driving license. Once the visitor's identity has been checked and the officer is satisfied, visitors have their picture taken, and their finger prints are electronically scanned before being given a small identity badge with their picture and a bar code which can be used to identify them while they are in the prison. They are then required to leave all their

personal belongings in one of the tall metal grey lockers which align the walls on the left hand side. Only £15 worth of coins, a limited amount of baby equipment, medications (such as inhalers) and the locker key are allowed into the prison. Whilst everything else that denotes a person's sense of self is required to be left behind. Following this, the visitors are sent in small groups over to the prison, where identity is once again verified. They are then asked to take off their shoes, belts and coats which are then placed on a conveyor belt and sent through a metal detector. Every visitor is then subjected to a rub down search. Their hair, mouth and soles of the feet are also examined. The procedure is used to prevent contraband such as drugs or weapons from being brought into the prison. This part of the search procedure seemed to be one of the least liked, particularly with regards to the way in which the officers dealt with children:

> What I don't like about it is ya know when you go in for your search and you take ya shoes off and you have go to go through that big scanner... and then they pat ya down- I've seen a girl in front of me with two young babies struggling.. and they've [officers] just stood there... I don't think they are very helpful.

Many of these search procedures exemplify Goffman's (1961: 24) ideas about the transformation of the inmate's identity, which usually occur when he enters the institution and during which the inmate proceeds through a 'series of abasements, degradations, humiliations, and profanations' in which the 'territories of self are violated' (ibid: 11). The admission and search procedures, the use of numbers, and the 'personal defacement of his [or her] appearance' are measures which are designed to strip the inmate of their identity; they also form part of the process of mortification referred to as a 'contaminative exposure' as the 'personal/private reserve is penetrated' (ibid: pp 24-38). In this way, therefore, search procedures which form part of the prison system of security and surveillance, can be seen to have an impact on the family which replicates, to an extent, the impact of incarceration on the inmate. Surveillance in this context is qualitatively different from the kind of panoptic surveillance that Foucault mentioned (Foucault 1977; Brochier 1977; Smart 2002: 88), in that it directly targets the body and mind of the subject that these procedures are directed at.

In this respect, the procedures used to strip families and visitors of their possessions, security checks and search procedures can also be likened to the ritualistic and ceremonial procedures that Turner (1969) and Van Gennep (1960) argue form the transitional stage in a rite of passage, which mark the stripping away of the old identity and the adopting of a new identity. Visitors, like the prisoners, are being transformed into passive objects of surveillance as they pass from the outside world into the confines of the prison; thus supporting the arguments of Comfort (2003) that waiting areas are 'liminal spaces' between the inside of the prison and the outside world. Here, women experience the processes of 'secondary prisonization' as they are transformed from legally free people into 'quasi-inmates' of the penal institution. Their status however is one that is temporary rather than permanent, and rather than adopting an elevated status, their status is one that is degraded through the practices of prison visiting. Before visiting can finally commence however, visitors are required to pass through one last stage of the search procedure which involves submitting themselves to a search by the prison dog.

**Let Slip: 'The Dogs Of War'**

Prison dogs are frequently used as part of routine search procedures that visitors endure before the start of a prison visit. At this particular prison, the dogs were used after the visitor's identity had been verified and after they had submitted themselves to all of the other search procedures. In order to progress to the main section of the prison where visits take place however, the visitors must leave the building referred to as the prison gate and make their way outside into what I would describe as a compound, comprised of wire mesh fence on either side which links one building to another. During the summer and on warm weather days the officer who is taking the visitors across will line them up at particular intervals alongside the fence. A dog handler then enters from a gate at the side, and walks along leading the dog past the line of visitors.

Dog handlers appear to display a more aloof attitude towards visitors, in that they are less likely to engage in conversation or interact with visitors except for during the search procedures. The prison service describes these canines as 'Dogs of War', a term which is indicative of their role; the dog handlers on the other hand describe themselves as:

> Dog men, as they call themselves, are a self-described weird bunch. As attached to their canines as to their families (in fact the dogs are considered a member of the clan).[5]

Directly beyond the compound lies the next corridor that is internal to the visits building. Along the floor of the corridor there is a line of crosses made from masking tape. In bad weather and during the winter months visitors are told to stand on the crosses whilst the handler leads the dog past. Whilst the dog is being led past visitors must remain still and are not allowed to pet or talk to the dog in any way. As one of the visitors remarked:

> It feels like they're lining us up to be shot.

Visitors often devoted a significant amount of the time they spent waiting discussing the topic of prison dogs. Discussing issues such as which dog they thought would be on duty that day, which dogs don't like them and single them out, and which visitors have recently been indicated by the dog and therefore refused a visit. Using dogs in this way can be seen as a method of depersonalizing a situation which could be construed by the visitor to be aggressive. The use of dogs can be seen as a mechanism which serves to deflect any tensions and conflicts which might otherwise arise between the families and the officers.

During my observations, a number of incidents occurred, where visitors got through the first part of the processing procedure, only to be 'indicated' by the dog and then subsequently turned away. Visitors who are indicated by the dog usually get offered what is referred to as a closed visit. This type of visit takes place in a smaller room where they are separated from the prisoner by a glass screen. Closed visits rooms also have a camera and an intercom so that visitor and prisoner can speak. However, visitors don't always take up this option, and sometimes even if the visitor agrees the prisoner may refuse. As one woman said to me:

> The dog indicated me so I took the option of a closed visit but my husband refused; he says that once they get you on the closed visits

[5] http://www.hmprisonservice.gov.uk/prisoninformation/prisonservicemagazine/index.asp

> its difficult to get your ordinary visits back. It caused us to have a really bad argument; my marriage nearly broke up!

Thus, being 'indicated' by the dog is not only upsetting and stressful, but as the woman suggested it can also have a negative effect on a couple's relationship. On other occasions women told me that they felt embarrassed and humiliated, suggesting that they were not only unfairly singled out by the dog, but also by the officers:

> I was going through the gate when these three officers barged past me and shoved me out of the way and up against the wall. They were all acting like little kids, laughin and joking on. I'm sure that when they pushed me they must have contaminated me with something. We went through to the visits building and stood in the line in the usual place on the crosses. The officer led the dog passed, and then I'm not sure what happened, there seemed to be a bit of commotion and I was confused as to what was going on. I knew there was something happening so I turned round to ask Angela [another visitor] what happened and then the officer threw a ball at the dog.[6] I just knew, I just knew it was me by the look on her face. The officer came over and asked if I would like a closed visit so I told him 'you can go and shove it, stick it up yer [...]', then one of the 'Screws' took my arm and escorted me out of the building; I felt so embarrassed and humiliated – to be pushed out of the way and then sat on by the [...] dog, and then escorted off the premises with all of the other girls watching, it was just so awful, how can they do that, its just not [...] nice.

In this way, the use of dogs to detect drugs during the processing procedure creates a spectacle that everyone in close proximity can see. Indeed, it is not just the action of being singled out by the dog that becomes an issue but also the approach of the officers and the presence of the other visitors who witness the 'indication'.

However, exactly how the dogs 'indicate a visitor' is unclear, as can be seen from Andrea's explanation of the event when she expresses that she felt confused. During a conversation in the Visitors' Centre one visitor told me:

> When the handler leads the dog past along the line if it stops on a visitor then that is an indication that they may have drugs or sometimes the dog will sit next to where you are standing.

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[6] Dog handlers often carry tennis balls with them as part of training the dog. If a dog makes a positive indication then the officer will reward him by giving or throwing the ball to the dog.

Whilst another visitor told me:

> They do different things, like sometimes you just know before hand because they [dog handler] whisper to the officer and laugh and then when the man leads the dog past he will pull the dogs lead – and the dog will stop; but another time the dog stopped in front of me and just refused to move.

A limited amount of information can be accessed by the families and friends of prisoners in *The Prisons Handbook*, which the co-ordinator keeps behind her desk at the Visitors' Center. The information provided suggests that the drug dog may indicate that a visitor may be carrying drugs but there seems to be little information to specify what an indication looks like or how a visitor might recognize that an indication has been made. For instance, the section devoted to advice on prison dogs contains the following information:

> There may be dogs in the visiting area amongst which you must walk. Do not worry, they are trained to detect drugs being carried into visits and are there solely to prevent trafficking of drugs, *not to intimidate you.* (Cheney 2002: 314)

Apart from this, the only other source which a visitor may have access to is the pamphlet *Keeping in Touch*, a guide for the partners and families of prisoners (APF 2003: 9-10), which is also similarly vague:

> As part of the search process on entering a prison you may also meet a sniffer dog with its handler. If this is the case you will normally be asked to stand on a marker in line with three or four other visitors. Its handler will walk the dog along the line, on a leash. It will let the handler know if it detects something which might mean that the person indicated has had recent contact with drugs.

Once again, the text providing very little specific information as to how a visitor would know when a 'positive indication has been made.

In addition to this, prison governors are equally vague in their attempts to explain the meaning of 'giving an' indication', as is demonstrated by their response to visitors' letters after they have written to complain:

I fully accept your statement that you are not involved with drugs; I also wish to assure you that we do not assume from the fact that the passive dog has indicated on you that you are involved with drugs in any way.

What I can say is that the passive dogs will indicate on any person who has had any contact with an illicit substance. This can occur on any individual without their knowledge in many ways – the most common being the use of public transport. We have also recently become aware that the use of some toiletries can give off an indication, as some products sold have derivatives from the hemp plant.

The suggestion that toiletries can 'give an indication', does not reveal how one might recognize what exactly an indication is. Restricting information in this way therefore corresponds with Goffman's ideas concerning the way in which the flow of information from prison staff to inmates is limited in total institutions of this kind:

> Just as talk across the boundary is restricted, so too, is the passage of information, especially about the staffs plans for inmates. Characteristically the inmate is excluded from knowledge of the decisions taken regarding his fate... such exclusion gives staff a special basis of distance from and control over inmates (Goffman 1961, pp19-20).

Cohen and Taylor (1976) suggested that prisons have an 'obsession' with maintaining secrecy, and limiting the flow of information to the inmate, his family and the public, which is usually justified by the establishment on the basis of 'security' or 'good order and discipline'. However, by withholding information from visitors this leaves them in a vulnerable position, particularly in situations such as this where they are left without any means of arguing that the dog has not indicated that they may be carrying drugs.

Without any other means of explanation as to why the dog has indicated even when a visitor insists that they are not carrying drugs, ideas concerning 'contamination' therefore seem to take hold. This can be seen if we refer back to the woman's narrative in which she talks about how she may have been 'contaminated' by the officers when they pushed past her as she went through. These ideas concerning

contamination were not exclusive to this visitor in particular but were clearly demonstrated in both the actions and the stories told by other visitors too. For instance, on one occasion when I was working as a volunteer alongside the coordinator, one of the visitors came into the centre crying because she was worried that she may have been contaminated by people smoking cannabis on the bus:

> I have travelled miles to get here, I had to come by bus. There were people on the bus smoking wacky baccy. I wouldn't of known what it was but my daughter told me, and I could smell it, I just know I am not going to get in now, the dog will stop on me.... And I haven't done anything! Is there anything you can do? (Saturday 18th June 2005).

The response that the coordinator gave her was that the situation was unfortunate but that there was nothing that could be done except for her to keep her fingers crossed that the dogs let her through. The coordinator's response serves to indicate how it is the prison in control of the situation, and how the power of that the coordinator holds is limited in these circumstances, and that helping the families of prisoners to achieve their aim of getting into the prison is difficult.

The fear of becoming contaminated by other visitors or people who use drugs, leads some of the visitors to adopt certain measures which they feel might help them avoid such situations occurring. Some women would bring a spare change of clothes with them so that they could change at the Visitors' Centre before they went through to their visit. Spraying the body with copious amounts of perfume and body spray was another method that was sometimes used. Another method that I saw some of the visitors using while I was there was sitting on newspapers and magazines. One visitor told me:

> N: they're all [...] junkies smoking dope on a night, no wonder the dog sits down on me when that lot are smoking that stuff all the time, contaminating me. It makes you so paranoid. I even put me coat down on the bus seat when I get the bus now so that I don't get contaminated
> V: Yeah I've seen the group that you sit with in the visitors centre, you all sit on newspapers, magazines and coats don't you
> N: Yeah (laughs) that's to stop us getting contaminated ... but it still sat down on Sara before and there is no [...] way that Sara had taken owt in.... those [...] dogs are wrong .... They just won't admit it. There was two of the girls who went through with me last time I

> was in. I was getting really upset cos they had a new dog on this time, [...] MASSIVE it was, you should of seen the size of it, its head was about this [...] big, and these girls don't like me cos the time before they had this really scraggy dog on and I just knew that I wasn't gona get through cos that dog don't like me, but it passed me and sat down on them and they were accusing me... sayin... 'oh yes I've seen it sit down on her before, its her fault, she's contaminated us'. I [...] laughed me head off cos they deserved it anyway

Here, again, the concept of contamination is used as an explanation for why the dog may have indicated that the person is carrying or has been in contact with drugs. In this case, there are a number of interpretations that could be made of this visitor's response. For instance, it could be quite simply that the concept is employed by visitors as an excuse, since visitors do sometime try to smuggle drugs into the prison (see Leech 2006: 232) or as what Goffman refers to as 'deceit' or 'feigning' a way of conveying false information about their innocence which helps them to cover up so that they do not lose face in front of other visitors. On the other hand, if it is not the case then this would evoke the question as to why visitors would turn to using the idea of contamination. Douglas' (1966:2) theory concerning 'pollution and taboo' is helpful in trying to understand why this should be the case. If, as she suggests, beliefs in pollution and purity are attempt to create order out of disorder; whilst avoidance is 'a creative movement, an attempt to relate form to function, to make unity of experience' (ibid), then drawing on ideas of contamination, provides visitors with 'a reason' which helps them to make sense of their situation (partly by laying the blame elsewhere). This is particularly important because as my research participant's narrative shows, the situation is one in which there are a lot of tensions and anxiety, not only concerning whether they have been contaminated, but because being singled out by the dog would affect their status in front of other visitors. In these circumstances therefore, prevention may serve as a form of 'impression management' (Goffman 1959: 243) which helps to make the visitor feel more like they are in control, in that sitting on magazines and coats provides a cue which enables the visitor to indicate to others that they are not involved with drugs.

After visitors have passed the search procedures, and been approved by the prison dogs, the officer then leads them through the corridor and into the visiting room, before making sure that the door behind them is securely locked. Once inside visitors

are not allowed to leave the room again unless they need to use the toilet. Using the toilet is discouraged by the fact that they would once again be required to submit themselves to another rub down search or a search by the prison dog; reflecting the fact that the visiting room is where security and surveillance are at their most intense.

**Security And Surveillance: Inside The Visiting Room**[7]

The visiting room at the high security prison is a site in which surveillance and discipline are intensified. As the wife or partner and children of the prisoner enter the main visiting room they are instructed to approach the desk where an officer is sitting. The visitors of vulnerable prisoners are led off into a separate room where they will stay for the duration of their visit. In the normal location room the officer then marks the visitors off his list and provides them with a number which corresponds to the table where they are expected to sit during visiting. On a number of occasions I witnessed women complain about the table number that they had been given; in some cases this was because they had small children and preferred to be near the crèche towards the back of the room, while in other cases it was because the visitor was disabled and required a table which facilitated this type of access. In most cases, however, the visitors' complaints about the seating arrangements were not heeded by the officer, who made the standard response:

> you must sit at the table that you have been allocated

There are four chairs arranged around each table which are secured to the floor. The chair on which the prisoner sits is a different colour to that of the visitor, thereby enabling the officers to distinguish more easily between the prisoner and his friends and family. One of the officers told me that the chairs were different in order to:

> prevent the prisoner escaping by changing places with the visitor

For the same reason the prisoner must also remain seated throughout the duration of the visit. Visitors are allowed to leave their seats in order to purchase refreshments

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[7] Except for the new rules and regulations which came into existence during the research that I refer to in the second paragraph of this chapter, this section is based on my own experience and observations and notes that I made about this prison during my husbands incarceration and not observations conducted as part of the research.

for themselves and the prisoner. However, the kinds of food which can be bought at the small tea bar in the visits room are also restricted, because of the threat of drugs being passed between the prisoner and his visitor. I was often told about new restrictions being brought into effect while the research was taking place, for instance a new rule whereby lids must be placed on drinks so that the visitor cannot use the cup as a method of passing drugs, and a ban on crisps because of the threat of contraband being passed across in the packets.

In order to guard against these problems officers are stationed at both ends of the visits room; keeping a watchful eye over the transactions which take place between the prisoner and the visitor. In addition to this a number of large black domes extend across the length of the ceiling; each concealing a camera which moves around and can focus in on the most intimate detail. Prisoners and their families are sometimes reprimanded by the officers for not keeping their hands in view of the camera. Concealing the cameras in this way highlights the panoptic effect of the prison visits room in which the prisoner and the visitor become 'the object of information' (Foucault 1977: 200). The prisoner and his family are seen, but because the cameras are obscured they cannot see, but instead must always assume that they are being watched. The spatial and structural aspects of the room, combined with the intense surveillance afforded by the camera(s) highlights the way in which 'visibility is a trap' (Foucault1977:200). Indeed, except for the use of technology and the increase in security, it would seem that little has changed since the very beginnings of imprisonment in the early to mid nineteenth century; when the prison warder would listen in on the conversations that took place between the prisoner and his visitors, whilst watching and monitoring their visits 'to see that nothing was passed between them' (Ignatieff 1978: 7).

Technology may now negate the need for a warder, but there are still officers present to impress upon the visitor that abiding by the rules and restrictions of the prison is a requirement. In addition to this there are also numerous signs around the visits room, which serves to warn the visitor of the sanctions they face if they break the rules in anyway. If a visitor is seen passing drugs or breaking the rules then the prisons response is to send a team of officers referred to as 'the MUFTI squad', to arrest the prisoner and his family. 'MUFTI' refers to 'Minimum Use of Force Tactical

Intervention', and the team of officers to which the term refers are usually used to break up riots and prison protests (Fitzgerald and Sim 1982a: 21-22). During the time I visited my own husband at this prison I witnessed the entrance of the 'MUFTI squad' on a number of occasions. Each time, the response was the same: the visits room became a site of chaos, as the officers, all dressed in black, suddenly and alarmingly steam in through a small door at the back of the room, pushing and shoving the unsuspecting visitors, mainly women and children, out of the way before hurling themselves on those they believe to be guilty. It is a response which reflects the way in which this high level of control subordinates kinship by dominating the form of its expression on every level. The way in which families, and in particular the wives and partners of prisoners 'do kinship' under circumstances such as these, is an issue that I will address in the next chapter.

**Conclusion**

The culture and performance of prison visiting is shaped by the way in which the families and friends of prisoners interact with the rules and regulations of the penal establishment. Where as the prison emphasizes its role in maintaining its authority by using signs and cues which are intended to define the situation and keep control, the concerns of the family are orientated towards maximizing their chances of gaining entry to the prison, in order to communicate, be intimate, and express love and affection, because that is how they 'do kinship' with their husbands and partners. In order for the prison to maintain this high level of control, a series of ritualistic stages are employed, in which the family are required to submit themselves to a variety of techniques and procedures, which involve allowing themselves to become the object of surveillance, as their personal details are documented and scrutinized. It is a process which is used not only as a mechanism of control but one that also allows the prison to depersonalize the situation, by allocating the family into a category which accords with that of the relative they are visiting. Indeed, these are the processes which, as Comfort (2003) suggests, deprive women of their autonomy; it is part of the process of 'secondary prisonization' whereby the visitors' identity shifts as they convert from legally free people to what Comfort describes as 'quasi inmates'.

The event initially takes place at the Visitors' Centre, the site at which the world of the prison and the outside come together; serving as an interface between both

worlds, by emphasizing the welfare of the visitor as well as the rules of the establishment. The welfare of the visitor is reflected through the approach of the welfare organization and the volunteers, as they attempt to help the visitor to acclimatize to their situation. Providing help, information and advice, while assisting them in their transition, as the family relinquish their liberty and progress through the system, beyond the outside world and into the heart of the establishment. It is a process which displays some of the qualities of liminality that accompany rites of passage. There is, however, one significant difference, which is that instead of moving from a lower to a higher status as Turner (1969: 166) describes, the transition involves a steady and seemingly inexorable descent, as the family becomes incorporated into the system of imprisonment; progressing through each stage of the transitional process devised by the prison. It is in this way that the authority of the prison prevails while kinship is systematically subordinated. In the next chapter I will therefore move on to look at this in more detail, primarily through an examination of the ways in which prisoners and their families 'do kinship' through the different forms of contact available.

# CHAPTER SIX

## 'Doing time' by 'doing Kinship'.

### Types Of Contact And Communication

Richards et al state that '[t]here are four means available to prisoners for maintaining contact with their families' (Richards et al 1994: 3). The first three 'means' are visits, letters and telephone calls, and it is these that I would argue form a foundation for the majority of relationships of women with a husband or partner in prison. The fourth, which is that of home leave, is I believe, of a different order, because it forms a different stage in the processes of imprisonment, in which women not only once again have to readjust their practices and routines, but they are also dealing with the effects that imprisonment has had on their husbands or partners, such as the problems caused by institutionalisation. Since this would be another piece of research in itself, the topic of home leave is therefore not considered in this thesis. Instead, an exploration of the first three means of contact will therefore form the basis of discussion for this chapter, since all of the women that I spoke to during the fieldwork used each of these forms of contact to varying degrees depending on the practicalities of their situation. In order to do this, the way in which visiting serves to shape some of the more intimate aspects of kinship, such as physical contact, sharing food, special events and gift giving will initially be examined. I then move on to consider the role that other forms of contact such as letter writing and phone calls play in the maintenance of kinship relations. Finally, I will explore the way in which women become actively involved in their partner's incarceration, by sending letters and making phone calls to prison governors concerning their husband's or partner's wellbeing.

### Prison Visiting: A Means Of Demonstrating Kinship

In her description of San Quentin Prison in California, Comfort (2002) argues that during family visits the prison visiting room becomes a 'domestic satellite' which she refers to as 'big papa's house,' an alternative site for the performance of 'private behaviour'. Everyday activities such as family celebrations, spending the night together and buying food from the prison so that women can cook for their husbands,

serve to temporarily relocate 'home' and the outside world into the prison. What is more, she suggests that it is through these activities that women are able to express 'their longing to nurture their loved ones'. This behaviour is important because 'such desires become more salient in tightly controlled relationships with scarce opportunities for shared activities or the exchange of gifts' (Comfort 2002: 477).

Some countries in Eastern Europe and Central Asia, as well as some states in the USA and Canada, also provide special arrangements for families where visiting takes place in apartments inside a compound where they 'can live for periods of up to 72 hours with the family member who is in prison' (Coyle 2002: 98). Other European countries, including Denmark, Sweden, the Netherlands and Spain also permit conjugal visits (Coyle 2002: 98). However, in British Prisons, conjugal visits are strictly prohibited (Devlin 2002: 43). Special family visits where prisoners and their families can live together for short periods of time are also not allowed. When I contacted a representative from the Ministry of Justice (see email from Grant Dalton in Appendix C) about this issue he told me that 'there are currently no plans to change the position on this'. However he did point out that 'Prisoners are nevertheless entitled to apply for access to artificial insemination facilities in order that they can have a family [...] in exceptionally compassionate circumstances'. The rules which govern visiting and the types of contact that families are allowed in British prisons are therefore more restrictive from the outset than is the case in most other European countries and in the example of the Californian prison that Comfort (2002) describes. The question that then arises is how the rules and restrictions which are placed on prisoners and their wives or partners influence the performance of 'private behaviour' and everyday activities under these circumstances. It is this question in particular that this part of the chapter will address, by examining the importance of visiting and how visiting and the types of visit allowed influence the management of personal relationships.

**The Multiple Meanings Of Visiting And Its Control**

The act of visiting holds an important place in the context of managing kinship over long distances (Mason 2004). The visit is about the act of 'seeing' and 'being co-present with' (ibid). With regards to the maintenance of kinship relations between male prisoners and their wives or partners, the importance that is placed on visiting

and also 'seeing' and 'being co-present with' is evident from the following comment made by one of my research participants, Helen:

> H: My visits are the most important; they [husband/prisoner] can tell you anything on the phone. It's more important that you see them and then you can see for yourself how they are
> V: Why are visits more important than letters or phone calls?
> H: cos they [the prison] read the letters and listen when he calls; so they can't share anything on the phone.

In this case, the visit serves to facilitate the woman's care-giving role as well as the moral and obligatory aspects of kinship, in that it enables the woman to ensure her husband's wellbeing; as well as to practice some of the more intimate aspects of kinship such as the notion of 'sharing', which Jamieson (1998) argues is one of the main characteristics of 'disclosing intimacy'. This facet of relationships, she argues, is increasingly important in relationships between couples in the contemporary western context, because 'intense, face-to-face sustained interaction' with 'significant others' helps to create a sense of stability when many other things are fluid (Jamieson 1998: 2-4). However, although visiting may still facilitate the notion of 'sharing' and an emotional closeness between a prisoner and his wife or partner, 'bodily intimacy' which is also an important characteristic of most relationships, is restricted by the rules and regulations of the prison, which limit physical contacts between visitors.

However, these rules are not uniform and the types of interaction allowed during visiting tend to differ between establishments. This situation was described to me by Amy who had experience of visiting at both a local male and a High Security prison:

> ...I mean in the visiting room.. if they are so family orientated then, and if they're not a cat A but a local prison then why all the security? Why can't you actually be a little bit intimate with ya partner? Why can't you sit beside ya partner? Because I mean at [the High Security Prison] I mean it's the same... they have got to sit facing you but ya can still hold tha hand and give them a kiss, you can be a little bit more affectionate during the visit, but at [the local prison] ya canat... no holding hands

The quote above reveals some basic contradictions; why is the level of physical contact and intimacy allowed at the local male prison more restricted than at the High

Security Establishment where one might expect security to be higher and therefore intimacy and physical contact more limited? I was unable to ascertain a direct answer to this question. However, a representative from the Ministry of Justice did acknowledge that they do not have a policy statement regarding physical contact, and that the level of contact allowed is determined by the individual establishment:

> ...the issue of physical contact between a prisoner and their family/friends during the course of social visits [...] will vary considerably depending on i) any security measures which are deemed necessary by the prison ii) whether there are any public protection issues e.g. if the prisoner is assessed as posing a risk to children and iii) the type of social visit. There is no single statement as prisons will largely determine this locally (Grant 2007 – see Appendix C).

The restrictions on physical contact, as well as the lack of privacy that couples have on visits, create a situation which one of the women I interviewed suggested was unnatural:

> ...you don't get no privacy... I think that they should let you have a room to yourselves every few visits so that you can be private with each other... I mean its not natural is it that we don't get no sex... the only sex I get is a love bite and then the screws make fun of you... but it's the only sex I get.

Such comments indicate that a certain amount of privacy and sexual contact with a husband or partner is intrinsically linked to this woman's notion of a 'normal' relationship. Giddens (1992: 12), refers to this aspiration as the "pure relationship"; a relationship of 'sexual and emotional equality' where 'women expect to receive as well as provide sexual pleasure' and which is often considered to be basic to a satisfactory relationship. The 'pure relationship' is part of the transformation of intimacy which Giddens sees as having been brought about through 'modern contraception' and 'new reproductive technologies', giving rise to a 'plastic sexuality'; that is, 'sexuality, freed from the needs of reproduction'. However, since the prison *potentially*[1] sanctions artificial insemination facilities – for prisoners, while

[1] I emphasise the word potentially because the situation is complicated by the criteria that the prison uses to define whether or not a prisoner would be entitled to artificial insemination. For more information on this see email in Appendix from Dalton, a representative from The Ministry of Justice.

rejecting the need for special family or conjugal visits, it could be argued that this high level of state intervention, is a way of maintaining the type of social control which feminists have often suggested oppresses women, by ignoring their sexual rights whilst tying their identities in with that of childbirth (Chandler 1991; Gittens 1985; Richardson 1997) and 'assisted' reproduction. In this respect, the fact that the issue of surveillance, couched in the language of 'security', overrides not only privacy but also the level of physical contact and intimacy clearly demonstrates how kinship is subordinate in this context. Despite this however, some women do go to considerable lengths to achieve this kind of intimacy with their husband or partner.

The lack of privacy and restrictions on physical contact meant that in some cases women indulged in what they referred to as 'prison sex'. The woman quoted above for example suggested that 'prison sex' referred to:

> Touching and kissing and the love bites he gives me while we're in the visits room.

Whilst another woman suggested that 'prison sex' referred to:

> Talking dirty to each other during phone calls.

A number of the women I spoke to during the study suggested that they found the restrictions on physical contact difficult. In some instances, it also served to foster suspicion; as one woman told me:

> He's always asking where I'm going, who I'm going with, what time I'll be back... I tell him he's got nowt to worry about but he's always suspicious.

In some cases, however, women suggested that sexual abstinence was a sacrifice they were prepared to make in order to remain faithful to their partner. Indeed, during one of the periods of observation that I conducted at the Visitors' centre, the group of women that I was sitting with began to compare the lengths of time during which they had been sexually abstinent as if it were a competition, with one woman saying that she had not had sex 'for five years' while another woman suggested 'well I haven't had me leg over for seven and I'm proud of it'. During the same conversation

one of the other visitors was also berated by the other women behind her back for not being faithful, after she was seen kissing and saying goodbye to another man just before going in to visit her husband.

In his work on American kinship Schnieder points out that sexual intercourse is not only a 'sign of love' but it can also convey 'unity, identity, oneness, togetherness [and] belonging (1980: 52)'. Limiting intimacy, and in particular physical contact between a prisoner and his wife or partner therefore, also infringes on feelings of unity and togetherness. However, celibacy or sexual abstinence has also been shown to carry a variety of meanings in different cultural contexts, such as social status, identity and an adherence to religious beliefs (Sobo and Bell *et al* 2001). In this way, it could be suggested that, abstaining from sexual intercourse and comparing the duration of abstinence with other women, provides an alternative means of expressing a sense of unity and togetherness, and the type of faithfulness and loyalty that may otherwise be difficult to achieve under these circumstances.

In addition to the limitations that the prison imposed on the wife's or partner's relationship, some of the women I spoke to were also concerned about the restrictions that the prison placed on the relationship between their children and the prisoner, for instance Amy told me:

> He [prisoner] can't get up and go to get [his son] a toy if he wants to; he's got to be seated all the time, he can't event take the kids to the canteen...You know even if he was just allowed to take both kids by the hand and take them to the canteen and me pass him some money, he could go and get them some sweets cos then it feels like he's given them somethin when they're visitin. I mean really he's not allowed to move and I find it really wrong.

In the case of the local male prison, however, the situation was different to this in that special father-child visits were held in the chapel, where prisoners were free to move around and play with their children. The atmosphere of the father-child visits was a lot more relaxed and, as a result of this, the women I spoke to about these types of

visits suggested that both they and their children preferred them. [2] One issue of concern however, was that mothers are not allowed to remain with their children or their husband or partner during the time that these special visits take place. This is an issue that is more significant than it first appears. As I suggested in chapter three, most of the emphasis that the prison places on the importance of maintaining relationships seems to apply primarily to that between the prisoner and child. What is more, in cases where parents have separated because of divorce it has been shown that fathers often experience difficulties because they usually rely heavily 'on the mediating role of the mother' in establishing their sense of fatherhood and in providing 'important cues' about their 'own behaviour and role' (Simpson et al 1995: 9). In this respect, women are often referred to as 'kin keepers' because of their role in facilitating and maintaining 'quality contact with other family members' (Finch: 2006 300). However, because there is nothing comparable in terms of family visits which mothers can also take part in, this denies them the opportunity to participate in many of the practices which would be important in helping to establish strong family relationships. Kinship is thus further subordinated by the way in which the mother's needs are often excluded from visiting arrangements.

The absence of the opportunity for special family visits which mothers' can take part in was not the only concern. There were also no opportunities for more relaxed visits to take place for the children of long term prisoners at the high security prison. In this way although the children of short term prisoners benefit from father-child visits, the children of long-term prisoners and the wives and partners of prisoners remain disadvantaged by the limitations that the prison imposes on their relationship and on the kind of intimate exchanges which form an integral part of the way in which families practice kinship.

Nevertheless, although contact and intimate behaviour between prisoners and their families is restricted, the Manager of the Welfare Organisation described the importance that families place on being able to purchase and share food during visiting:

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[2] Here I am using the phrase women to denote both research participants (Amy, Sharon, and Paula who all had experience of these types of visits) and my conversations with other women at the Visitors' Centre.

> ...it is part of a social setting which is very sensitive and nerve wracking...Food and drink simmer things down and make things a bit more manageable...it is the only meal that a family has together...it is an important aspect of being together...Even the purchasing, the families going to the tea bar and directly saying could I buy a Mars bar, could I buy him that... taking it to the table in an instant. You know...where as what they normally have to do is pay for a postal order... or put something in the post an get it vetted and they get it in a week or two weeks time or they have to put it in to the prison... they never get the chance to directly give them anything again, which is an important aspect of family ties...(Manager of Welfare Organisation).

In this way, the sharing of food seems to take on a heightened significance during visiting; a situation which was also demonstrated during my observations by the way that families frequently became angry or upset if the tea bar inside the visits room was closed during their visit. Anthropologists such as Douglas have proposed that certain types of food and the sharing of food is used 'to mark social relations' (Douglas et al 1974: 74). Similarly, Firth suggests that food is a symbol of expression, a fact that he illustrates by using the example of the Tikopia in the Western Pacific. Moreover, Firth suggests that 'food is the major mechanism whereby the kinship ties which are basic to the structure of Tikopia society are given concrete expression' (Firth 1973: 244-245). Other theorists support the view that there is a connection between food and the marking of social relationships, and the depth of intimacies involved (Douglas 1984; Goode et al 1984; Carsten 2000). In this way, therefore, visiting the tea bar and buying food for the family to share during a visit is a major part of the visiting process, in which, food becomes a gift imbued with meaning; a material symbol of emotional ties, and one of the few means for the prisoner and his family to give 'concrete expression', and add a sense of normality to their relationship.

Thus, although 'the performance of private behaviour' (Comfort 2002) between prisoners and their families is severely limited by the rules and regulations of the prison, the evidence from my research indicates that because kinship is fluid and negotiable (Finch 1989; Finch and Mason 1993; Mason 1999; Mason 2004; Morgan 1999; Silva and Smart 1999) this does serve to facilitate the way that families 'do kinship'; and that, by negotiating kinship practices around the prison rules, the wives

and partners of prisoners still manage to find ways of giving concrete expression to their relationships. What is more, although rules and regulations prevent activities such as family celebrations from taking place in the visiting room inside the prison, special events such as Christmas time are still marked by women and children while they are waiting at the Visitors' Centre.

**Doing Christmas At The Visitors' Centre**

Typically, a festive atmosphere is created in the Visitors' Centre in the approach to Christmas. The Centre is spruced up with Christmas decorations by some of the Visitors' Centre staff and volunteers; a Christmas tree and some tinsel are used to adorn the waiting room. The sheets of paper with pictures that the volunteers usually give out to the children to colour in change their theme to depict Santa, elves and reindeer, which are then pinned up on the wall of the crèche to further reinforce the festive idea. Cards are also exchanged between some of the visitors, and visitors sometimes bring cards and small gifts in to give to the Visitors' Centre staff and volunteers. A selection box of sweets and chocolate are provided by the charity running the centre and then given to each child by the Visitors' Centre coordinator when they come to visit.

In the majority of prisons, visits do not take place on either Christmas or Boxing Day (Cheney 2002: 314). Christmas Eve therefore becomes the pinnacle of these events, the Visitors' Centre temporarily becomes a site of jovial activity as an entry from my field notes suggests:

> **Christmas Eve 2004:**
> I had been asked by Nina [Visitors' Centre co-ordinator] to help her out as a volunteer on Christmas Eve. I arrived at the VC at 11 o'clock to find that the Visitors' Centre was absolutely packed. The reason for this is that it is the last chance for families to visit over Christmas because there are no visits on either Christmas or Boxing Day. Nina had placed a small plate of mince pies on each of the tables, and she had put a tin of chocolates and sweets for the children to help themselves from on the counter top. A large group of women sitting around the tables in the middle of the room seem to be dominating procedures by encouraging others to join in. Most of them are wearing party hats and have decorated themselves with bits of tinsel and flashing Christmas lights. In the middle of the row of tables which the women have pulled together there are paper

plates with large amounts of food (crab sticks, chicken legs, sandwiches, quiche, biscuits and mince pies). One of the women brought a plate overflowing with food over to the counter for Nina and myself to share, whilst another brought over a CD player and asked if she could play some Christmas songs, so Nina plugged it in. I don't recognise all of the women, but Nina tells me that some of these women are part of her regular Thursday group.

The giving of presents also increases at this time of year, evidenced by the many parcels of clothes and such that surrounding the floor of the visitors that they have brought with them to hand in.[3] One little boy goes through to the back room to hand in what is officially referred to as property – a pair of shorts, some socks and a tee shirt that he has bought as a Christmas present for his dad. The festive spirit however does not extend to everyone as the boy comes back through into the waiting area in floods of tears still carrying his parcel which the officers have rejected. His mum asks him the reason 'the screws' gave as to why they wouldn't accept it – but no explanation has been given. Nina goes across and tries her best to calm the situation by telling them that perhaps the application made by the prisoner to receive the property has not gone through. The rigidity of prison rules does little to appease the situation, and although the festive atmosphere continues the little boy remains sullen and barely breaks a smile throughout the remainder of the time while he waits for his visit.

At Christmas time the sharing of food features as a regular part of the festivities and celebrations which accompany the event (Carrier 1995: 185-186). Sharing food or feasting and dressing up, giving gifts and music are also recognised as common elements of traditional 'religiocultural' celebrations, which are used to reaffirm and demarcate the boundaries and identities of families and communities (Bell 1997: 123). It is also as I have suggested a recognised way of marking social relations (Carrier 1995; Douglas 1984; Goode et al 1984; Carsten 2000). The sharing of food with other visitors and volunteers in this context can therefore be taken as a way for many of the women who are visiting their husbands to define and reaffirm their relationships with some of their friends and acquaintances who are also visiting. It was also noticeable that prison officers were not included in these festivities or celebrations; highlighting how there are also limits to who is and is not included and who prisoners' families are prepared to admit within their circle of social relations.

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[3] Although items such as clothing and gifts can be handed in at any time of the year there is a visible increase in this sort of activity at Christmas time.

With regards to the idea of kinship the idea of 'co-present interaction' may also be relevant here, in that "'face to face' (presence with people), 'face the place' (presence in places), and 'face the moment' (presence at occasions and events)'" have been recognised as important features in some distance relationships (Mason 2004: 422). Recreating festivities in the Visitors' Centre and sharing their celebrations with other women whose husbands are also in prison, I would argue, serves as a way of taking these important family celebrations close to the location of the prisoner. The point at which the gifts which family and friends have brought for the prisoner are handed over represents a way of including the prisoner in the types of celebratory activities and practices which accompany Christmas.

However, as the example that I have given also shows, the rigidity with which the rules of the system are employed, along with the lack of explanation given to families concerning the situation that they are experiencing can also have a negative influence. In particular, this can have consequences for younger family members who can easily feel rejected, confused and upset by their experiences. This observation then raises questions as to the impact that this type of upset and confusion over prison rules and the restrictions on giving gifts has on the child's wellbeing? The question is one that should be considered of paramount importance by those who claim to be concerned about the effects of imprisonment on children. In particular, because these sorts of experiences (along with those covered in Chapter four), may become internalised and inculcated into the child's habitus as part of the discourses and the lived realities that they will use in the future to inform them about family life (Bourdieu 1977: 72). Since this study was not longitudinal the answer to the question of the effects of this on the child is beyond my remit; I would argue however that this is a question which deserves much more attention and further research.

Although the general atmosphere at the Visitors' Centre could be described as jovial for many of the women who took part in these events, the situation was not necessarily experienced in this way at home. At home, the absence of a husband or partner at particular times of the year such as Christmas was experienced by women in different ways. Sharon whose husband Richard had been in prison before suggested that his absence made little difference to how she experienced the event:

> Christmas was fine, I managed okay...[...] it was just sorta normal apart from he (husband) wasn't here.

However, Paula suggested that she found the event particularly difficult and upsetting:

> It was really horrible, I just got drunk all the time [...] I just couldn't be bothered me [...] I just felt dead sorta thing, its horrible [...] and it wasn't very nice for the kids that year, but last year it was a little better, and like this years gonna be a lot better cos I feel a lot better now than what I did last year.

Similarly, Helen also suggested:

> Christmas this year was much better than the Christmas last year [...] it was absolutely horrible... it was the first Christmas in the house, we didn't have a tree, we had hardly any decorations...I was just like well I'm not bothering [...] but you realise its for the kids isn't it.

The degree to which their partner's absence influenced their participation in Christmas was therefore related to the length of time that had passed since their partner's incarceration. The situation also seemed to improve with each successive event. In each of these cases any reference to Christmas being a religious ceremony or related to religious beliefs was notably absent. Instead, the importance that these women attributed to the event was that it was a time 'for the kids', and family gatherings:

> Its like a time when everyone's supposed to be there...but its not is it. (Paula)

The importance attributed to the event in terms of family gathering is significant in this context. As Carrier highlights, in Western capitalist societies notions of special events such as Christmas are often a way for families to define their personal relationships with one another (1995: 173). Since the confinement of a family member at this time of year limits the possibilities for family gatherings, and in doing so limits how families in this context define their relationship this serves to

demonstrate one of the ways in which kinship in this context becomes subordinate to the rules which govern imprisonment.

In the case of Miranda however, rather than focusing on her partner's absence, she included her partner in the preparation of the event:

> Last year we let Iain, ... he sent us a recipe and everything for the way he'd cook Christmas dinner, and I cooked it his way. It tasted really nice, but it was just... it took hours and hours and hours to cook, and I was like-mine would take like an hour to cook (laughs). It was because he wanted all these roasters and-I'll have to dig out the recipe and show you but he wanted all these things in this roasting tin and they were all, I've got pictures of me crying peeling these onions what he wanted me to put in this dinner and I was like so stressed [shows me a photograph] you can see in me face how stressed I was cooking this bloody dinner, but we had all these big bloody meat and oh all these different types of veg not just one, there were about five or six (laughs) and only me and the kids to eat it.

The buying of food and cooking for family members is an important 'marker of family social relations'; particularly in the case of women whose experiences of cooking for their family may be interpreted as a gift imbued with meaning and expression (Carrier 1995: 115). In Miranda's case, I would suggest that by including her partner in the preparation and by cooking his Christmas dinner the notion that she held of her partner being absent was limited by the way in which she was able to recreate a notion of his presence at the event. This way of evoking presence in the face of absence was also the case with some of the gifts-like transactions which took place between prisoners and their families; it is to a discussion of this that this chapter will now turn.

**The Significance Of Gifts**

Anthropologists have often emphasised the way in which obligation and reciprocity are key elements of the way in which kinship is conceptualised. According to Mauss (1990) social relationships are established and maintained through the giving and receiving of gifts, whereby gifts are not just given as an 'uninterested' token of good gesture but they compel the receiver to reciprocate. In the context of Western capitalist society, the kinds of gift transactions that take place are more often

'voluntarily given' with less expectation attached to the process of reciprocation. The giving and receiving of gifts, however, does still form a significant part of the obligatory processes in which family members attempt to define their personal relationships with each other (see Carrier 1995: 22 – 31). In this context, it is therefore the meaning of the gift that is significant, and the way in which this serves as a method of giving concrete expression to a relationship (Carrier 1995). The limitations that the prison places on the giving and receiving of gifts, however, highlights another of the mechanisms through which kinship is made subordinate to the rules and regulations, which govern the system of imprisonment.

The importance that the wives and partners of prisoners attribute to the gifts that their husbands or partners have given them was demonstrated to me by the fact that out of all of the topics that I broached during the research, the subject of gifts always seemed to bring a smile to their face. When the topic was raised they would rush upstairs or into another room, bringing back the various items that they had received from their partners to show me. Because prisoners are often constrained by financial means and have limited access to purchasing goods the majority of gifts that I was shown tended to be hand made. I was shown a number of different sorts of gifts, such as clocks, wall hangings, jewellery boxes, a Faberge egg, picture frames, posters, paintings, a dolls' house and a wooden boat with carved figures.



**Fig 6**. Examples of gifts above: a Lion wall hanging and a clock made of matchsticks, with a red velvet lined jewellery tray that pulls out at the top.

In Miranda's case the walls of her living room were filled with drawings, and photos in picture frames which her partner had made and given to her as gifts. When I commented on this during one of the interviews she told me:

> Its all I've got... I feel that with him in there I've lost part of me...
> but when I'm in here [living room] I feel him all around me.

Carrier's observation that it is not necessarily what is given that is important but the 'association between person and object' in which 'the object has a history and carries the stamp of those who possessed it previously' (Carrier 1995: 25) seems relevant here. In that, as he suggests '[i]n possessing the object, then, we possess as well that object's past'. In this particular case, I would suggest that the significance of the gift lies not in the past, and in the fact that the prisoner made the gift himself, but in the present and in way that Miranda's possession of the gift serves as a material manifestation which helps her to signify her relationship to her partner to others; whilst also serving as a way of bringing them closer together.

In Paula's case, however, the gift that her husband had sent to his daughter was slightly more unusual:

> **P:** [...] he made a tooth box... that little box there for the bairn (points to a small wooden box)
> **V:** the one in the middle?
> **P:** Aye, for to keep all her teeth in
> **V:** he's put her name on it as well
> **P:** Aye, but he's been gettin all his teeth done... he's been gettin his teeth out and that and he's been sendin them home (laughs). People keep sayin 'oh that's a nice little box, I'd like to look at it', and I think oh god (laughs) ya know what I mean, its got all his teeth in it

In this case, the gift is an 'inalienable gift', which is one that is linked to the giver as an expression of the giver's identity (Carrier 1995: 24-25). By sending his daughter one of his teeth, what appears to be happening here is the conscious embodiment of the gift by the father, i.e. sending home teeth, ensures that he maintains a physical presence in the home.

Tapes were another gift which one prisoner sent to his wife:

> He sends me tapes so that if I get lonely I can play his voice on a night time... he sings and everything.

Sending audio tapes is not something that was exclusive to this particular case; although in this particular instance what is perhaps more unusual is that the prisoner was sending tapes to his wife, whereas in the majority of cases prisoners tend to record tapes for their children. For example, some prisons have set up initiatives either through their education departments or in conjunction with charitable organisations to encourage prisoners to record stories and send the tapes home to their children. 'Story book dads' is one such scheme, which is described by Boswell and Wedge (2002: 97-8) where fathers can read and tell stories or sing nursery rhymes to their children. This scheme is seen to 'be an important means of contact' which in some cases has been shown to have positive influence on the behaviour of children, as well as their reading abilities. However, neither of the prisons where I conducted the research took part in any type of scheme such as this, and it is very much left to individual prisons to determine the types of family initiatives in which they take part and the types of contact that they encourage.

Families also frequently bring or send gifts to their partners. However, because of security procedures, the kinds of things that are allowed are severely restricted. On a number of occasions I was told by the family members that I spoke to how they felt that the system was either 'frustrating' or 'confusing', because of the way that the lists of 'approved items' which prisoners are allowed is often prone to change:

> They sent me stamps back one time and said that he had to buy his own stamps, but now they're allowed stamps again **(Karen)**

Whilst Lois similarly told me:

> Clothes... you're not allowed to take them in anymore, you have to post them in

Items of clothing that women sent were also sometimes refused because of the resemblance with the prison officers' uniform, as Miranda told me:

> I've sent clothes in and he isn't even allowed to have them, I've sent white T shirts, black T shirts, blue T shirts... they said it was because of the colour of the uniform but the white ones have got a stripe down, it was a brand new T shirt and he got a blue one in before but they wouldn't let him after that.

On other occasions women sometimes brought in stereos, musical equipment or art materials to hand in to the officers, to pass on to the prisoner after their visit. However, there were often changes to the prison rules concerning whether items could be handed in at the time of visiting or whether they should be posted; and indeed this situation occurred on numerous occasions during the course of the research.

Sharon, my only research participant with previous experience of a partner's imprisonment, also described to me how the rules concerning the items which could be taken in on visits had changed over time. In particular she told me that during her husband's first prison sentence food and cigarettes were allowed to be taken into visits. This was also confirmed for me by two of my associates who were both angry at the way in which the rules had gradually changed, becoming much more restrictive. The gradual onset of these restrictions, I would argue, are ones that seem to coincide with the shift in penal ideology and the introduction of the system of punitive managerialism, in which security has become the overriding issue (see chapter three: 51-52).

I was, however, told by a representative from the prison that the reason for changing the rules in this way was usually due to a breach in security, such as trying to smuggle drugs or other forms of contraband into the prison. Yet not all prisoners' families participate in such activities, and the prison has alternative ways and means of determining which of the visitors and family members are bringing drugs into prison, such as the monitoring of phone calls and letters (for instance see section on phone calls:149). Families are thus made to suffer the consequences of these types of punishment collectively rather than individual privileges being withdrawn.

What is more, as McDermott and King (1992: 64) point out, there is often an added financial burden for the family in buying items for prisoners. They suggest that

buying clothes and equipment is often done to help to 'normalize' the prisoners' experience. For the prison, therefore, the issue of security is considered to be a priority which is higher on their agenda than the kinds of practices which families use to reaffirm their kinship ties and practices. Since most of the gifts usually consisted of clothes, stamps, or money this often serves to create difficulties for those families living with incarceration whose financial means are limited. In some cases, however, families did invent novel ways of dealing with these issues.

For instance, Miranda told me how she dealt with any presents that her children bought their dad which could not be sent in:

> I have a little box at home that we call a treasure box, and when it's Christmas and birthdays... and like fathers' day and stuff like that, because the kids get upset because they like to buy their dad something... so when they buy these presents and stuff we leave them in the box and then what we're gonna do before Iain comes home we're gonna wrap them up and put a note with them to say whether they were for Christmas or birthday and then we'll give him his treasure box when he comes home with his presents in for all the years he's not with us...

As this example shows, families are still able to mark special events such as Christmas and Birthdays with gifts. Miranda's practice of placing the gifts for her partner in a 'special treasure box' until he returns home can be seen as a kind of delayed reciprocity. What is more, as Bloch (1973) suggests, the moral elements of kinship revolve around the length of time involved in reciprocal obligations, and the fact that it is the generalised nature of reciprocity which serves to define the enduring nature of long term relationships. In this way, therefore, the fact that the prison regulates the kind of transactions that are allowed to take place between the prisoner and his family is perhaps less important, than the fact that they are still able to define their relationship by inventing novel ways to participate in these crucial kinship defining practices. Visiting, special events and giving gifts, however, are not the only ways in which prisoners and their families express their relations, and in the next section I turn to the practice of letter writing.

**Letters**

Letter writing is clearly not exclusive to prisoners and their families as there are many contexts in which letters are used as a means of maintaining relationships. Family members who may be absent due to work commitments, or between members of an extended family or friends who reside in different areas of the country or abroad are just a few examples of contexts in which letters might feature strongly. The work of Dietzsch (2000: 271) for example demonstrates that letters were frequently exchanged 'between friends and relatives in the German Democratic Republic (GDR) and Federal Republic of Germany (FRG)' as a means of maintaining relationships despite the 'political boundary which ...separated Germans on either side'. The common theme in the use of this particular type of correspondence is in the way that it is used to 'bridge a spatial division' (Dietzsch 2000: 271), which occurs either through necessity, by choice, or as in the example of the GDR because it has been imposed. In the case of Prisoner/ family relationships the use of writing letters corresponds more to the latter, in that it is a way of bridging a spatial division that has been imposed by the state. Thus, it is the way in which the rules set out by the prison regulate these types of contact that has an impact upon the practice of kinship.

The Prisoners' Handbook suggests that in order to 'facilitate' the writing of letters, convicted prisoners are usually provided with one letter a week and a second class stamp at the prison's expense which they can use to write to family and friends (Cheney 2002: 320; Richards *et al* 1994: 2). More letters are allowed to be sent but this is at the prisoner's own expense and must therefore be paid for from the prisoner's own money or money sent to the prisoner by family and friends (Cheney 2002: 320). There is usually no limit to the number of letters that can be sent by a convicted prisoner although prison governors hold discretionary powers to limit the number and length of letters in high security establishments where the routine reading of prisoner's mail is in force (ibid 2002: 320). Restrictions are made on the content of letters which must not contain anything which the prison deem would be a threat to security such as plans for escape, coded messages or anything deemed to be 'offensive or obscene' (Cheney 2002: 320). All of the women I spoke to were aware that their letters may be read by the prison and subject to censorship restrictions; although none of the women suggested that because of this they restricted the content of their letters. In a couple of cases however, the women to whom I spoke did have

difficulties in writing letters because of their low levels of literacy which therefore precluded them from using this method as a means of maintaining contact.

For those women who did use letters as a regular form of contact, the frequency with which they were used seemed to vary. In some cases women would write to their partner everyday because they felt that writing letters was particularly important, as Beth suggested:

> I write everyday, I like writing letters... he says that my letters are what get him through each day.

In other cases, whether women enjoyed using this form of contact tended to depend on practical issues such as the time they felt that they could allocate to such activities due to other commitments such as work, and how well they felt they were able to write. As Sharon told me:

> Sometimes I think, I haven't got like enough time to do everything, sometimes I think that but then it comes to sitting down and writing letters... I think oh I haven't got time or d'ya know I just think like ohhh I've just been to work, I've just done that, but then I think well I've just spoke with him yesterday soooo , but then he likes to, likes to know what I'm doing an he likes to get a letta (letter).

Although Sharon proclaims that she does not feel she has enough time to write, it appears from the quote that letters hold an important place in her relationship, in that they provide a source of information and a regular dialogue about family life outside the prison setting; demonstrating how in some cases, writing letters becomes one of the activities which forms one of the ways in which prisoners' families maintain relationships. However, even though these activities are important, they are as Sharon's account emphasizes time consuming, especially when accompanied by all of the extra financial, domestic and emotional burdens that women in this situation often have to deal with on a daily basis.

Accounts of daily activities were not the only purpose of this type of correspondence since letters often included other things, such as jokes and poems:

> We write about everything really... I write about what I've been doing during the day.. about the kids and stuff and jokes, I write jokes to make him laugh cos he never has much to bloody laugh about in there doesn't he not. I also buy those little cards, you know the ones you get for 99p with the poems on, and if I find something dead funny in the papers I cut it out and stick it on me letters [...] **(Miranda)**

Since as Morgan suggests, 'family practices are not just any old practices' but those in which people invest meaning and 'a degree of emotional significance' (1999: 20), it could be argued that in this case, letters were a way of sharing some of the more social and sentimental aspects of kinship which usually occur between couples during their face to face interactions - such as sharing jokes and poems.

Paula, another of my research participants, included information regarding the children's education in the letters that she sent to her husband, such as 'certificates', 'school reports' and 'stickers off their reading books. In a study concerning the issue of fatherhood and divorce the lack of communication from the mother about children's 'health, schooling and wellbeing' is reported as being 'a source of distress' for fathers that are separated from their children (Simpson et al 1995: 33). In the context of incarceration, therefore, I would argue that a similar thing is happening here. The meaning and emotional significance attached to items such as these, serves to negate these difficulties by keeping the woman's husband (the prisoner) up to date with their children's education, and thereby involving him in what could be referred to as a form of distance parenting.

In return, men would sometimes enclose small gifts for their children:

> the kids get a letter themselves like twice a month but he sends things in with my letters for them which I get everyday so there'd be like a letter for Ben or there'd be like a card for them, sometimes a poster each or something like that see so when there's something in the letter its not always that they get a letter but that they'll get like football or sticker books...you know, you get them free in the paper and that and he sends them to the kids. **(Miranda)**

In this way, letters can form a means of incorporating the prisoner into the activities and everyday lives of their family; facilitating their participation in a 'family life' despite the distance that separates them from it. Another method of contact which women would often use to facilitate their husband or partners' participation in family life was phone calls.

**Phone Calls**

The prison service states that it is their policy: 'to encourage prisoners to take responsibility for maintaining close and meaningful ties with their family and friends' (Leech 2006: 383). Prisoners are therefore allowed to maintain contact with their family through the use of what it referred to as a pin phone system. This system enables them to contact telephone numbers which have been approved by the prison authorities (Leech 2006). The phone calls that prisoners make to their family and friends are recorded; and on one of the tours round the high security prison that I attended we were shown into the security room where they record and listen to these conversations. A large white board on the far wall of the security room had the names and numbers of prisoners and their associates written along side scribbles of information, gleaned from the monitoring of phone conversations. The board also contained the names of visitors who were suspected of bringing drugs into the establishment and other snippets of information which attest to the fact that this is more than just a method of encouraging prisoners to take 'responsibility for maintaining meaningful ties'; but also one of the many forms of surveillance within the prison.

Furthermore, the wives and partners of prisoners cannot phone their husband or partner in prison. If their husband or partner phones while they are out they are then reliant on having to wait until he phones again. Because of this, arrangements are therefore usually made to phone at specific times:

> If I'm out I tell him I'll be out or to ring after six o'clock and I know I'll be in then. **(Meena)**

Anxiety, however, often ensues if the prisoner's wife or partner goes out and for whatever reason their return is delayed, as Karen suggested:

> I daren't go out, if I've been out and I'm late I'll run back if it kills me.

Miranda described how she got particularly upset and anxious that something had happened if she was expecting a phone call and her partner did not ring:

> If he doesn't ring when he's supposed to I'll get upset and think something's happened cos you get used to the time that he phones and ya start getting excited and thinking- OOoo he's gonna phone in a minute.. and then like if anybody comes to the door I'll be like 'GO AWAY' and not answer it or if someone else rang I'd say 'you'll have to hurry up me baby's ringing (laughs).

In this way, women tend to prioritise phone calls from their husbands and partners over contact with other people. In some cases, phone calls from husbands and partners were a feature of the relationship around which women chose to organise their day:

> Like he's on the phone constantly, its like 8 O'clock in the morning and it goes right through to like seven O'clock at night, and then I'll unplug me phone and that's me finished for the day...[...]
> **V:** do you stay in for his phone calls?
> **P:** yeah, all the time. I know when he phones, say on a morning at like 8 O'clock and then if I'm gonna go out then I'll go out after that and then come back for when he phones between eleven and twelve and then I'll go back out and he phones usually tea time like between half three and four just before he gets banged up, and then he phones again about six o'clock so I'm in and out sorta thing like all the time. But like I hate it when I miss him cos I feel horrible, not guilty but I just feel like... I like to talk to him all the time dya know what I mean..[...] he would never like not phone sorta thing errm and if he does phone and I'm not in he panics and rings the family saying 'she's not in the house, what's happened to her, and then ya get people knock on the door and they're like what's the matter and I'm like nowt, I've just been to the shop ya know, just something stupid like that. **(Paula)**

Organising her day around her husband's phone calls, therefore demonstrates one of the ways in which social actions such as this have become part of her lived understanding of their relationship (Finch 2006: 296). Regular contact, both between the couple and with other family members, helps to create a 'shared biography' that

substitutes for face to face contact and co presence (Mason 2004). The regularity of routine communication thus serves to minimise the feeling of distance within the relationship. Despite the benefits to this type of regular contact, however, the cost of maintaining a relationship in this way can be difficult for a family to sustain.

**The cost of relationship maintenance**

Research suggests that it costs five and a half times more to phone from prison than it does from a normal BT payphone (PRT 2006; Smith et al 2007). Most of the women[4] I spoke to during the research told me that they sent either £10 or £20 per week, to subsidise these arrangements. As is similarly suggested in a research report by Smith et al who suggest that families in their study sent cash of between £10 and £40 per month to finance the 'outgoings associated with imprisonment'(Smith *et al* 2007: 19). In some cases financing the outgoings of a prisoner extended beyond money for phone calls, as Miranda suggested:

> I send twenty pound a week in me letter. He gets thirteen pounds a week from work in the prison and that goes on like deodorant and razors and stuff like that, soap, shampoo and all that and then he gets twenty pound off me; ten pound of that goes on the phone, then the other ten pound so he can buy stamps and food otherwise he starves cos the food in there is disgusting so he buys his own.

In this way, the provision of money for men to buy items such as toiletries and food can be seen as facilitative of care-giving which is often assumed to be part of the role of women (Finch 1989; McGlone 1999). Thus, it is not just a provision of financial support, but it also enables women to care for their husbands or partners by subsidising their wellbeing. Nevertheless, it was often pointed out that sending money was financially draining, particularly to those on low wages or on benefits. Some prisoners do work inside the prison as a requirement of their sentence, however, because they 'do *not* have employee status and are not covered by minimum wage legislation'; the average wage is only about £7 per week (Meek 2002: 436). The cost of maintaining family relationships is not one that usually arises. In this context, however, it can be seen to be an issue of primary importance, because having limited financial means makes maintaining relationships such as this more

[4]This is research participants: Miranda, Beth, Lois, Paula, Meena, Karen and Silvia; and women I spoke to at Visitors' Centre during participant observations.

difficult. What is more, by taking on the financial burdens for supporting the family and the relative in prison, carrying out domestic, child care duties, and keeping kin, this then raises the issue of what the husband and father's contribution towards the family and the role that he plays actually consists of? Imprisonment does not seem to reinforce the husband or father's obligations and responsibilities, but instead excuses him and restricts his contribution. On the other hand, some of the women that I spoke to seemed to go to great lengths to practice their own obligations and responsibilities, as I move on to demonstrate in the next section on letters and phone calls to prison governors.

**Letters And Phone Calls To Prison Governors**

In some cases, women do not just limit themselves to contact with their partners but they also seek to influence the course of their partner's sentence by becoming actively involved in writing letters to prison governors with requests and complaints. For instance, Silvia had been writing at least one letter a week to the prison governor for the last six months. Broaching various topics, such as the difficulties in booking visits, requests to take all her visits at a weekend rather than having to take some during the week, because of the way that this would interfere with her daughter's schooling, requests for her husband to be tagged or sent to an open prison, other requests for prison transfers, complaints about search procedures and having to take closed visits and complaints concerning missing postal orders. Each of the letters set out the particular problem by stating the impact that the issue was having on her family in order for the governor to consider alongside her request:

> Dear sir,
>
> I am writing to you to ask for your help and understanding with regard to some distressing issues, which I now find myself and children been faced with due to my husband's prison transfer away from the North.
>
> My husband was sentenced on ***. We have two children, [...] the eldest child is [...] years old and our other child [...] suffers from Cerebral Palsy affecting all four limbs.
>
> After serving ** months in HMP *** My husband has just been transferred to HMP ***.
>
> We have a very strong family network which has definitely been tested at this difficult time. My parents have supported us in this, in some ways adopting the

role of my husband whilst he is away in prison, but there are still gaps in the support that is needed which have not been filled.

Although our daughter [...] has a good understanding and is aware that her daddy is not with us at home, she does have severe learning and physical difficulties and therefore requires 24 hour care from two persons. While my husband is in prison it is extremely difficult to meet [...] needs especially the lifting and carrying around the family home. This has created a great deal of stress for me and has resulted in me seeing my family doctor for medication and support.

Since the transfer to HMP *** on Monday last week the distance away from home is making things much more difficult for the family.

I would like you to consider the following issues as extenuating circumstances in this case and as a request for transfer to HMP [Open Prison] or tagging as soon as possible.

Yours sincerely

Mrs ***

To which the governor of the prison responded:

Dear Mrs ***

Thank you for your letter dated *** 2003

Due to population pressures in the prison system prisoners are being transferred from local prisons to prisons of the correct category as soon as possible. This has resulted in your husband being transferred to HMP ***.

Your husband is welcome to apply for a transfer to HMP [Open Prison] however although I am sympathetic to the circumstances you have identified in your letter I am afraid that I cannot influence HMP *** decision as to whether they accept your husband.

Yours sincerely

HMP Governor

Each letter that Silvia had written was similar in its content, although often differing in the request or the complaint that was being made. In each case the Governors response was also similar, for instance:

> ...though I am sympathetic to your circumstances it is not possible...'; 'I know this will come as a disappointment to you but...'; 'I sympathise with your concerns but...' etc.

As Silvia subsequently told me:

> All the things I've wrote have been refused for one thing or another, I just feel as though you know... I don't think the prison are interested in helping families...

The letters do, however, give a good indication of the particular ways in which women may try to orchestrate their involvement in their husband's sentence, either for their husband's benefit or their own.

In a similar case, Karen had contacted the governor on the phone because when her husband had been transferred to another prison he had not been given his clothes:

> I was on the phone to the governor and everything... and that was about his clothes, he never got his clothes.. it was his fifth day an he hadn't even got no clean underwear, no facial or wash stuff... [...] He had to wear the same clothes for four days so I did go on to the governor and I went on to loads a people [...] and I was on all weekend. I even phoned the Home Office but they weren't open, they said I had to phone back Monday morning but I never phoned back cos we did get the issue sorted... but it took a few phone calls back before the governor answered me calls; and then he [husband - Eddie] didn't get all of it he only got part of it but he got enough to get by...[...] Eddie said he went to the SO [senior officer] on the wing, but he said he never took his head outa the paper when Eddie spoke to him.

In this way, the problems which prisoners face, as part of their imprisonment also become the concerns of their wives or partners, who not only feel the stress of their husband's or partner's predicament but also take it upon themselves to try and sort the situation out by taking on issues such as this and confronting the prison and other influential bodies. In this respect, although kinship is subordinate in the context of imprisonment, by negotiating with the prison on behalf of their husbands and partners women do still manage to maintain what are often considered to be the obligatory and care-giving roles which define and distinguish kinship relations (see Finch 1989). Indeed, demonstrating their concerns and becoming involved in this way serves as an example of how women 'do kinship' when their husbands or partners are in prison and also sheds light on what is actually meant when the families of prisoners suggest that they are also 'doing time'.

## Conclusion

I have endeavored to show here how the rules and regulations which govern the various forms of contact that prisoners are allowed serve to shape the way in which their wives/ partners and children work to maintain relationships and thereby make kinship active rather than merely passive or given. In many respects, these rules and regulations alter kinship practices, so that many of the features which accompany the expectations which women have of 'normal' relationships become either severely restricted or non-existent. Intimacy, sexual reproduction, and the obligations and sense of responsibility in caring for their husband's or partner's wellbeing are drastically curtailed. In turn, the prisoner's contribution to his family, in particular the role he plays as a husband or father is also called into question. After all, what does it actually mean to be a father or a husband when he is restricted from all of the financial, domestic, and child care duties which these roles imply? Furthermore, these issues becomes all the more important when one takes into account the increasing emphasis that policy makers and government bodies are placing on the idea of family as the 'cornerstone of society' (Straw 1998); and especially since policy decisions are often aimed at the poorer and most disadvantaged sectors, where those most likely to be dealing with the problems of imprisonment are to be found.

Nevertheless, the wives' and partners' of prisoners do develop creative and novel ways of demonstrating their obligations and responsibilities, in spite of prison rules. As we have seen, some women organize their day and alter their routines around their phone calls from their husbands or partners, and in some cases they orchestrate their own involvement in their partner's sentence, by writing to prison governors with requests and complaints. The gifts which prisoners send to their families and the gifts their wives and partners send in return also often take on a heightened significance in the context of imprisonment. This is particularly powerful when the gift that is shared is food during prison visiting. Intimacy, and the idea of spending time together revolve around visiting and phone calls, as some women indulge in what they refer to as 'prison sex' or they spend their time at the Visitors' Centre emphasizing the lengths of time that they have been celibate to demonstrate to others the strength of their relationship. Thus, it is possible to maintain a relationship, despite the fact that in the context of incarceration the practices which serve to define kinship often differ from some women's expectations of a 'normal family relationship'.

Despite this, there are some issues which warrant further attention. For instance, the cost of maintaining the relationship, the absence of a policy on physical contact and the absence of consistency with regards to this issue across the prison estate. I would also argue that the lack of special family visits for mothers to take part in is an issue that needs to be given more consideration. Arguably, imprisonment could never be removed, but perhaps there are ways to reduce significantly the sense of subordination.

# CHAPTER SEVEN

## Relationships and Social Networks

### Introduction

Prior to the eighteenth century, Foucault argues, criminals 'were perfectly tolerated by the population'. By imposing a system of moral values on the poor by encouraging a fear of crime and bringing about a divide between criminals and workers, while stripping the inmate of his civil status this ensured that 'when he left [the prison] he could do nothing except become criminal again' (Brochier 1977: 11; Foucault 1977: 285). In this way the prison not only professionalized the criminal but it also served as a mechanism of extending the reach of the penal system, and in particular the techniques of surveillance; by subjecting them to either a perpetual life of crime or recruiting them from within as an informer for the system (ibid). The stigma that incarceration engenders is therefore a new phenomenon, since it developed simultaneously alongside the birth of the modern penal system.

The stigma that incarceration engenders does not only affect the prisoner, but it also affects other family members; this is demonstrated in other studies of prisoners' families. For instance, a study by Morris in 1965 demonstrated that '57 per cent' of prisoners' wives and partners in her study experienced a 'deterioration in relationships with friends and neighbours' and a '60 per cent deterioration in relationships with in-laws' (cited in Murray 2005: 444). Smith (1989: 54) similarly highlights the loss of support from family and friends, which she suggests may be because they are 'unsure of how to approach them in their new role of prisoner's wife'. Whilst Davis (1992: 79) suggests the wives and partners of prisoners become 'fearful of outside contact and the reactions of others because they are shocked at the initial reactions of 'their family and their local community'. Braman (2004: 11) highlights the way in which stigma affects the relationships of the families of offenders, suggesting that

> The burden of stigma ...often falls more heavily on non-offending family members than on the offenders themselves. Whereas criminals are held with other criminal offenders, family members live in communities where many of their friends and neighbours are

> victims of crime and where animosity toward criminal offenders often runs high. For this reason many relatives hid the incarceration of a family member not only from friends but co-workers, and fellow congregants, but also other extended family members. The result, for many, is that relationships at the individual and community level are diminished and distorted to guard information about incarceration.

In order to explore this issue in more detail in this chapter I will focus on the impact that the incarceration of a husband or partner has on the social networks and relationships of women in the North of England. In doing so I will begin by exploring an in-depth case study of one of my research participants called Sharon who is the wife of a normal location prisoner. I will also draw on other examples from the interviews that I conducted with some of the other wives and partners of normal location prisoners, in order to highlight the similarities and differences in their experiences. In particular, I will examine how these different experiences are related to a variety of other factors such as the location in which my research participants were living, and the area in which they grew up; the influence of the prisoner's background, as well as looking at how women deal with the stigma that incarceration causes by limiting access to information. I will also examine the influence of what Donzelot (1979) refers to as 'the social', such as the approach of schools and social services, as well as media involvement.

After this I will then move on to concentrate on the influence that imprisonment has on the wives and partners of vulnerable prisoners (in particular sex offenders) who I refer to as 'the socially excluded of the socially excluded', by drawing on a detailed case study of one woman in particular, called Miranda. As Murray (2005: 445) highlights, 'there is growing appreciation that families and partners of prisoners are not a homogenous group'. An understanding of how incarceration impacts on the social networks and relationships of the two different categories of prisoners' family is therefore important because it will add to a greater understanding of the way in which the practicalities of imprisonment serve to shape different families experiences. Before I move on to do this however, I should make clear that I am using the term 'social networks' here in a metaphorical sense, and that I do not intend to engage in the type of technical or quantitative analysis that that may ordinarily be used in other studies drawing on what is generally called 'network analysis' (see:

Berkowitz 1982; Cook and Whitmeyer 1992; Emirbayer and Goodwin 1994; Freeman 2000; Scott 2000; Wasserman and Faust 1994).

**Sharon – The Wife Of A Normal Location Prisoner**

Sharon (and Richard) owned a small terraced house, situated on the edge of a large council estate in the suburbs of a large Northern city, where they had both grown up.

At the time the research took place Sharon's partner Richard had just served two years of a nine year prison sentence for a drug related crime; this was Richard's second prison sentence; the first one was for a burglary that he had committed almost twenty years prior to this particular offence for which he was currently serving time in prison.

Sharon and Richard were in their late forties; they were not married but they had been living together as a couple for the last twenty seven years. During that time they had two children; Mark, who was twenty five and who had recently left home to live with his girlfriend, and Paul who was thirteen and still lived at home.

Sharon worked in three part time jobs for the same company at the local shipping yard, cleaning offices and supervising on the deck; the wages that she earned from these jobs provided the main source of financial support for the household, and had done so both before and since Richard's imprisonment. Richard had worked prior to his imprisonment; however these were often 'cash in hand' jobs working for friends.

In one of my interviews with Sharon I asked her to draw a diagram of the relationships with those people whom she considered to be 'close' and 'supportive' based on her kinship ties and social network.

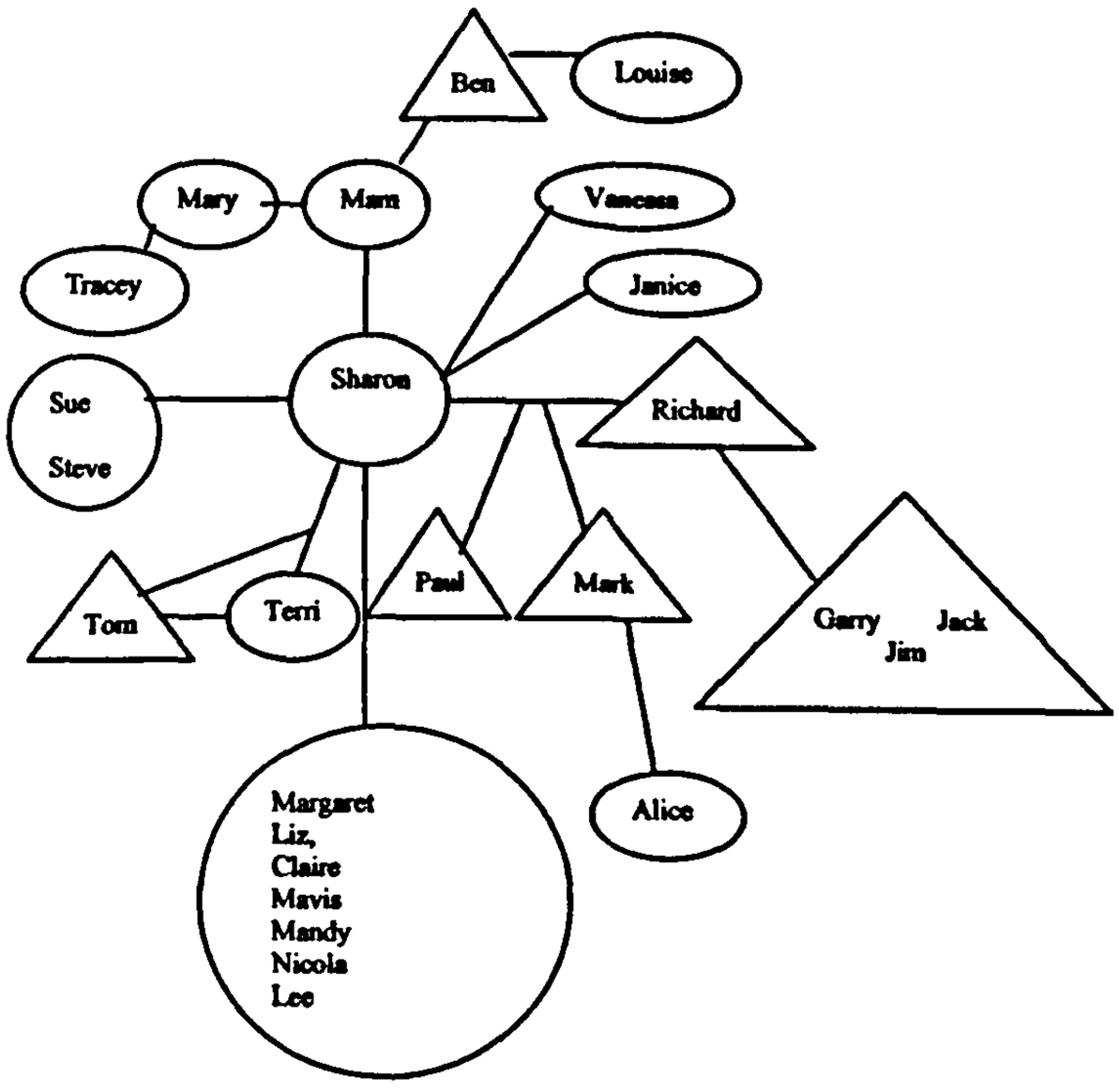



**Figure 7:** Sharon's kinship ties and social network.[1]

I asked Sharon whether any of her relationships had changed as a result of Richard being sent to prison, to which she replied:

> No, no not at all, not with any of me friends or family or anything.

Sharon's mother was living on a similar estate across the other side of the city. Sharon said that she saw her mother regularly and would often see her on a Sunday when she would come round for dinner. Sharon also had a brother called Ben, who was married to Louise:

> I have a brother...and... I get on really well with him, and with me sister-in-law and me niece and nephew who are grown up.

She also described having a close relationship with her nephew Tom and his girlfriend Terri:

[1] **Shapes** – Single names contained in triangles denote male friends and family member; where more than one friend or family member is contained within a shape the shape then denotes whether these were primarily Richards or Sharon's friends; Sharon's friends being denoted by circles and Richards by triangles.

> I'm close to Terri cos she'll sometimes come round and we'll sit and have a bottle of wine...she's sort of like me family.

Sharon's maternal aunt Mary, and her cousin Tracey, both lived locally and would sometimes pop in for a 'cuppa'. Sharon told me that she had a number of other cousins who lived locally, although she suggested that:

> We never all see each other unless its somebody's party.

Richard's parents were both deceased; but Sharon told me that he did have a brother called Martin who was serving a similar sentence in the same prison as Richard, for exactly the same crime:

> his brother's in Jail as well for the same thing, and sort of... he got caught up... but really, if it wasn't for his brother I don't think he would have got found guilty, but it was because he sort of associated with his brother...

Sharon and Richard blamed Martin for Richards's conviction, and as a result of this she suggested that their relationship with Martin and his wife had become strained.

As well as family relationships, Sharon also had friends who she had been to school with that she described as 'close':

> Janice and Vanessa are like me really close... I would count them as me best friends; we're really close, if I didn't have them I would be lonely.
>
> Vanessa, she'd normally comes around like when she finishes work, she'll pop in even if its only for twenty minutes for a cuppa on a night time, she doesn't come probably every night, but like four or five times a week, or sometimes she comes for her Sunday dinner on a Sunday, and depending on what I have done on a Saturday sometimes we might go shopping on a Saturday afternoon or something like that.. She's always like called in for cuppas when Richard was here as well...she used to have her dinner here still when Richard was here, but not so much as like every week. On the Sunday just gone I made a dinner for Vanessa's mam; she took it round for her because me brother took me mam out for mothers day, so I didn't have me mam this Sunday.

> Janice errm, about three weeks ago when Paul was in France with the school...and Janice and Eric got a caravan for the weekend, I went up on the Saturday and stayed the night, they said like you might as well come rather than be in the house by my self.

Sharon had also built up a number of relationships with some of her colleagues at work:

> We all help each other at work. We've all been there for like years and we're just all friends. There's like Margaret, Liz, Claire, Mavis, Mandy and Nichola... and we've got Lee, he's gay... we were at work the other week and he was saying well, we always talk about food and he says he's making liver and onions for tea...I love liver and onions but since Richard's been away I don't make it cos Paul doesn't like it so he says well I'll put some in a container and bring it in for you – and he did.
>
> I've been there for like ten years may be... whereas probably the others have been there for about eight or nine. Everybody knows me situation, Margaret knew from the beginning cos Margaret is Tracey's (Sharon's cousin) mother-in-law... so everybody sort of knows each other. Me head supervisor, when I used to work on a Saturday- I don't now, but when I used to go see Richard on a Saturday when he first went in, she used to just say well put your name down on the list anyway to say you have worked so that you still get paid – she's really like dead good.

Richard also had a number of friends living in the local area who would sometimes call round to see Sharon:

> Garry, Jack and Jim are Richards's friends, and they all pop down for a cuppa and a chat. If Garry comes round he likes a drink too. Garry has been in prison before, he's like only been out since Christmas really, he's just getting a flat... he was in with a girl and he had a house but when he got sent down he lost everything, that's why I have just bought him some crockery, it was expensive, but its just spoons, plates and stuff .I've known Garry as long as I've known Richard and I have known Jim – well when we lived in **** road Jim just lived round the corner from wah (us), when we moved here Jim moved too...I think he's following us (laughs). When we moved in here Jim.. done a lot of like work, like helped Richard do bits and pieces; I haven't known Jack that long though, only for about five years.

The fact that Sharon includes kin, friends and work colleagues in her accounts and in her diagram is not unusual. Other studies reveal, 'people commonly include some

(but not all) of their kin plus some people to whom they are not related, either genetically, sexually or domestically' (Finch 2006: 296-7). However, what this does serve to highlight is that Sharon had a strong and stable set of kinship ties and social network, which provided her with a high degree of emotional and practical support. Bott (1971: 92) referred to these types of network which are common in working class neighbourhoods as 'close knit'; which is where 'husband and wife have grown up in the same local area' and where 'people know one another and have known one another since childhood'.

In particular, Sharon's female friends and kin were particularly important, as has been shown to be the case in other studies which focus on social networks in working class neighbourhoods (see: Bott 1971; Firth 1969; Young and Willmott 1957; Mitchell and Green 2002). What is more, although a spouse or partner is usually the first 'port of call' for help and support, friends are often called on in preference to other family members in cases where people are 'divorced or separated' (McGlone et al 1999: 149). In Sharon's case the relationship that she has with her two school friends, whom she describes as 'close', similarly suggests that her friendships are a particularly important source of support; and similarly with Richard's friends and her work colleagues who all appear to be supportive of her situation. In turn, Sharon also highlights the support that she herself provided for one of Richard's friends when he was released from prison. Thus, unlike some of the other studies which focus on prisoners' families (Morris 1965; Davis 1992; Braman 2004) there had been no significant deterioration in Sharon's relationships as a result of her husband's incarceration. Although the strain that incarceration had placed on the relationship between Richard and his brother Martin was an exception to this. However, the fact that Sharon's other associations with the prison are represented in her narrative, in addition to the approach of her friends and work colleagues highlights how imprisonment in this context does not carry the same stigma but instead appears to be normal feature of the social landscape.

Another of my research participants, Amy, also had a similar 'close knit' social network of kin and friendships, comprising of her parents, grandparents, siblings and cousins and a couple of 'really close' friends who all lived within the local area. Amy suggested:

> I class everybody here, this is me family and friends, I've never went out of me family and friends circle.

Similarly, Amy told me that she had not experienced any deterioration in her relationships with her family or 'close friends', and suggested that they were there for her if she needed anything. She further described one of her friends whose boyfriend had also served time in prison as 'really close', telling me:

> She's me backbone, she's me rock.. [...] she's supportive for both of us really.

Amy's husband also had a couple of 'close friends' who would frequently take turns with her at prison visiting. Thus suggesting that in the cases of Amy and Sharon, the 'close knit' networks to which they both belonged, and in which there were other associations with imprisonment, helped to bring about a degree of normality to the situation which served to limit their loss of social relationships.

**The Impact Of The Prisoners' Background On Support And Social Relationships**

In the cases of both Sharon and Amy, it was also apparent that with the exception of siblings, it was primarily their family rather than that of their husband or partner who provided support:

> A: ...he's got my mam and step father now [...] I would say that Tony thinks my family is his family now. [...] I can honestly say...it has been my family that have put their neck out and been there.
> V: what do you mean by that? In what way have your family put their neck out and been there?
> A: with my family its like we'll go visit Tony sometimes, like on a Sunday visit there'd be like me and me brother and the two kids, and me mam and me mam's husband or like it might be me brother...errm so as I say my family is like Tony's....me mam's actually going to court with Tony at the end of the month [...] uhum there's gonna be me mam, her husband and me brothers also going...

In Amy's case, as well as in the cases of others, the reason given for the deterioration in their husband's or partner's relationship with their own families was articulated in terms of their background, and the fact that they had been in and out of foster homes

and social care. Being brought up, or spending periods of time in local authority care is not unusual in circumstances such as these, as Richards et al (1994: 11) also point out.

The fact that the support provided by kin for a number of the women that I spoke to during the fieldwork was orientated towards what could be described as a matrifocal arrangement is perhaps therefore unsurprising in this context. This matrifocal tendency is consistent with the way in which support between female kin is central to working class communities more widely in the UK (see Mitchell and Green 2002).

However, the expectation that one will receive the support of female kin cannot always be guaranteed. For instance, Ann, who was also native to the area in which she was living during the time of the research, did experience a deterioration in family relationships. However, the deterioration in those relationships was not only the result of incarceration but it also seemed to stem from her family's reaction to the way in which her partner had been violent towards her:

> ...Tommy had been drinking one night and we got into an argument; he was getting more and more angry and he was starting to get violent. I got a bit hysterical and phoned me dad and me dad got on to the police and told them to get somebody down to my house because there was a mad man in there. At this point Tommy was getting more and more angry and ended up holding a knife to my throat...

As a result of this and other similar incidents Ann's family had stopped speaking to her. She told me that they thought Tommy was a 'bad influence', and that:

> Nobody in my family can accept that I want to give Tommy another chance.

Although Tommy had a history of drug abuse and violence, Ann did not appear to be disturbed by his actions:

> ...all the time that he was holding the knife to my throat I never thought that he would hurt me, I was never scared of him, he was just drunk, I just kept thinking to myself oh yeah you will have forgotten all about this in the morning...

Shaw's work with prisoners' families acknowledges that in some cases men may be violent towards their families and that their influence may be 'damaging' and 'negative' (1992: 22). In cases such as this he suggests that incarceration is likely to be 'beneficial to the children'; whilst also providing the woman with a welcome 'escape' or 'respite'. During the conversations that I had with Ann, however, she told me that she wanted Tommy back home, and she did not at any time during the research suggest that she felt his incarceration was welcome or that it provided her with an escape or respite. Two of the other women I interviewed also admitted that their partners had been violent towards them; and in a similar vein to Ann, they also wanted their partners to come back home. Reactions such as this however are not unusual in cases where women experience domestic violence. Indeed, it has been acknowledged that women do frequently put up with such violence whilst making excuses for their partner's behaviour (Hallows 2005: 22). The situation with domestic violence is therefore not one which is exclusive to prisoners' families. However, as Ann's account shows, it can make the situation with friends and relatives more difficult under these circumstances. It was not only the relationship with her family which had become tenuous; she had also chosen to move out of the area where she had been living with Tommy before his arrest. At the same time she had decided to sever the relationship that she had with some of their mutual friends because, as she said:

> They were all getting on to me to leave him, telling me he was no good for me and that I needed to get rid of him cos he was a monster.

**Limiting Stigma By Limiting Information And Relationships**

After moving back home nearer to her family and to the area in which she had grown up Ann subsequently decided to limit her relationships with other people. As she explained here:

> I don't have any friends anymore because they ask too many questions.

The fears that she had seemed to stem from the difficulties that she faced in explaining her partner's whereabouts to a friend:

> I did actually make one friend who lives just down the road. We used to see each other every day and she would pop in and out of my house for a coffee, and I would pop in and out of hers. I told her that my husband worked away; but then when she did not see him she accused me of lying, and we had a big argument over it. When you say he works away you see they still expect to see him at times like Christmas. Once I even booked myself into a bed and breakfast just so I could say to them that I was going up to his mam's for Christmas. They still started to guess after a while..

Ann's narrative highlights some of the difficulties which can arise as the result of trying to disguise a partner's absence. Braman (2004) refers to the way in which women may choose to limit their social relationships in this way as a coping strategy. While some of the other studies of prisoners' families also mention that women will try to disguise the reason for their partner's absence; although this is more often mentioned in relation to what women tell their children (Morris 1965; Richards 1994; Shaw 1992; Laing and McCarthy 2005). In particular Shaw (1992: 41) refers to this phenomenon as 'deception'. However, one of the other women in my study who I put this explanation to took offence at the use of this term, telling me:

> Its not deception, its protection. I don't deceive anyone.

Managing and controlling information in this way is not exclusive to the families of prisoners, but often occurs in relation to individuals who are stigmatised, particularly when the stigmatising attribute is not one that is clearly visible, and where knowledge of the attribute would cause a discrepancy between 'an individual's social identity and his virtual one' (Goffman 1963: pp41-42). In Ann's case, it was not only with her friends that she had tried to disguise her partners whereabouts but she had also decided not to tell either her son[2] or the school that he attended about her partner's incarceration:

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[2] Ann told her son that his father worked away. This tends to be a standard explanation that I have heard many women use – however telling children that their father works away in order to disguise the fact that he is in prison, is a method which in circumstances such as these does not take into account the fact that when children visit their fathers in prison there are various signs and indications – such as prison officers and dogs which are almost exclusive to the setting of

> The school found out and that was a bit of a problem. I had always told them that Stephens' dad worked away, but the school pulled me up one time because they had been asking the kids to draw pictures of what they did on holiday. Of course Stephen went to see his daddy, so he would draw a picture of me and his dad but there would be the guards and the prison dogs in the background, and the large prison officer with the big key (laughs). I mean, what else would you expect him to draw! [...] it can be so embarrassing sometimes; of course at that time he did not know where his dad was either so I had to explain everything to him. After he had drawn the pictures for the school the school went and informed social services who turned up on my doorstep wanting to take Stephen off me. I hate Social Services. I mean how dare they just turn up like that. Stephen wasn't at risk so they had no right.

It is clear from Ann's account that her decision not to tell his school about her partner's whereabouts did have what she perceived to be negative consequences', in that it resulted in the intervention of Social services. The consequences of telling the child's school was also described by another of my research participants Miranda, who told me that at one of the schools that her son attended the teachers had:

> Singled him out and bullied him in front of the other kids and then they called him a 'hard man' who was trying to act just like his father.

The harm that disguising such facts has on the child's emotional health and wellbeing has led some researchers to suggest that teachers should automatically be informed about the incarceration of a child's father (Shaw 1997:8). However, it has recently been acknowledged that the approach of schools to the children of prisoners' is often mixed, in that they are not always supportive, but may be 'judgemental and stigmatising' (Smith et al 2007: 37). Any harm that could potentially be caused by disguising such facts should be carefully weighed, therefore, against the harm caused by the stigma that imparting such information engenders, because as Boswell and Wedge also point out, ascribing 'negative labels to prisoners' families', and their children' does not necessarily serve to 'solve the problem' but instead it may serve to 'perpetuate it' (Boswell and Wedge 2002: 156).

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imprisonment. Hence the reason why some authors such as Shaw (1997) suggest that disguising such facts can have a negative impact on the child's health and wellbeing.

The approach of other institutional bodies such as social services has also been described as inadequate and in some cases damaging (Smith et al 2007: 37). This situation was demonstrated during my fieldwork when Miranda also had problems with the social services when she asked them for help in getting permission from the prison and the police for her son Andrew to visit his father.[3] On one occasion when I was visiting Miranda and social services were there, they told Andrew that he would be allowed to see his father on his birthday. However when his birthday came and went and he had not been cleared his behaviour became extremely problematic. There were a number of incidents in which the police were called because Andrew physically assaulted his mother, committed acts of vandalism and ran away from home on several occasions. A picture which Andrew drew for me during this period of time reflects the difficulties that he was experiencing:




**Figure 8:** A Drawing by Andrew

There were, however, undoubtedly other factors which may have contributed towards Andrew's behaviour, in that he had moved home and area a number of times and had witnessed the assault of his mother during a previous violent relationship. The notes that I made in my fieldwork diary do, however, suggest that although he was certainly not an easy child for Miranda to deal with, in particular because of the health

[3] Children do not usually need clearance from the police and the prison unless the prisoner is a sex offender, which in this case he was. I am highlighting this here because all of the other cases that I have broached so far have been normal location prisoners; since I intend to deal with the wives of VPs in the second half of this chapter.

problems that she was experiencing, it was noticeable that prior to the time when his behavioural difficulties began Andrew was usually talkative and cheerful and would often make cups of tea for his mother, run errands and on occasion would help her around the house. Following the involvement of social services, however, Andrew appeared withdrawn and any help he gave his mother ceased. I was present when the social worker apologised to Miranda for the difficulties that she had caused, as she told Miranda: 'I can see I have opened a can of worms'.

Following these incidents, Miranda told me that social services said that they would give her support in dealing with Andrew's behaviour problems, and that if the situation got worse they would place him in care to give her temporary respite. During the research, however, when the problems escalated, Miranda told me that she asked for them for help, but that the help she had asked for failed to materialise. She told me that the social worker apologised and told her that the difficulties in helping her were the result of a lack of funding. Even so, it would appear from this example that the approach of social services does appear as the report by Smith et al (2007) suggests, to have, negative and damaging consequences, because in this case their approach appears to be irresponsible and to have contributed towards making what was already a difficult situation much worse. What is more, if the role of 'the social' is to establish a 'social code' which sets an example that informs people how to behave (Donzelot 1979) then this raises the issue of the type of example being set. I would argue that such an approach is the opposite of the kind characterised by respect, responsibility and familial values currently being promoted by the state (see Home Office 2003; Straw 1999).

Despite the fact that some women choose to limit information in order to guard against the type of stigma that ensues from incarceration, it should however be noted that not all women who are married to prisoners deal with the type of stigma that incarceration often engenders in the same way. For instance, as Paula told me:

> When yer out and that... the little-un will say 'ah my dad's locked up'; I says he's at work man he's at work, and god... people just look at ya different don't they... but I don't care; and a lot of people are frightened to come near ya aren't they. When I moved in here, I've been here like nearly two year, and I didn't know anyone when

> I moved in, and I was saying to him well like what will I say to people, they might think I'm by mesel, what am I gonna say, an he says just like tell em the truth – an I though ohhh; and then I got to know a couple of people and I telt them, but like everyone knows now and like now I don't care, I've got nothing to hide anyways; I'm not ashamed of anything. But like some of em are frightened to talk to us, they're like ya know like (laughs). an I think GOD GROW UP.

The fact that people might think that Paula does not have a husband or partner seems to be as much of a concern to her as what they might think about her husband being in prison. Stigma and incarceration are therefore not necessarily synonymous, because how people handle these effects and deal with the situation inevitably vary from one individual to the next, depending on a range of factors. This particular narrative however also broaches another issue which is that people outside the immediate situation often react to incarceration in different ways. In some instances it engenders reactions of fear whilst if we reflect back to the examples of Sharon and Amy incarceration was in that context experienced as normal.

In certain cases criminality can also engender status and reputation (Crewe 2005:183), a situation which was also reflected in one of my conversations with Ann, when she suggested that although her family had withdrawn their support because of Tommy's violence towards her, Tommy's family took a somewhat different approach:

> If I go up to [different area of the country] to see his family and stay near where he lives I get treated like royalty. I only need to say his name and they are really respectful of me and really nice to me. You would think that if I was going to have problems anywhere it would be up there wouldn't you. But people down here are the ones that are nasty. Up there people wouldn't dare say a word against him…

In this way it would seem that the stigma which incarceration engenders is most likely negated by the status and reputation attached to the particular crime committed; particularly in circumstances where people remain within their native area; hence the reason for Ann's suggestion that if she were to stay in the area where her partner was from she would be treated 'like royalty' and would be respected.

To a certain extent, the stigma attached is therefore also dependant on social status. As I have said elsewhere, in each of the cases reviewed so far, all of my research participants lived in or around the fringes of council estates in working class areas, where people's associations with crime are likely to be more prevalent. Only one of the participants in the study, Silvia, who was classed as the wife of a normal location prisoner lived on a private estate. In this particular instance, the woman's relationships with her neighbours, who she described as 'good friends' were affected by the media attention that her husband's crime received.

**Media Impact**

Many research participants were particularly fearful of media attention. Often times these fears seemed to stem from the problems that media attention caused with their neighbours and friends. This was something that most often occurred around the time of their husband's arrest or following court trials. Silvia, for instance, described the difficulties that this kind of media attention had caused her and her family:

> They (neighbours/friends) stopped speaking to me, and told the papers that we were bad people, living in the lap of luxury and always spending money on fancy cars and holidays. They even told them that we were getting an extension (on the house); we were, but only because of my daughter's illness and the lump sum of compensation from the hospital because they admitted negligence...

Silvia's daughter had also been bullied by some of the other children at school, because of the stories about the crime which appeared in the papers:

> She had gone to school and it was a case of "you're not gonna get any Christmas presents you know cos your dad's goin to jail or your dad's in jail".

Silvia's fear of the media was also displayed during one of the interviews, when her house phone rang and she began to panic, declining to answer it because the number had been withheld, telling me that the reason for this was that:

> It could be someone from the media trying to get through.

During the course of the research Silvia's husband was released 'on tag'.[4] In the first interview with her following her husband's release, he approached me, apparently concerned, and asked me if I was a journalist. I reassured him that I wasn't and told him about the research, however shortly after this Silvia subsequently withdrew from the study.

Thus, the media can be an influential factor in the deterioration of relationships, because by highlighting a crime that a person has committed this allows those who stand outside the situation to draw inference about the remaining family members with whom the criminal is associated. The fact that those remaining family members have not committed a crime is at the same time negated through these associations. In this way therefore, the media impacts on 'social identity' by making what Goffman (1963: 3) describes as 'attributes that are deeply discrediting' visible. In circumstances such as this, Goffman goes on to suggest that:

> ...an individual who might have been received easily in ordinary social intercourse possesses a trait that can obtrude itself upon attention and turn those of us whom he meets away from him, breaking the claim that his other attributes have on us. (Goffman 1963: 5)

By printing pictures in newspapers of the offender, or printing details of his crime, which often includes the street name and area, this therefore serves to perpetuate the stigma by making the associations that the family has with incarceration more visible, and making the ability to conceal those associations difficult if not impossible.

The influence of the media in situations such as this, however, is not limited to the particular case but also plays a substantial role in educating the public and encouraging them to adopt certain moral values, which often serve to encourage a greater fear of crime (Muncie 2001: pp 59-60). This fear of crime is, as Young points out, often exaggerated and therefore disproportionate to the reality of the situation. As Young argues, exaggerating the more negative aspects and increasing fears by focusing on the increasing rates of crime helps to sell newspapers and keep public

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[4] A tag is an electronic device used to monitor the 'offenders' whereabouts; this method is most frequently used when a prisoner is reaching the end of his sentence.

audiences interested (Young 2003: 36-37 & 43). As a result, crime and criminality and catching criminals, have become somewhat of a British public obsession (Wilson and Ashton 1998: 44-45), as can be seen by the number of television programs devoted to these issues; for instance programs such as 'Crime Watch UK'; 'Watchdog', 'Macintyre', 'Police, Camera, Action', 'Night Watch with Steve Scott', 'Real Crime' which are just a few of the more popular documentary style programs regularly shown on television. Attempts to implement name and shame campaigns which are used in order to embarrass the criminal have also become more prevalent in tabloid newspapers.[5] However these tactics pay little attention to the way in which campaigns, or representations of crime such as those displayed on television, may influence the lives of innocent non-offending family members.

At the same time there are very few representations of prisoners' families; and those which do deal with the family are often comedies which do not portray the situation accurately. Porridge for instance, is perhaps the one which provides the most accurate representation, but even then, because the situation is aimed at entertaining it does not portray the emotional difficulties, or the stigma or the difficulties which women experience in maintaining their relationships. This is even more the case with the latest BBC comedy to hit the television screen – called 'The Visit' which as the following description of the series shows bears little relation to many of the difficulties which I have been dealing with in this thesis:

> The visit is set entirely in the visiting room of a prison. Stray sheep, dodgy drug deals and snatched conjugal rights are common occurrences, as the inmates of HMP Radford Hill are reunited with loved ones and dodgy business associates. [6]

Arguably, such arrangements are only for light entertainment, but since in contemporary society the media is, I would argue, an influential sector of what Donzelot (1979) calls 'the social' then it is these comical representations, and the lack of other types of representation that feed into the public consciousness, which in turn provide a foundation for stigma to flourish.

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[5] http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/3724148.stm (Thur 7th Oct 2004) Wells (2000) Thur 14th September http://www.guradian.co.uk

[6] http://www.bbc.co.uk/comedy/thevisit/

What is more, disguising one's criminal associations in order to negate this type of stigma and preserve kinship ties and social networks may be more important for some women than it is for others. As I have already demonstrated in the chapter on the Visitors' Centre, within the confines of the institutional setting, those who are the partners of vulnerable prisoners already suffer stigma within this context. Whether incarceration serves as the impetus for the deterioration of a woman's kinship ties and social networks beyond the walls of the prison is dependent partly on the particular crime that her husband or partner has committed. In order to explore this further, in the next part of this thesis I move on to focus on the relationships and social networks of the families of vulnerable prisoners. It is these families who I refer to as the socially excluded of the socially excluded.

**The Socially Excluded Of The Socially Excluded**

Miranda lived with her two children, Andrew (age 9) and Ben (age 6), in a terraced house on a council estate, in a 'pit village' on the outskirts of a city in the North of England. Miranda and her children had taken up residence in the village after leaving a refuge, following a violent relationship with Ben's biological father.

At the time of the research Miranda's current partner, Iain (who is also Andrew's biological father) was a vulnerable prisoner serving a life sentence. Iain and Miranda had been together prior to the offence but had separated during the period of time when he committed the crime, largely due to his addiction to drink and (prescription) drugs which had caused him to become violent towards her. Iain and Miranda resumed their relationship while he was in prison. Despite the fact that they were separated when the crime was committed, she told me:

> We had our windows broken; people wrote nasty messages all over the walls of our house, they would shout at me and throw things when I was walking down the street. It was because I had his son... people seemed to blame me... they hated me.

Since Miranda was living with her family at that time, she told me that these problems placed a strain on their relationship. Miranda moved away from home, and

eventually married a man called Tim, Ben's father. However, after they had been married for a few months Miranda described how Tim became violent:

> He was always shouting at me and hitting us, he just got nasty; he'd scream at me and hit me in front of Andrew and Ben, he would shout that Andrew was the son of a murdering bastard... and how could I love him after what his dad had done.

Miranda then decided to find out which prison Iain was in, and then subsequently resumed contact with him. Iain convinced her to leave her husband, and it was at this point that she moved into the refuge for women. However, when the refuge found out that Miranda was in contact with Iain she reported that:

> They didn't like it, they [...] thought that I was stupid. They used to hide my letters [...] and then they would read them.

The situation got worse when the woman from the refuge researched the crime on the internet:

> She [...] printed the stuff off...then she would throw it in me face and say to me how could I love him after the sick things that he had done.

When Miranda eventually moved out of the refuge and into a home of her own, her sister came to visit. However, because Miranda's family did not like Iain and would have been against their relationship, she told me that she had decided to keep it a secret. Keeping their relationship secret was difficult, because Iain had taken over the role of father figure to the children who were now calling him dad. She also had to hide her phone calls, and prison visits, telling me:

> When he phoned me I just had to take the calls privately so that she didn't find out.

Miranda did not like keeping secrets from her sister, as she told me:

> I feel like I'm living a lie [...].

She told me however that she had spoken to a couple of women from the Visitors' Centre (other visitors) about the problems she was having hiding the situation from her sister, before going on to say:

> ...they were Christians, and they said that I must tell her, that I am living a lie and that I need to get it off my chest... that when I tell her I will feel better... then they started quoting the bible at me...something about god condemning those who throw stones.

Partly as a result of this she decided to send her sister a letter:

> I sat down and wrote her a letter...it was from the heart... I told her about Iain and how I felt and that I needed her support.

In response her sister sent her a text message:

> Saying that she didn't want nowt to do with me while I am with him cos she hates him.

The lack of support Miranda received from her family became even more problematic when she was admitted to hospital, and had no one to look after her children. At this point in the research Miranda asked me to phone her sister. Her sister's response was indicative of how she felt about the situation:

> Miranda is sick in the head, do you have kids? Do you know what that pervert has done? If you have kids and you knew what he has done and what he is inside for then you wouldn't go anywhere near her.

Iain's family were however more supportive of their relationship; but because Ben had a different father, they treated the children differently, buying presents for Andrew but not for Ben, and only taking Andrew on holiday. Miranda had difficulty in accepting this and as a result, contact between them was irregular and their relationship remained permanently tenuous.

Although Miranda's kinship ties and social network were limited, she was extremely hesitant about making new friends, telling me

They just wouldn't understand.

Her hesitance was also fuelled by the fact that her relationship with two friends that she had made since she had left the refuge had both ended, primarily as a result of the situation that she was in. Her first friend knew where Miranda's partner Iain was, although she had not been told about the crime he had committed. The practical and emotional responsibility of looking after Miranda and her children however, seemed to place too much pressure on her, and after a stay in hospital Miranda's friend stopped visiting and subsequently broke contact. In the case of Miranda's second friend, she told her and her partner that her husband worked away. When she was once again admitted into hospital however, she told me:

I felt I had no choice but to tell them that Iain was in prison.

Following the incident, this friend also broke contact with Miranda. Miranda did make friends with two other women who she met at the prison Visitors' Centre. In both cases, these women were also the partners of vulnerable prisoners. Both women lived in other areas of the country, so the friendships were primarily maintained through telephone calls and meeting at prison visits. On some occasions the women would stay at Miranda's house prior to their visits and would sometimes go out shopping or for meals together. After a short period of time Miranda encouraged her children to give the women the title of 'Nanny Beth' and 'Aunty Lois' thereby ascribing them fictive kinship roles. Each of the women lived up to their new role, buying presents for the children, and sending them money and cards, for their birthday and for Christmas. Neither of the women knew what Iain was in prison for, and as Miranda suggested:

It's none of their business and it is not right to ask.

Miranda's story highlights many of the problems that seem to stem from being the partner of a vulnerable prisoner, or more specifically in this case a sex offender[7], such

[7] It is perhaps important to note that although Miranda's partner had been convicted of a sex offence Miranda was adamant that he was not guilty of this crime. She did however tell me that her partner had committed murder, and that she would never forgive him for this. As far as Miranda was concerned the police had added the charge of sexual offence because without this there would be no motive; Miranda suggested that Iain accepted the charge of a sexual offence because of his state of mind, caused by the fact that he was on prescribed anti depressants, and

as tenuous kinship ties, limited social networks and harassment from others within the same community. As I will discuss shortly, the loss of friendships and kinship ties and support network was not exclusive to Miranda, in that it similarly occurred in the cases of a number of other women whom I interviewed who were also the wives or partners of sex offenders. By virtue of the type of crime that their partner has committed therefore, women who are married to or are the partners of sex offenders appear to be the socially excluded of the socially excluded; in that the crime is so heavily stigmatised that this acts as the impetus for a deterioration in social relationships.

The 'harassment' and problems that Miranda and her family initially experienced, can be seen to stem from the way in which she became associated with what is considered to be one of the most highly stigmatised crimes – that of child abuse and/or murder. In her book 'Women and British Justice, Eve was framed' Helena Kennedy (2005: 21-22) argues that it is the associations that are made between women and biology, and the way in which '[e]ven if women do not themselves have children, society expects them to embody the nurturance and protectiveness associated with mothering' which brings 'a heightened outrage when they seem to run in the face of those ideas'. The evidence that she draws on to support this argument are cases such as the Soham murder in which two young girls were murdered by a school care taker. The girlfriend of the murderer, Maxine Carr, was initially imprisoned for providing her boyfriend Iain Huntley with an alibi before he was found guilty of the murder. As a consequence of this and the public outrage that the case seemed to cause, she was forced to change her identity and had to move area several times in order to prevent herself from being recognised and subsequently attacked. Mira Hindley and Rosemary West are other names which Kennedy draws on as engendering similar reactions within society, which she suggests are the result of the way in which deviations from the biological associations of motherhood 'take on monstrous proportions in the collective mind' (ibid). However, in the cases of Hindley and West

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also alcohol dependant and because of the guilt that he felt for committing the murder. There was no trial in Iain's case because he 'turned himself in' and pleaded guilty to the crime. Shortly before the research Iain had put an appeal in against the charge of sexual offence because there was no evidence to support this and was also in the process of appealing against the length of his sentence (life) on the basis that the drugs he had been taking were an influential factor in the crime that he committed. Prior to this crime Iain did not have any convictions – either sexual offences or otherwise.

they were not just supporting these men but also played an active role in the crimes that were committed. Similarly, Carr was not just a passive bystander but provided Huntley with an alibi which, it could be argued, was the primary reason for such outrage.

The power of this abhorrence is seen in my own research, in the extent to which sexual crime taints the partners of those involved in such crimes even though none of the women who took part in this study had any involvement in the crime. It is perhaps also interesting to note that most of the partners of vulnerable prisoners that I spoke to during the research were adamant that their husbands were innocent. Miranda however was the only exception to this, in that she told me that she knew Iain was guilty of murder, and that she would never forgive him for what he had done, although she was also adamant that he was not guilty of sexual abuse. The 'outrage' caused by these types of crimes is therefore not only reflected in the reactions of Miranda's family and in the community that she came from, but it is also reflected in the way in which the wives and partners of sex offenders refuse to conceive of the fact that their husbands or partners could be guilty of the crimes for which they were convicted.

In examining issues of stigma, Goffman (1961:23-4) suggests that 'the members of a particular stigma category will have a tendency to come together into small social groups whose members all derive from the category'. Moreover he suggests that 'in being a member of the category, an individual may have an increased probability of coming into contact with any other member, and even forming a relationship with him as a result'. In this research it became apparent that the Visitors' Centre fills this role. It is one of the only places in which women who are stigmatised in this way can meet. Miranda's case demonstrates this in the way that during the research she began to build up a small network of relations with other women in the Visitors' Centre who were also visiting vulnerable prisoners. By designating some of the other women as 'Nanny' and 'Aunty' Miranda was able to structure some sort of 'normality' for her own children through the creation of a surrogate family. During my observations at the Visitors' Centre one of the other women who was the wife of a vulnerable prisoner also told me:

> That's the nice part about coming here is that you get to talk to other people who are in a similar situation, we are all in here for the same reason, we visit for the same reason, there aint nobody that's better than anybody else in here.

As I have already suggested, relying on friendships for support, particularly 'in times of crisis' and designating them as 'fictive kin'(McGlone 1999: 154) has been shown to be a particularly important source of support in contemporary studies of kinship. In Codd's (2002: 338-339) discussion of the benefits of self help groups in empowering women who are married to prisoners, she also describes the importance of these types of social arrangements, in which she suggests that 'pseudo kinship relationships' can be 'indispensable' in providing support and replacing relationships that have deteriorated. For the partners and wives of vulnerable prisoners, I would argue that it is even more important to be able to make these associations, and gain the support of other women who are in a similar situation, because of the difficulties of being associated with this type of crime, and the impact this has on their kinship ties and social networks.

Even though women do build relationships with other women in the same situation who they meet at the Visitors' Centre, animosity and hostility as I have already indicated above, is still prevalent in that environment. This is especially so in relation to the different categories of visitor. For instance, in one of my conversations with Meena she told me:

> There's that fat bitch with the kids at the prison and all that gold... I mean come on we all know that her husband is a drug dealer – but she thinks that its great... she swans in there and the kids run around shouting and swearing... they think that is great visiting inside a prison ... they run around and think that they are so smart... but we all know that they will be the next ones to end up there.

On some occasions during my observations at the Visitors' Centre I also noted that the wives and partners of vulnerable prisoners would gossip about others who were also visiting vulnerable prisoners, making assertions as to whether they thought someone's partner was a sex offender. In this respect therefore, although women can meet others who are in a similar situation, friendship and unity created on the basis of similarity is not automatic.

Loss of family and friends may also occur for a number of other reasons. As Thomas suggests 'sex offending itself takes many forms' (Thomas 2000: 1). In this respect, the wives and partners of sex offenders may lose support because the crime involves accusations of abuse brought by the family of the offender. For instance, Helen whose husband Garry had been convicted of abuse against his own children from a previous marriage, told me:

> Me sista knows and basically we don't really speak any more because of it, but me brothas no wiser, he doesn't know and I find it best just to leave it the way it is.

Helen had also experienced problems with Garry's son:

> Last time I seen his son was at court... and ... he slapped us across the face for being there.

Similarly, Helen also experienced problems with a nearby neighbour who knocked on her door:

> I answered it, and she said 'is this where the nonce lives is it? So I went no, she said 'dya know who I am, do ya know who I am, I said yeah I do, I've got two kids in here man..., and she said 'dya think I give a toss' and then she said Ill have ya windows put out and ill have ya all moved, I said oh right and shut the door (laughs),... obviously I was shaking like a leaf.

Lois, an older woman, told me that the relationship with her daughter had deteriorated after her daughter had given birth to a child of her own:

> When Norman was arrested my daughter was six hundred percent behind me, but after Norman was sentenced that's when she had her daughter, her little girl Amy, and after this she just cooled down an awful lot and then it was October last year she came and picked Amy up from here and my neighbour was in and she started shouting at the top of her voice that Norman was a paedophile, well... that was it.

I did not interview Lois' daughter, so it is only possible to speculate as to why the birth of her daughter's child seemed to cause the relationship between them to

deteriorate. However, since the breakdown occurred following the birth, this again seems to be indicative of the strength of association that people often make between women and their nurturing, childrearing role (Kennedy 2005), which I mentioned earlier.

In cases where relationships between family and friends have broken down the wives and partners of sex offenders may move home. This was the case with Beth who told me how she had moved to a different location after her husband had been arrested in order to avoid problems with her family and neighbours. After moving to a new area Beth had managed to make new friends, but in order to do this she told me that she had lied about her husband's whereabouts, and had chosen to disguise where she was going when she went to visit him in prison:

> I've told everyone back home that I am going on holiday for a few days, none of them know where Brian is, they just think I go on holiday every other month.

Beth also told me that she was planning to move again and change her name once her husband came home:

> There are police living in the street... and you know how it is, they might find out that Brian has been inside and what he has been inside for, and then tongues will start to wag, and I just can't be coping with that again... We want a fresh start we do so that is why we are gonna change our name and move somewhere where nobody knows us.

The fact that some women choose to disguise the reason for their husband's or partner's absence appears to be a strategy that is used in order to negate the disapproval and stigma that is exercised by others who are in close proximity, such as neighbours and friends, which in doing so can be a way for stigmatised individuals to manage their identity (Goffman 1961). Goffman refers to this type of stigma as a 'courtesy stigma' in which 'the individual who is related through the social structure to a stigmatised individual – a relationship that leads the wider society to treat both individuals in some respects as one' (Ibid: 30). The offender however is removed from society and then segregated from normal location prisoners for his own

protection (Sparks et al 1996), whereas none of these protective factors exist within the community. It is the family who are left behind to take the wrath and anger of 'society'. What is more, since the identity of women is largely associated with their biological and nurturing child rearing role, this serves to impose a heightened form of stigma which can be as bad, if not worse than the stigma experienced by the offenders themselves.

The stigma and hostility that incarceration engenders, however, is not confined to friends and neighbours, but can also have an impact on the way in which the partners and wives of prisoners are treated at work (Smith et al 2007: pp36-37). As Lois told me:

> When Norman went to prison I met with a lot of opposition at work, I was the cook in charge and they used to knit pick on everything I did... the staff refused to be served by me... I worked a mental disabled place so they weren't bothered but the staff refused... and I was off work after that for a long time with stress.

The problems that Lois describes here with her work colleagues are notably different to the example I drew on of Sharon at the beginning of this chapter (whose husband's incarceration had no impact on her work relationships, or the relationship with her employers who were particularly supportive of her situation). It was also notable that in Silvia's case, her husband's employer initially kept his job open and continued to pay her husband's wages for a set period of time while he was in prison. Thus, in this context the stigma which the wives and partners of prisoners experience at work may vary depending on social status, the job a person does, whether the woman's working and social relationships are interconnected, and also the particular type of crime or offence that one's husband or partner has committed.

**Conclusion**

Thus it would seem that the deterioration in women's kinship ties and social networks does not automatically accompany the event of incarceration, but instead is dependant on the circumstances of each case. For the wives and partners of normal location prisoners such as Sharon and Amy, who live in areas in which crime and criminal associations are more prevalent, they are for that reason less likely to experience the

stigma which would lead to the deterioration in their relationships, because the situation is perceived as normal in this context, and because they remain within the confines of their 'close-knit' networks. Although stigma is negated by these 'close-knit' networks, I would argue that they are still excluded from a full participation in the wider society, in which the associations with crime and criminality are less tolerated. Indeed to a certain extent this is evidenced in Ann's account of her situation, where, having left the area in which she grew up in she finds that the support which she may otherwise have received from her friends and kin begins to deteriorate, and she resorts to limiting information about her circumstances, and limiting her relationships. This process can be likened to Goffman's ideas of 'deceit' or 'feigning' (1959: 14) in which the individual conveys misinformation about themselves when they are in the presence of others. When this situation occurs in the context of a stigmatised individual limiting information is part of the process of 'normification' whereby the individual attempts to present themselves as 'an ordinary person' (Goffman 1963: 31). In the context of imprisonment, however, conveying false information is perceived by those involved to be a protective mechanism. Nonetheless, this often leads to problems because there are other cues – for instance the pictures which Ann's son drew for the school, or the absence of a man about the house, which serve to indicate a discrepancy between the performances presented and the actuality of the situation.

This situation is often made worse because of the influence of the media and the approach of institutional bodies such as the social services. In the case of media involvement this not only encourages a fear of crime, but also, it makes it difficult for families who do have members in prison to hide their associations and therefore minimise the 'courtesy stigma' which the situation engenders. Similarly schools, and social services, could and should be helpful in limiting the stress that women suffer in these circumstances. In particular, because this is the area of 'the social' whose job is supposedly to teach moral values by establishing a 'social code' which informs peoples how to behave (Donzelot 1979). In many ways however their approach is often more of a hindrance than a help because they are often tainted by the stigma of incarceration, and as a result of this they are often unsupportive, and only serve to further aggravate the difficulties that prisoners' families' experience.

Moreover, finding support is more important for the wives and partners of some prisoners that it is for others; in particular those who are the socially excluded of the socially excluded. Women who are married to or the partners of prisoners who have committed sex offences therefore have a double impediment, because of the kind of outrage that these crimes engender. The biological, nurturing role which is attributed to women in Western society is undoubtedly a contributing factor, in that the concept of motherhood and perceptions of how women should behave towards children stands in opposition to the notion of supporting a prisoner in these circumstances. The stigma and outrage that these types of crimes engender, and the way in which this is directed towards the women who support these types of prisoner however, is not just a product of those who stand outside the situation; since these women themselves also frequently find it implausible that other women would support men who have committed sexual crimes, particularly those against children. For these women in particular, therefore, their kinship is not only subordinated by the approach of the penal establishment and the approach of other official bodies but also through the approach of other families who are in a similar situation to themselves. As a result of this they lack the type of supportive matrifocal 'close-knit' networks which appear to be more common amongst the wives and partners of normal location prisoners for whom criminal associations and associations with imprisonment are often part of the social fabric of everyday existence.

# CHAPTER EIGHT

## Discussion and Conclusion

*'The mood and temper of the public with regard to the treatment of crime and criminals is one of the most unfailing tests of the civilisation of any country.'* Winston Churchill, 1910[1]

In this thesis I began by trying to locate the place of the family in relation to the prison and imprisonment. I took this approach as a way of helping me to define the relationship in more detail, and provide a more comprehensive examination of the family's position. In doing so, I suggested that the family is not the underutilised resource that some reports would appear to suggest, but that instead the family has been embedded in the system of imprisonment from the very earliest stages of its development. I highlighted this in chapter three with reference to Foucault's work on discipline and surveillance and in particular his assessment of the work of eighteenth century reformers such as Lucas who highlighted how imprisonment throws the prisoner's family into a state of destitution (see Foucault 1977: 268). In contemporary contexts, some families may still face destitution when the effects of imprisonment combine to impact on every aspect of their existence. In this final chapter, I briefly summarise these impacts.

### The Financial Disadvantages Of Imprisonment

Financially, prisoners' wives and partners are often disadvantaged by the fact that they are either limited to one wage earner, or at the mercy of welfare benefits. Whether the occupation or job that a woman has before her husband's incarceration is affected may depend on a number of factors, such as whether the environment is one in which a partner's incarceration is seen as acceptable or normal (Sharon), the type of crime a husband or partner has committed (Lois and Alison), and the extent to which their health and well-being remains intact, and or the degree of extra responsibility for domestic roles and childcare (Amy). At the same time, a sole person's wage and welfare benefits, do not take account of the degree of extra

[1] Citation taken from Hibbert, C (2003) *The Roots of Evil, a social history of crime and punishment*, Sutton publishing, UK.

financial pressure placed on the family due to the obligation and responsibility that they have for supporting the prisoner, such as buying his clothes, material goods (books, art materials, musical equipment) food, paying for telephone calls, travelling to visits and accommodation. As I suggested in chapter six, the cost of maintaining a relationship is not one that is usually a primary consideration but in this context it becomes an overriding factor, because limited financial means restricts the type and amount of communications and interactions available.

Sometimes financial pressures are aggravated by the application of confiscation orders. The prisoner has already had his liberty removed. He is locked up, so arguably his possessions no longer matter. But this is not the case for the family, whose possessions are also brought into question. During this part of the judicial procedure the family are treated as though they operate as a field and not an aggregate of individuals (Bourdieu 1998: 68-70). If the items are domestic necessities, however, such as fridges, cookers and fires then they would need to be replaced. Such expenditure undoubtedly impacts severely on families who are already experiencing financial difficulty. Indeed, in the case of Amy (presented in chapter four), here was someone who had the advantaged of a 'close-knit' social network. She was able to draw on her family and friends for support in helping her to confirm where the items under question came from. In the case of women whose friendships or networks have deteriorated, harnessing that support, however, would be much more difficult to accomplish.

**The Impact Of Imprisonment On Responsibilities And Obligations: Ramifications And Health Problems**

At the same time, the judicial system does not take into account the fact that by removing the prisoner/father from his family and home, he is then excluded from his responsibilities as provider or carer. The identity that he holds in relation to his role within the family is subsequently undermined, constrained and/or terminated. This is the point at which the prison becomes 'omni-disciplinary' in its approach by assuming responsibility for all aspects of the individual (Foucault 1977: 235-236). The result is that these extra obligations and responsibilities then pass to other family members. In most cases, this means women and their children. Taking up these extra responsibilities and obligations, however, can be extremely difficult because of the

stress and trauma which the incarceration of a husband or partner leaves in its wake. As my research participants' accounts have shown, the situation for women often results in health problems, such as depression and other psychological difficulties, which in turn can affect their ability to function. For some women with children, this can make the situation even more difficult, especially with regards to parenting. As I have shown in chapter four, this is particularly the case during the earlier stages of imprisonment when women are already faced with a number of challenges. For instance challenges such as their newly acquired status of 'separated' 'single parent', the trials of prison visiting and trying to incorporate court procedures into their daily routines.

**Tensions And Conflicts Between The Family And The Criminal Justice System**

In addition to this, conflict frequently accompanies the high degree of intervention in family life. But this is not a conflict between parents, as in cases of divorce. Instead the conflict and tension which arises is between the family and the authority of the criminal justice system. These tensions sometimes manifest in how women and their children are treated during the process of arrest, and sometimes during court procedures or prison visiting. Situations such as this can lead to a deformation of the family's values, by encouraging attitudes that are opposed to authority. This situation then raises the question of the type of example being set for our children. This is an important question, as I have clearly shown, and one which deserves and requires much more attention.

**A Composite Form Of Punishment**

I also suggested that the approach adopted by judicial authority shows a high disregard for the ideals of kinship. We have seen this in relation to the disregard shown towards the family's possessions which serve to compromise the more personal and symbolic aspects of kinship. These are the possessions which are tied to the family's notions of privacy, home, and the material items in which their identity and sense of self is invested. Indeed, it is this penetration of the personal/ private preserve, which demonstrates how a prisoner's separation from the outside world begins to define a very specific relationship between the family and the prison. Such a high degree of surveillance and the discipline that accompanies this process may be expected in the case of the offender. The point that I am making here, however, is that

it is not only the offender that these practices affect, because a prison sentence is often a composite punishment which punishes over and above the individual, by punishing other legally innocent family members and, in particular, women and their children.

**Incarceration As A Process Not An Event: The Creation Of Women As 'Quasi-Inmates'.**

Furthermore, as Weintraub (1976) indicates, incarceration is a process, not just an individual event. The arrest may mark the beginning, but the practices of the judicial system continue in various different forms right throughout the prison sentence. I demonstrated this in chapter five by examining in detail the performance and culture of prison visiting. In this chapter I examined how the performance of visiting serves to deprive women of their autonomy and subject them to what Comfort (2003) refers to as 'secondary prisonization'. This 'secondary prisonization' manifests in a shift in women's identity as they move nearer the prison subculture by converting from legally free people to that of 'quasi inmate'. I would further argue that this process is akin to Goffman's idea of 'mortification' (Goffman 1961: 24-38). In this respect prisons today still display many of the features of total institutions that Goffman describes (ibid). In addition to this, in chapter five I also explored many of the ways in which the incarceration of a husband or partner impacts on some of the most intimate aspects of kinship, such as the levels of physical contact between the prisoner and other family members, as well as the notion of quality time that the family spend together.

In chapter six, I then went on to focus on the various forms of contact available. In particular, I examined how the rules and regulations of the prison serve to shape the relationship between the prisoner and their family, and how, as a response to this, women go about finding novel and creative ways of practising their responsibilities and obligations. They thus seek to manage gift giving, special family events and intimacy, caring and the financial aspects of kinship around the prisons rules and the various forms of contact and communication available. In some cases, women will rearrange their daily routines to fit in with the schedule of phone calls that they expect to receive from their husband or partner. Whereas, in other cases women orchestrate their own involvement in their husband's sentence, by contacting prison governors

and other influential bodies with requests and complaints concerning his well-being. These actions, I argued, are testament to the flexibility and creativity of kinship. They also serve to signify the importance that many of these women place on their 'kin keeping' role and maintaining their relationships.

**Limiting 'Courtesy Stigma' By Limiting Relationships**

Maintaining their relationships in the face of adversity such as this, however, is often made harder because of the stigma which accompanies incarceration. As I have shown, this is what Goffman (1961: 30) refers to as a 'courtesy stigma' due to the way in which the family and the offender are treated as one. As a result, women may proceed to either limit their relationships or protect themselves by disguising their husband's whereabouts. However, it is not just themselves that these women try to protect, but also their children. Stigma explains why children are not always informed about their father's imprisonment. There are, however, a number of factors, which can influence whether these 'stigmatising attributes' are made 'visible' (Goffman 1963:3). For example, the influence of the media, discrepancies between what people are told and what they actually see, and the discrepancies that occur between what children have been told and the kind of information that they reveal to other people. Indeed, it is discrepancies such as these, and the difficulties that this type of situation causes, which has led some authors to argue that children should be told the truth and that their school should be informed, otherwise, they suggest, the experience will have a negative impact on a child's well-being (Shaw 1992: 41). Arguably, however, these women are only acting out the processes of 'normification' as a way of trying to protect their children from the stigma which accompanies their father's incarceration (Goffman 1963; see chapter seven).

The stigma which accompanies incarceration, however, is not a forgone conclusion. Instead, as I demonstrated in chapter seven, it may depend on a number of factors, for instance whether the woman remains within the confines of a 'close-knit network', the status the crime engenders (Ann) and whether or not incarceration is perceived to be a normal feature of the social landscape (Sharon). On the other hand, as I have also argued, this is certainly not the case for all women, in particular those who suffer the double impediment – the socially excluded of the socially excluded.

**The Double Impediment: The Socially Excluded Of The Socially Excluded**

In chapter seven, I explored how in some cases women may feel that it is even more important to employ these measures of protection by limiting information about their circumstances. I argued that this was especially the case for women who are the wives and partners of vulnerable prisoners, and, in particular, the wives and partners of prisoners' who had been convicted of sex offences. These women suffer a double impediment. They are the socially excluded of the socially excluded by virtue of the high degree of stigma which accompanies the type of crime their husband or partner has committed. The major reason for this is because, as Helena Kennedy suggests, the associations between women and their biological role as nurturers and protectors seems contradictory to their role of supporting a family member who has committed a crime which engenders this type of heightened outrage and abhorrence (Kennedy 2005: 21-22). Indeed, I argued that this situation is one which frequently leads to the terminal deterioration in relationships and social networks (Miranda). It can also lead to situations of conflict between neighbours (Helen), and in some instances it can impact on the woman's working relationships (Lois). Moreover, this outrage and abhorrence is not only shown by those who have little experience of incarceration, but it is endemic in the relationships that play out between the different categories of prisoner, and their families; as well as between the other wives and partners of vulnerable prisoners.

**The Case For Fictive Kinship**

However, as discussed in chapter seven, new relationships and fictive kinship ties are often forged between women who are in a similar situation and who have had similar experiences. This was shown in chapter five in my account of the interactions and conversations that take place between the wives and partners of vulnerable prisoners while they are waiting at the Visitors' Centre. This was also demonstrated in chapter seven in the case study of Miranda and the fictive relationships that developed between herself, her children and two other women, Beth and Lois. Moreover, although the creation of fictive kinship occurs in all sorts of situations, for Miranda, it seemed that being able to forge these types of relationships was particularly important. It helped to ease her loss of family support and compensate for other friendships which had deteriorated. In order for these types of relationships to develop, however, it would appear that there needs to be a common ground, or space

which facilitates this process. The common ground in this case was the Visitors' Centre.

**The Visitors' Centre**

In chapter five I examined whether the Visitors' Centre is a 'liminal space', and proposed that this is an inaccurate description. In order for the Centre to be described as a liminal space, the balance of power between the prison and the visitor would need to be more evenly weighted. As the boundary between inside and out where the prison and the family come together, however, it does display some liminal qualities. Rituals of transition do take place, but in this case the move is one from a higher to a lower status. The welfare of the visitor and the outside world are also reflected in the approach adopted by the Welfare Organisation. Organisations such as this, however, are not always entirely impartial, because they are bound by the rules and regulations of the prison. As a result of this, there are limits to the type and amount of support and help that they can provide for the families and friends of prisoners. Even so, as I discussed in chapter five, many of the women I spoke to found the approach adopted, and the information provided by the staff and volunteers from the organisation helpful.

The organisation also have a hand in organising and running the special family visits, such as those that take place between the father and the child. However, even though father-child visits are often preferred, these types of visits still tend to limit the mother's 'gate-keeping' role, which is not always helpful (McBride 2005). As I suggested in chapter four, there therefore needs to be some type of special family visit which would facilitate the needs of the mother and her role as the main facilitator of the father child relationship (Clarke et al 2005). Perhaps, in turn this would also provide the opportunity for some of the wives' and partners' of prisoners to re-establish the notion that their family are a 'collective subject' rather than a 'simple aggregate of individuals' (see Bourdieu 1998: 68-70; also see chapter three: p64).

**Implications Of The Study and Further Research:**

In order to tackle the negative influences that imprisonment has on the lives of the wives and partners of male prisoners and their children, kinship needs to be given a higher priority. Unless the disjunction between the ideals of imprisonment and the

ideals of kinship and family can be reconciled, the situation will continue to be one of stasis. Research will continue to repeat that families are 'forgotten victims' and 'invisible victims' of the system (Brink 2003: 393; Codd 1998; Mathews 1989; Smith 1989) when, in actuality they have not been forgotten and they are not invisible. But instead, the prisoner's family are firmly embedded in the ideology of imprisonment. If they are victims, I would suggest that they are the victims of the subordination that imprisonment imposes on their kinship ties and practices. As a means of overcoming this impasse, the needs and welfare of the family of the offender need to be treated as an issue in its own right, instead of revolving around their contribution to the prisoners' welfare and the ideals of reducing recidivism. Unless there is a greater recognition of this fact, and in particular, the extent of their contribution and worth, then I believe that women and children will continue to suffer disproportionately.

In addition to this it might also be helpful for any further research and related practice to broaden the focus and treat the family more as a collective subject. In saying this I do not mean that the family should be treated more like offenders and further constraints and interventions placed on them. What I do mean is that the status of the mother and her role in facilitating kinship needs to be recognised and strengthened, rather than her position being continuously undermined, ignored or sidelined. Focusing on the needs of the child over and above the needs of the mother (or the carer of prisoners' children), whilst ignoring the help and support that she requires in order to function competently, is an injustice to both mothers and their children. If the detrimental effect that imprisonment has on women's health was dealt with then I believe that their children would benefit – by virtue of the fact that mothers would be better equipped to deal with the difficulties that their children experience. Research should also examine the perspectives of other family members i.e. extended family such as grandparents and siblings etc, in order to determine their needs and the impact of incarceration on their health and wellbeing.

To a certain extent, I would also agree with the work of Codd (2002) who argues that there should be more investment in promoting and facilitating self help groups. This would be an excellent way of empowering women with husbands and partners in prison, prioritising their needs rather than prioritising the needs of their husbands and partners to the detriment of their own and their children's welfare. It would also

provide women and other members of the family with an avenue through which they could build other kinds of relationships, which would in turn provide them with the support and assistance that they need throughout the prison sentence. Self-help groups also have the added advantage of not being tied to 'the social' and are therefore more or less free from state influence.

In addition to this, it would be interesting to explore how kinship is influenced by alternative systems of imprisonment, and the values that these promote. For instance, ideals such as those employed in Denmark where the philosophy is one of 'openness' and 'normalisation'. Normalisation in this context is not the same as the kind of normalisation of discipline that Foucault (1977: 296-297) describes. Instead, the Danish concept of 'normalisation' refers to a process in which the conditions for prisoners must correspond as closely as possible to the outside world, and openly acknowledges the negative effects of the loss of liberty.[2] An important piece of future research might therefore be to explore and determine whether 'subordinate kinship' still exists in this context.

Further research should also be undertaken to establish the needs of the hard-to-reach, such as ethnic minority groups. Because kinship ties and practices vary, there will be problems which have so far escaped attention. For instance, the impact that imprisonment has on the health and wellbeing of certain family members may differ, as well as the importance they place on certain practices and special events. In order to overcome this deficit, and largely because of the emotive nature of the topic, I would suggest that any research should ideally be conducted by anthropologists with a prior understanding of kinship in these particular areas.

Finally, although the imprisonment of a husband or partner often has a negative impact on mothers and their children, as this research has also shown, the flexibility and creativity of kinship means that women still frequently manage to find creative and novel ways of practicing and maintaining their relationships. In order to test the findings of this study however I would suggest that further research should be conducted which is aimed at recruiting across a broader range of mothers. For

[2] www.kriminalforsorgen.dk

instance, mothers who live in other areas of the country, as well as those who visit other types of prisons (for example Open prison and Young Offenders institutions). It would also be interesting to explore the impact of incarceration on those who are married to or the partners of other categories of prisoner (for instance those referred to as Terrorist prisoners). A comparative study of other mothers who might experience very similar situations, such as women with husbands or partners in the armed forces would also be useful in establishing whether 'subordinate kinship' exists in other contexts.

# APPENDIX A

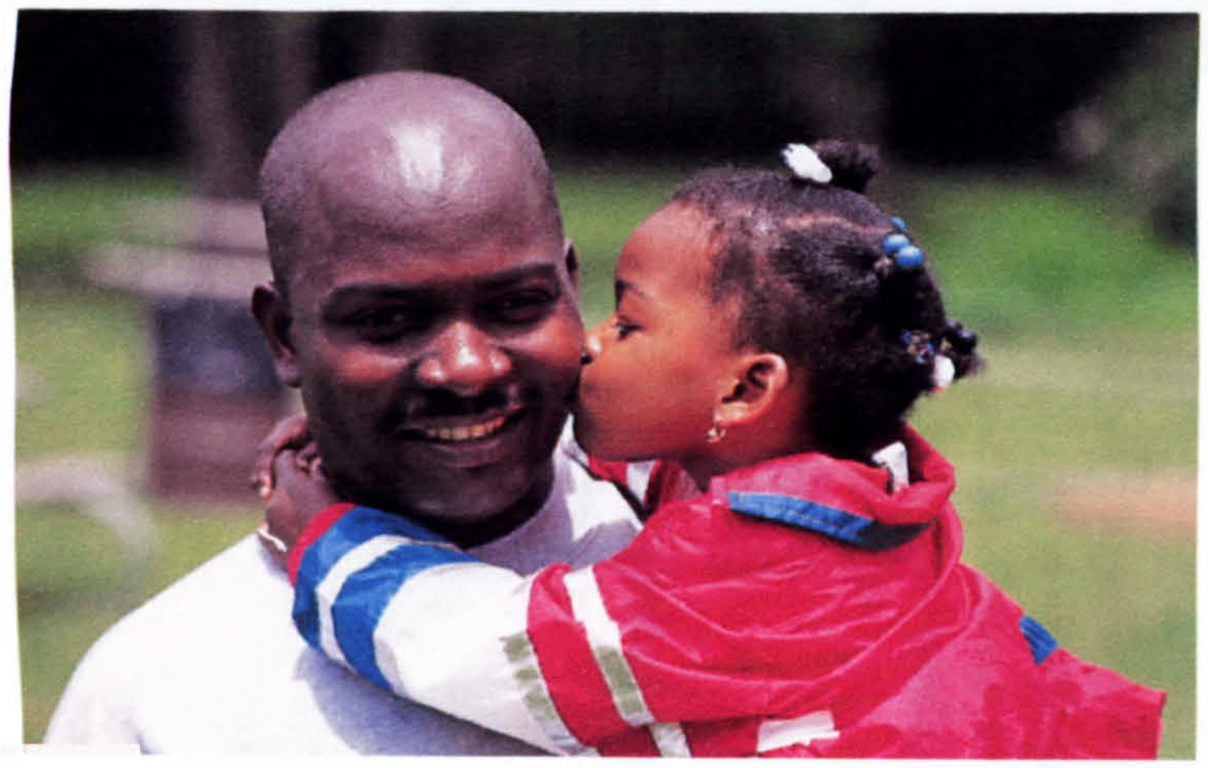
# TEXT BOUND INTO

# THE SPINE

# Who can I contact For more information?

If you would like more information about taking part then contact me, Viki either by email :

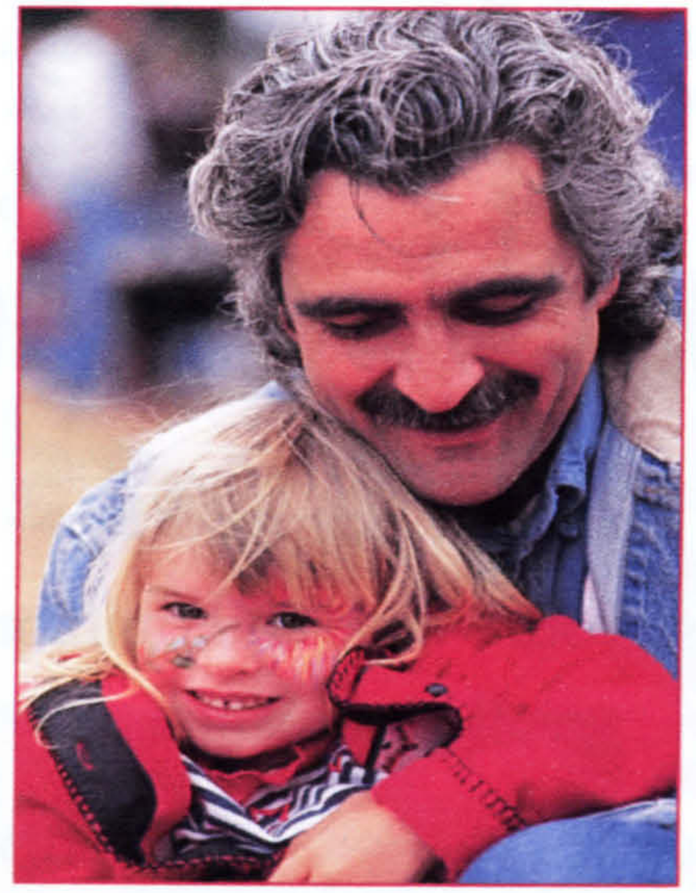
**v.j.wood@durham.ac.uk or by phone on: 0781 606 7883 or text your name and number to 0781 606 7883 and I will phone you back. I would love to hear from you—I am always more than happy to talk and answer any of your questions.**





University of Durham

# FAMILIE WITH FATHER



# AT A DISTANC

# What is Families with fathers at a distance?

Families with fathers at a distance is a research project that is aimed at gaining a clearer understanding of how families maintain relationships when they have a husband or father in prison.

## Why do you want to talk to me?

Because your views and opinions are really important.

Nobody has the experience that you have, and it is only through talking and listening to you that a clearer understanding can be gained of the problems that people like yourself face when they are trying to maintain family relations with husbands or fathers who are in prison.

Policies and decisions that influence prisoners may also influence their families, and in some cases this may affect a family's ability to maintain contact.

Changes in financial and social circumstances that occur when a member of a family is taken to prison may also add to these difficulties.

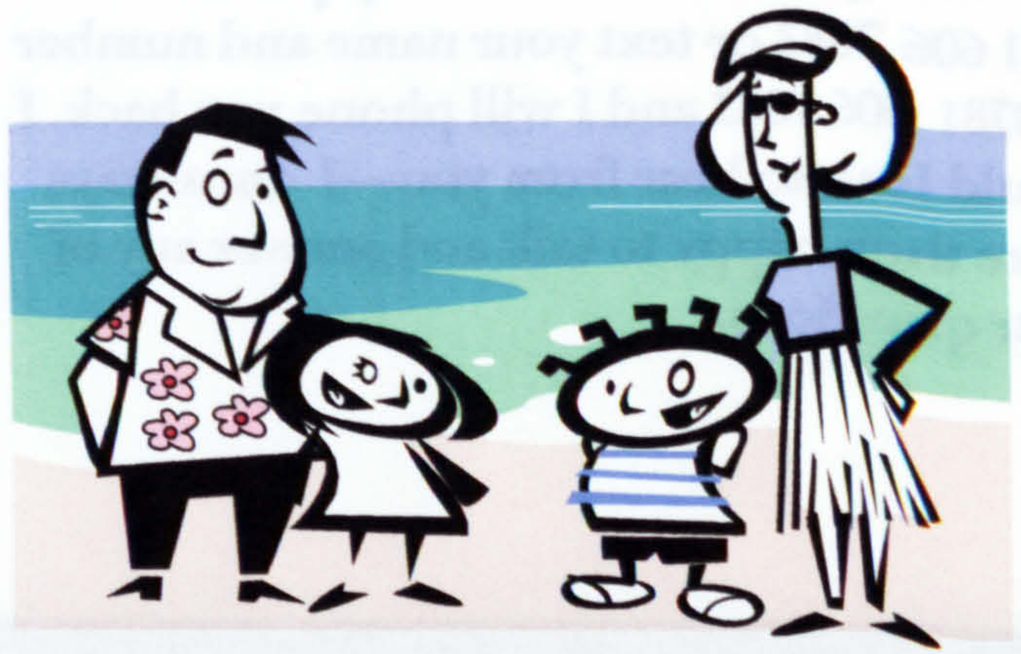
However, talking to people like yourself who have first hand experience of what it is like to be in this situation is by far the best way of collecting information.

It is information like this that is needed if we are ever going to influence and guide the policies which enable us to overcome these difficulties.



## Are you part of the prison service?

No, the project is nothing to do with the prison or probation services. The project is being funded by an organisation called the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC). The focus of the project is aimed a looking after the needs and welfare of prisoners' families.



## Is the research confidenti

Yes, anything that we talk about will be treated with strict confidentiality and onl used for this research.

# APPENDIX B



INBOX

INBOX: Re: Parenting and family learning for prisoners (55 of 55)

This message to

Delete | Reply | Reply to All | Forward | Redirect | Blacklist | Message Source | Save as | Print

Back to INBOX

**Date:** Mon, 17 Jan 2005 15:22:34 -0000
**From:** Monica.MENDIRATTA@dfes.gsi.gov.uk
**To:** v.j.wood@durham.ac.uk
**Subject:** Re: Parenting and family learning for prisoners

Victoria,

Thank you for your e-mail. The information that you require is not routinely collected however, please find some information on parenting and family learning courses for prisoners below.

Regards

Monica

PARENTING PROGRAMMES - how they can strengthen the family unit:

The importance of family ties to rehabilitation and resettlement plays a significant part in the Government's action plan to reduce re-offending, which includes a commitment to improve education on parent craft and family relationships within the mainstream package of support for offenders.

Offenders are able to practise parenting skills through family learning courses in prisons, which both provide support for their families while they are in custody and help them to settle into family life on release. They also encourage parents and other family members in prison to support their children's reading development as well as improve their own skills.

BACKGROUND:

62% of prisons were delivering parenting courses last year, and 49% were running family relationships courses.

Examples of courses / projects:

FAMILY MAN AND FATHERS INSIDE

Family Man and Fathers Inside are parenting courses, funded by DfES, for male offenders developed by the educational charity Safe Ground. Learners can build their skills in literacy and numeracy through the courses and achieve nationally recognised qualifications. By improving their own skills, learners gain in confidence in supporting their own children's learning.

PARENTCRAFT
Many establishments offer "parentcraft" as one of the optional units of the Social and Life Skills programme which forms part of the core curriculum for prisons.

STORYBOOK DAD

Prisoners record a story on to tapes for their children, which also

# MISSING

# PRINT

develops their own literacy and communication skills.

OTHER

Dartmoor also has a Prisoners' Families Helpline and has a voluntary sector project called 'Couples' which involves the offender in custody and their partner outside.

The National Literacy Trust has a selection of innovative literacy initiatives in prisons for prisoners and their families.

-----Original Message-----
From: v j wood [mailto: ]
Sent: 14 December 2004 11:22
To: LEARNING, Offenders
Subject: Parenting and family learning for prisoners

Hi there,

I was just wondering whether you have a list of all of the family learning courses for prisoners or prisoners and their families. I would appreciate any details that you could give me such as: in which prisons the courses are taking place - what the aim of the course is and who the

courses are run by and whether they are for the family or just for the prisoners. Perhaps if you can not help me with this then you could suggest someone who could?

I hope that you can help me and I look forward to hearing from you.

Best wishes.

Victoria J Wood.

PLEASE NOTE: THE ABOVE MESSAGE WAS RECEIVED FROM THE INTERNET.

On entering the GSi, this email was scanned for viruses by the Government Secure Intranet (GSi) virus scanning service supplied exclusively by Energis in partnership with MessageLabs.

Please see for further details.

In case of problems, please call your organisational IT helpdesk

The original of this email was scanned for viruses by the Government Secure Intranet (GSi) virus scanning service supplied exclusively by Energis in partnership with MessageLabs.

On leaving the GSi this email was certified virus-free

# APPENDIX C

**Date:** Thu, 26 Jul 2007 13:50:50 +0100
**From:** Dalton Grant <Grant.Dalton4@justice.gsi.gov.uk>
**To:** '"v.j.wood@durham.ac.uk"' <v.j.wood@durham.ac.uk>
**Subject:** Conjugal visits enquiry

Dear Ms Wood

Thank you for your enquiry of 21 July in which you ask

Can you point me in the direction of a policy statement on conjugal visits, and on physical contact between inmate *and family during visits*. Information regarding both past and present policy on these topics would be helpful.

I have been asked to reply.

As far as a policy document/statement is concerned I am afraid that we do not have one largely on the grounds that conjugal visits, unlike in some other European countries, are not permitted in England and Wales and there are currently no plans to change the position on this. There are two main reasons for this - the risk posed by such visits to security and good order and the need for the Prison Service to restrict prisoners' activities and freedom of association in a way which maintains the effectiveness of imprisonment and the criminal justice system and sustains public confidence. Moreover, the introduction of conjugal visits would require major cultural and practical changes at a time when resources are directed to providing for an increased prison population and activities and programmes which impact more tangibly on Prison Service objectives. This policy on conjugal visits is consistent with judgements by the European Court of Human Rights, - notably ELH and PBH v UK (1997), which accepts that the prohibition of such visits are also justified on the grounds of public safety.

Prisoners are nevertheless entitled to apply for access to artificial insemination facilities in order that they can have a family. However, these applications are only granted in exceptionally compassionate circumstances and applications of this nature are referred to Ministers for a final decision.

Each application for access to artificial insemination (AI) facilities is considered on its merits. The following considerations (as opposed to rigid criteria) will be taken into account:

* whether the provision of AI facilities is the only means by which conception is likely to occur;

* whether the prisoner's expected day of release is neither so near that delay would not be excessive nor so distant that he/she would be unable to assume the responsibilities of a parent;

- whether both parties want the procedure and the medical authorities both inside and outside the prison are satisfied that the couple are medically fit to proceed with AI;

- whether the couple were in a well-established and stable relationship prior to imprisonment which is likely to subsist after the prisoner's release;

- whether there is any evidence to suggest that the couple's domestic circumstances and the arrangements for the welfare of the child are satisfactory, including the length of time for which the child might expect to be without a father or mother;

- whether having regard to the prisoner's history and antecedents and other relevant factors, there is evidence to suggest that it would not be in the public interest to provide AI facilities in the particular case.

Turning to the issue of physical contact between a prisoner and their family/friends during the course of social visits this will vary considerably depending on i) any security measures which are deemed necessary by the prison ii) whether there are any public protection issues e.g. if the prisoner is assessed as posing a risk to children and iii) the type of social visit. There is no single statement as prisons will largely determine this locally.

Under Prison Rules the Governor - or the person with delegated authority - is able to determine the conditions under which a social visit can take place. Generally speaking social visits will take place in an open environment where prisoner and visitor are seated at a table and during the course of the visit are allowed to embrace one another. During the visit children would be allowed to move around the visits hall more freely especially if there are supervised play areas. Of course prison staff are at the same time take measures to ensure that those children are safe from harm at all times. At the same time there may also be a more relaxed approach to physical contact between prisoner and child especially in a parent/child relationship.

For security reasons it may be necessary for the social visit to take place with a low barrier on the table which would prevent or at the very least alert staff to any items being passed from visitor to prisoner or vice versa during the visit. Alternatively the visit could take place in "closed" conditions whereby the visit takes place in a booth where there is a full length barrier between prisoner and their visitor(s).

Increasingly across the prison estate family days or childrens visits are taking place. These can take many forms - homework clubs, physical games or various activities - but the focus is on the parent/child relationship and the level of physical contact is substantially increased. The location of these visits may alter and might take place in, for example, the prison gymnasium. Such visits may take place on a regular basis or as a single event. To offer an illustration of the latter in October 2006 the umbrella family support organisation, Action for Prisoners' Families, challenged

every prison in England and Wales to hold a family friendly event. Sixty six prisons took part and more than 1200 children benefited from a day with their parent in prison. Events ranged from family fun days to fundraising fetes - with HM Prison Hewell Grange raising £1300 for a local children's hospice.

I hope this offers a useful overview but if you have any specific questions please do not hesitate to come back to me.

Yours sincerely

Grant Dalton

Offender Policy & Rights Unit

HM Prison Service

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# APPENDIX D

**Interview Schedule:**

**Miranda:** August 2004 – September 2005 (12 Interviews)

**Silvia:** September 2004 – February 2005 (5 Interviews)

**Amy:** September 2004 – August 2005 (6 Interviews)

**Beth:** September 2004 – August 2005 (3 Interviews)

**Meena:** October 2004 – December 2004 (2 Interviews)

**Lois:** September 2004 – August 2005 (2 Interviews)

**Paula:** Feb 2005 – July 2005 (2 Interviews)

**Ann:** March 2005 – August 2005 (3 Interviews)

**Sharon:** March 2005 – August 2005 (4 Interviews)

**Karen:** May 2005 – August 2005 (4 Interviews)

**Helen:** June 2005 – August 2005 (4 Interviews)

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